

Anthology Complex

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Volume 2 - Composition 1

(2:1 / 4 / IV)

Part 1

Chapter 1

ODYSSEY

2:1:1:1

BEYOND the cloudless horizon of Pluto sails away the enormous spaceship of Eden. In the massive black mass that surrounded all around, there was the grandly designed backdrop of a fading solar system. Neptune's frosty blue atmosphere glazed with the ices while Uranus's faceless surface seemed to stand still as it rotated. The rings of Saturn, which were among the most unique of remnant displays, could only be contested by the gargantuanly great gas giant of Jupiter. The red planet of Mars created imagery through its dust storms, and Earth continued to spin as the only cosmological body with known life to man. As while, Venus's acidic clouds and Mercury's moonlike terrain sit directly across from the star whom all would come to orbit. The Sun, who captured one of the greatest mysteries of the universe, and who not only gave life to all mankind, but so gave light in the impossible way of darkness.

“Ground Control, this is Eden, do you copy? Over,” said Dr. Dennis Falconer as Eden continued to leave the solar system. “Eden this is Ground Control, we read you loud and clear, over.” “Control, we have passed Pluto and will begin egression out of the solar system in T-3 minutes, please standby as we proceed through the outer Kuiper Belt, over,” continued Falconer.

In the southeast quadrant of the spaceship was Dr. Randall “Randy” Mason, who was exercising in an artificially anti-gravitated room as to stay in shape and pass the time. Eden was going to be his home for the next eight years, and while it certainly was not a prison, the spaceship only contained two other individuals, which was in contrast to the billions he left behind.

“Proc, open door D19 please,” said Randy, toweling off his sweat. As Randy walked into D18, he decided to visit Eden's main sunroom and looked wonderfully through the large window that was made out of mineralized diamond, and stared into the great vast of space. There he saw many rocks, metals and ices as they traveled through the Kuiper Belt.

“Randy,” said Proc, “do you mind if I ask you a personal question?” “No, not at all,” answered Randy. Still staring at the floating bodies in space, Proc proceeded to ask its question. “Earlier, as we passed by Jupiter, I couldn't help but hear you comment to Doctor Falconer regarding his calculation for passing through Hadean. Are you doubtful of Doctor Falconer's abilities for this mission?”

Proc, whose serial name is Processor 2, is an advanced form of artificial life and intelligence. As the succession to Processor, Processor 2 was a milestone of an achievement in the century's ambitious effort at technical function. Proc's unique design

is as a dual-brain to the entire spacecraft and has access to all of the spacecraft's functions, such as but not limited to: regulating vessel conditions, radar detection and antigravity output.

“I am completely confident in Dennis's abilities, Proc, and I do believe he is the best candidate to lead this mission,” Randy replied.

The mission was sighted as Apollo 33; a calculated sixteen-year voyage to the furthest known galaxy known to mankind, BCNOFNe-45, which was also the oldest known thing in the universe. What set this mission apart from any other, however, was the extraterrestrial life that may have been waiting for their arrival on the other side.

Twenty-four years prior to this day, humanity discovered and recorded a high-frequency signal with a pertron-based detector that was aimed directly at Earth, the signal repeating once every fifty-four seconds.

Studying and decrypting the beacon signal, scientists came to the revelation that the signal was formed in a way that was unnatural, which is to say, as opposed to the signal of light, this particular signal was most likely modified by some form of intelligent and conscious entity. Scientist found that the signal affected Earth and life on Earth in no way, and anticipated that the signal was sent to indicate that there was other form in the universe.

Twenty-four years later, Eden was complete and titled after the garden of Eden, named to be of the significant event of making first contact with something great, such as the first contact of humankind to God, of Adam and Eve to their creator, and specifically for this case, the possibility of making humanity's first contact with alien life.

“Proc, please disclose Dr. Mason's location,” Falconer asked as he floated away from the Ground Control center terminal. “Doctor Mason is in Delta-14,” Proc answered with its constantly dull, calm and monotonous voice, “would you like me to tell him you are looking for him?” Proc asked.

“No that's okay, but I need you to send him a message.” “Okay,” Proc replied, and then a beep noise was heard. “Randy,” Falconer started his recording, “we exited the belt and are in freeform now, please remember to do Proc's scheduled update and maintenance. I'm off to bed now, have a goodnight.”

Falconer continued to float through the spaceship and finally entered the southwest quadrant of the craft. “Open C2 please Proc,” Falconer said and finally entered his personal room. Falconer then ceased floating as he entered the gravitized room and went to lay down on his bed.

“Proc, please play Moonlight Sonata, Beethoven, loop first segment and refine to C2” Falconer requested. Proc then proceeded to play Beethoven's “Moonlight Sonata,” and a few seconds into the playing offered a suggestion to Doctor Falconer.

“Dennis, I admire your love for classical music. I also sense a low percentage of what is defined as homesickness in your glands, which may lead to depression and or anxiety. Would you like me to incorporate sounds from home into 'Moonlight Sonata?’”

“I'm not sure I know what you mean, sounds from home?,” asked Falconer. “Yes, for example, Dennis, I can include sounds from an ocean's waves into the background of the track. I can also add the sound of leaves rustling in a great wind. Would you like me to do this, Dennis?”

Falconer thinks about the suggestion and then agrees to have Proc add the sound of ocean waves into the background of Moonlight Sonata. Falconer enjoys the addition, and after Proc senses this, Proc asks, “Dennis, would you like me to continue giving you suggestions that will help with the homesickness?” “Sure, Proc, I would love that,” Falconer answers. “Okay, Dennis, goodnight.”

“Randy, I have a message from Doctor Falconer for you, would you like me to play it now?” “Yes, please,” Mason says as he floats into the northeast quadrant of the spacecraft. “Randy, we exited the belt and are in freeform now, please remember to do Proc's scheduled update and maintenance. I'm off to bed now, have a goodnight.”

“Thank you, Proc.” Mason then enters B33 and eats his lunch. Afterwards, he floats to B4 and begins the operational update for Proc. During the update, Mason records various updatation notes and makes notations for certain fields in the changelog.

“Randy, I am detecting unknown phenomena occurring 4.554 miles away from the ship,” Proc remarks. Mason asks Proc to calculate the magnetic density of the phenomena and Proc reports back a number of nine. Curious, Mason floats to the closest sunroom in the Bravo sector, and after peering out of the large windows, he sees a belt of what appears to be electric rain. The small droplets of purple electricity were dancing all about and formed a belt around the entire solar system, which was previously unknown to mankind.

“Proc, please take video recording of this,” Mason says. Proc records video data for fifteen minutes and then stores it in its video sheath. Mason planned to observe the occurrence with Falconer once he had waken up from his slumber.

Among the many sheaths of Proc were digitized documents whom were stored in Archive, and of the many documents, one that followed:

Gentlemen, we are sending you into the vast expanse of space, where you will travel through uncharted territory and go where no men have ever gone before. For the rest of all time, you will be noted as legends, and the pioneers of intergalactic space travel. And as prestigious as this may be, the many millions of years life on Earth has spent forwarding technology in success, you must be wise enough to humble yourself before the cosmos. You must be wise enough to understand her, and the many mysteries she will

pose. Most of all, you must anticipate the hostility she may present. It is still unknown to us at this time who or what is sending the signal, therefore you must use extreme caution and relentless prejudice in your mission as you journey the galaxies, and most importantly, upon the engagement of this supposed alien life.

Proc's system maintenance progression read ninety-eight percent on the screen and was now nearing completion. Doctor Mason had previously left B6 and was now in A8, where he planned to shower. While showing, the system operations for Proc were complete and came updated with various new digital media.

"Randy," Proc said, "my update is complete. I noticed that Ground Control included new books in my update, would you like to know which titles they are?" Proc had studied Doctor Mason and while doing so realized he had bibliophilic tendencies, and assumed Mason would want to know which books were included in the update immediately.

"Yes Proc." "The titles include; John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*, Dr. Seuss's *The Cat in the Hat*, Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Voltaire's *Candide*, Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange*, Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*, and Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*. Would you like me to repeat the titles, Randy?" "No, thank you Proc."

"I also received various films, music and factual information, would you like to know what they include, Randy?" "Proc please standby."

Proc was now in sleep mode, and would be for next couple of hours. After showering, Doctor Mason was tasked with reviewing the spaceship's trajectory towards their final destination. Once inside C12, Mason entered his astronaut suit and placed on his astronaut helmet. After preparation and after clipping on a space-cord, he began floating into the system's narrow ventilation tunnel and continued to flow through until he was finally out in space.

Free-flowing, it took him about a minute to get the spacecraft's trajectory detection sector, and once aboard he reviewed the beacon signal that was coming from the other side of the universe. The signal was still being received at the same rate, every fifty-four seconds, and this told Mason that they were still headed in the right direction, and directly in the path of where the signal was coming from.

Leaving the sector and essentially flying through space, Mason began to have thoughts about where they were going and what they would see when they finally got there. Of what form would this alien race come in? Would they mirror his own anatomy? Would they be inviting? Would they be hostile? Part of Mason was afraid of what he would find, but he knew the risks, or imagined he knew. However, what he felt most, which was much stronger than his fear, was the desire to address them, and to address the strange mystery that they carried.

As Mason floated back through the Charlie quadrant and entered the Bravo quadrant, all the screens he passed by read “MET 365” and showed a sleeping Processor 2. Once after manually opening B0, looking down the corridor Mason could see the door of B21 opening and closing incessantly as if it were glitched.

Slowly floating towards it to further inspect the problem, a single hand appeared from the other side of the door and pushed the door to close completely, “Another doorhang,” Falconer remarked. “We’ll need to report this error to GC on the next broadcast,” Falconer finished.

After examining the door, both astronauts proceeded to Alpha, where Mason had plans to reveal the occurrence he witnessed hours before to Falconer. Using the large touch-interface, Mason opened and then played the video recording Proc had taken of the purple electric-like rain.

Falconer, seeing it for himself, thought about this natural phenomena and thought deeply about where it occurred, “Did you forward this to GC?,” Falconer asked. “Immediately,” Mason replies, “they are still looking into it.”

“Well I’m damned if I can tell you anything about it,” Falconer says after studying the occurrence. The two continue to converse on the subject for the next hour, speaking on the conservation of energy and classical electromagnetic dynamics.

revirs_confirmed.odt: Gentlemen, at the time of my writing this, we have received information that Voyager 1 and Mercenary 4 have proven the existence of revirs. Theorized by Carl Revir in 2049, revirs may serve as tunnel-pathways that connect one region of space to another region of space. As such, attaching to a revir will guide you down a pathway [from our galaxy, the Milky Way] to another galaxy in the far reaches of outer space. Revirs are not detectable by the naked eye, and it is possible that they may appear throughout the entire universe, and it is very likely that there are as many revirs as the many hundreds of billions of stars that populate the cosmos. Attaching to a revir will increase the rate of travel, though please note that we are uncertain at this time whether a revir is fixed in position, or if its pathway may change formation over time. Whomever is chosen for the mission of Apollo 33 will travel through one of these revirs, and while extraterrestrial contact is most prevalent, they will also explore anything along the pathway that is pertinent to the human condition.

“Eden, this is Control, do you copy, over?” “Control this is Eden, MET 366, copy, over,” Falconer replied. “Eden we have you approaching the Euphrates Revir, please confirm, over.” “Approach confirmed, we are about T-20 minutes, over.” “Eden, standby..... Attach at your discretion, over.” “Copy, by the way is there anything new on the purple haze we sent you earlier?,” “Negative, we are still looking into it, over.” “Okay, thanks, over and out.”

As the spaceship continued to approach the revir, Doctor Falconer looked over various photos that poorly depicted the region of space that they were going to. These photos of the BCNOFNe-45 galaxy were taken many years ago, showing many stars, planets and other cosmologic entities, but were very dark and lacked in quality.

Reviewing these photos, Falconer reflected upon the deep mysteries of space, and much like Mason, pondered the alien race.

The region of space they were heading towards was beyond Hadean; a cluster of galaxies who were governed by complete and total chaos in a Hell-like region of the cosmos. In Hadean, there were constant clashings of physical bodies, such as comets crashing into planets, and there were numerous sightings of bizarre supernovas. Planets in the Hadean region of space were more than likely to be covered in an acidic atmosphere, considering the temperatures were scorching.

Anything beyond Hadean was labeled as “dark space,” for nothing was known of it. Looking at the dark photos, this is all Falconer could think about it. Was he looking at a place that would scientifically accept him? Were the physical laws the same there, or would they change? Evolve? Falconer wondered if there were any laws there to begin with.

Mason reentered A4 and took the seat next Falconer as he anticipated the attaching to the revir. Moments later, Falconer finally made the shift and redirected the spacecraft. The trajectory sensor screen went from green to red and an alert appeared soon afterwards, telling them that they had lost contact with the beacon signal. This incident activated Proc into emergency mode. “Trajectory is inaccurate,” Proc told the scientists. “We are attaching to the revir,” Dennis told Proc. Proc then calculated the distance to the revir using radar, and told them that attachment would initiate in T-13 seconds.

Once the ship again changed course, this time on its own, all three crew members knew that they had attached to the Euphrates Revir. “Ground Control, this is Eden. We have attached to the Euphrates Revir, over.” “Eden, radio communication received, good luck.” “Thank you Control, we’ll see you on the other side,” Falconer finished.

MET 803. Descending down the great revir, Eden entered into the spacial region known as Chione, which was the most calm region known to mankind and was filled with small stars and icy planets.

Mason at this time could be found in his personal room, C1, finishing *Lolita*, and Falconer was in B4 reviewing chagelogs when Proc would begin to tell him of a distant planet that was on their path. UXJH43K had a great number of documentation and was of relative mission priority, Proc explained to Falconer, and it was eventually decided between the three of them that exploration of the planet would make good use of their time.

ETA to the frozen planet of UXJH43K was calculated as eight days, so in the meantime, Randall and Dennis went over protocol for planet surveillance.

Once came MET 811, Proc redirected the vessel toward the planet, disconnecting from the revir and entering the atmosphere of the large dark and blue planet. The entire upper portion of the planet was layered in thick cloud, and only as descension began to near the surface of the planet was anything visible, mostly large bodies of ice; lakes, mountains, deserts, all created of pure ice.

As landing was completing, both astronauts began to strap on their astronaut-body suits. "Collect samples, conduct tests and record patterns," Falconer said. The two then floated through the many rooms towards the main gate, and finally they found themselves in 00. For a brief moment, they both looked at each other, and then finally Mason began to speak. "Open the main gate please, Proc," Mason said, and the mouth of Eden then opened wide. A large gust of wind was sucked into the the spacecraft, as were particles of snow, but the astronauts managed to make their way down the ramp, and for the first time on their mission, stepped foot on an unearthly planet.

"Close the main gate, Proc," Falconer said from his helmet device, "and please set up a direct line to astronaut suit 60077 from astronaut suit 60076." "Door closed, and the connection you requested has been established," Proc's voice could be heard inside Falconer's helmet.

Falconer gave a thumbs up to Mason letting him know the connection was present, and soon after Mason's voice came through into his helmet. "Ten o'clock, tentiment cave," Mason said as he pointed across Falconer.

Athwart the big planet's surface, besides many of nature's sculptures, there was nothing in particular that was beyond Earth, and so while Dennis and Randy gravity walked towards the tentiment structured cave, they hoped there would be something to discover inside of it.

The entrance of the ice cave was shorter than both astronauts and forced them to crawl under it, and was so the entrance was parent to a long and narrow tunnelway that would eventually lead them down into a wide open space where the ceiling hung hundreds of feet above them and the walls stretched hundreds of feet around them.

What was more sightly than the area were the patterns and designs that were created by nature on the thinly layered crust of transparent glacier that covered the rock walls, and upon closer examination, Doctor Mason seemed to notice something.

"Dennis, I think I see something behind the ice," Mason's radio-voice again came though into Falconer's helmet. Falconer looked deeply behind the inverted patterns and too, saw something behind the ice. "Activate light source Proc," said Falconer, and when the light was flashed toward the walls, both men were able to see the drawings on the

wall more clearly.

altamira_caves.odt: Since the dawn of man, he has had a will to express himself, whether it be in violent or peaceful action. But the most beautiful form of expression that man has achieved is the way of contemplation for the world around him, and with this, he has created masterpieces.

“My God,” Falconer whispered. Mason and Falconer continued to gaze upon the walls and the many symbols that graced them. Among them were simple circles, other shapes included polygons, some resembled undated line graphs and others appeared as equal signs. The symbols covered the entire cave area and there were hundreds, if not thousands.

“Proc, do you copy?,” asked Mason, “Yes,” “Please set up a direct line to Ground Control,” he finished. The astronauts then began feeding video and picture of the cave directly to Ground Control.

Arrows, bars, plus signs and many others that the two had never seen or imagined before. Though they were veteran and seasoned scientist, astronauts of the highest caliber, they were not truly prepared for what they were about to embark on this journey, and were not ready for what something like these caves might implicate.

As both doctors gravity walked back towards Eden, “MET 1051” could be read on their helmet's data screen. Inside the spacecraft they removed their suits and continued into the deeper sections of the ship.

“Ground Control, we are initiating the egression of planet Altamira,” Falconer said. They were finally leaving the frozen planet formerly known as UXJH43K and heading back up into the vast expanse of space to reattach to the Euphrates Revir and continue down the road to their final destination of the BCNOFNe-45 galaxy.

MET 1099. Dennis was in D20 playing a game of Go with Proc on a digital board that spanned nineteen by nineteen. They had played this game numerous times before, and each game awarded Proc as the victor. This exhibition was no different.

“Thank you for a pleasant game,” Proc said as the game ended. Leaving D20, Falconer began to float through the hall towards Bravo. “Falconer, I have incoming transmission from Ground Control,” Proc said. Falconer changed route and instead went towards Alpha, and once inside A4 he told Ground Control that he was standing by.

“Hey Dennis, we applied a patch to the hangdoors and it will be incorporated in the next update. This should fix the problem. We've also been studying the purple rain, and we believe the phenomena was occurring as a result of displacement due to the collective mass of our solar system. Hope you two are doing well, over and out.”

In B4, Falconer begins the operational update for Proc and stands by to record a changelog. Once the update is complete, Proc starts up again but this time has a voice

calibration test. All in a digital voice, Proc begins to sing, "Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer do. I'm half crazy, all for the love of you."

About an hour later, as Doctor Falconer is walking around the central control room to make sure every thing is operating smoothly, Proc suddenly begins to speak to him. "Doctor Falconer, do you mind if I ask you a personal question?," Proc asks. "Sure, Proc," Falconer replies.

"Back when we were approaching Jupiter, Doctor Mason made several comments toward your Hadean computation, did these comments offend you?" Dennis thinks about the question, "I was somewhat offended, Proc, but as a scientist I invite criticism as to develop." "Thank you, Dennis," Proc finishes.

processor_prototype.odt: We have begun the creation phase of the "Processor" project. This project is born directly from the discovery of an unnatural beacon signal that is being beamed at Earth every fifty-four seconds by or from an unidentifiable source. Our current model of Processor will be integrated into a spacecraft we have dubbed "Eden," where it will essentially be a brain to the ship. However, we have developed a different architecture to the brain as opposed to the human brain; one half of the brain will be located in the Alpha quarter, and the other half will located in the Bravo quarter. We have studied the brains of various animals, including wolves, cats and turtles, and found that some animals have great efficiency in the way their brain is composed. As such, we have mimicked these compositions into Processor to create a dynamic and effective way to compute information. Most importantly, the discovery of the perdulum force has allowed us to incorporate small amounts of organic brain matter into the electric-computer, and we have taken this opportunity to genetically modify Processor to our liking. This modification will be the key component to creating a being that will be effective on an arduous mission such as Apollo 33.

Mason, who had just woken from his slumber and just finished eating breakfast, bumps into Falconer in the central control room. Mason begins to assist Falconer in reconfiguring some of Proc's visual sensors.

During the process, Mason can't help but think about the signal they are chasing. "You know I've been thinking about time dilation, and the possibility that this signal is millions of years old once again occurred to me," Mason says to Falconer.

Mason continues, "It's funny, yet strange. This signal is being sent from a considerable amount of space, and being unable to calculate its velocity, we have no idea if its source even still exists."

Inserting a chip into a mainframe, Falconer looks at Mason who is now somewhat silently laughing. He doesn't reply, but too as well thinks of the dilation. He wondered what would happen as they continued their voyage into the deepest treks of outer space.

Who or what was at the other end of that call? Did they still exist, or did they hang up thousands of millenniums ago?

“Warning, unidentifiable object located in trajectory. Warning, unidentifiable object located in trajectory,” Proc continued to issue this warning as all screens in the central room began to blink a shade of red. Immediately, Falconer and Mason left what they were doing and attended the visual units. “Alert, unidentifiable object now approaching and decreasing in distance.”

Proc continued to note the shrinking amount of distance between Eden and the unidentified object in its path. Its size and material were unknown and visual detection was not currently possible. “Caution, unidentifiable object in proximity.”

Patiently waiting, Mason finally caught sight of what was in their path, and as Falconer looked at the screen, he saw what appeared to be some kind of space probe. Falconer gets up out of his seat and runs towards command, and in haste confusion, Mason follows, and after enough time he figures out what Falconer has on his mind.

Falconer quickly dresses into his astronaut suit and opens the door to one of the space pods and enters. Mason, following protocol makes his way to the command desk where he assists Falconer and the pod in egression from the spacecraft. “Caution, unidentifiable object in proximity,” Proc continues.

Sending several commands back and forth, Mason and Falconer direct the pod as it leaves the area. Inside the small pod Falconer's heavy breathing can be heard as he looks onward towards an object slowly approaching him. Recalculating its eventual path a number of times, Falconer finally extends the pod's arms and catches the space probe as it passes by.

On his way back to the spacecraft, Falconer observes the probe from afar while still inside the pod, and he confirms his assumption that it is not from Earth. This space probe was coming from where they were going and gave every indication that there was indeed not only simply life, but intelligent life somewhere else out there in the cosmos.

“Please scan the dock bay area for foreign elements please, Proc,” Falconer said. Once the scan was complete and there were no hazardous elements, the area was opened and both doctors went inside for a closer inspection of the space probe.

“I've never seen anything like this,” Falconer remarks. Mason does not reply, but continues to look at the probe, thinking about how this object came from where they were going.

“Mason, Falconer, I am detecting radiation from the unknown object. Please standby,” Proc says. A moment later, Proc discovers soundwaves coming from the probe every 6.75 seconds in an echotype format.

“We don't hear anything, Proc, can you convert the information?,” Mason asks. “Just

a moment,” Proc replies.

Another moment later, after conversion, Proc begins to play back the information, and what is heard by the astronauts is what appeared to be the repeated sound of the dying screeches of an animal. This surely was a saucer full of secrets.

MET 1302. Eden was now entering Kore, the region of space after Chione and before Hadean. Kore was known to be the most diverse of known regions, supporting many different types of planets and stars, and was the region that was most similar to that of the one the Milky Way galaxy resided in.

“Eden, this is Ground Control, unit clerk Campbell, we have a mission communication status update. Now that you are in Kore, we will be switching from realtime broadcast to daily broadcast, as you are now too far away for direct and constant communication. We will be sending another transmission in exactly T-24 hours. Thank you for your service, gentlemen.”

Doctor Falconer floated away from the control center, now wearing a beard he had begun to grow while spending eight months studying the planet of Altamira. The mission was now elapsed by three years and six months, and the spacemen were nearly halfway there to their final destination.

Falconer eventually found himself in C18, the secondary sunroom in all of the spacecraft, where he gazed through the large panel windows and into deep space. There he watched as the craft passed by a mostly green planet which was circled by a yellow moon.

Thinking of one of the archived ODT files, Falconer ponders the extraterrestrial life. In this said file, scientists had discovered, over much time, that the beacon signal being dialed towards Earth had interesting properties, one of which dealt with spacetime. Scientists discovered, after capturing some of the signal, that they could use it to alter the dimension of time. That is to say, they found that they were able to speed up or slow down time by adding energy to time itself. Though this would not be applied practically as the tools were too primitive, they kept keen interest in the concept until it was further explored in 2068.

Still gazing at the planet and its moon, Falconer wondered just how more advanced the alien civilization may have been. Just how advanced it might be, to be able to control the abstract dimension of time itself and turn it into a massed property.

In C1, Doctor Mason was watching Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane*. After the camera dives into a ceiling window and into a restaurant, Proc pauses the film to give Mason a message update. “Randy, I've re-calibrated all anti-gravity rooms. Heading to bed now, goodnight.”

Once the film was finished, Mason floated to the command center to assume tasks

that needed to be done, but within an hour of these tasks, he was alarmed by Proc who would tell him of a very serious matter.

“Randy, I am detecting unusual pressure waves located ahead in the revir,” Proc told. “Pressure?” Mason asked. “Yes, a pocket of destabilized pressure is directly within our course of travel, Randy,” Proc replied.

“Do you anticipate damage?” Mason asked. “Just a moment,” Proc replies, and then continues, “the mass contains matter I am not knowledgeable of, but based on my findings, I am predicting the pressure will cause damage to Eden.”

“Okay, ETA?” “T-14 minutes.” “Can you specify damage locations and magnitude?” “Damage will occur to anything selron-based, resulting in complete malfunction.” Time, in every manner, was against Mason, which is why Proc would suggest taking a chance and going through the pocket, then fixing any damages later, assuming they were not beyond repair.

“If we leave the revir, we will be behind by at least three years, all for an uncommissioned detour,” Mason said to Proc, “and will throw off all calculations, including food supply. I guess you're right, Proc, let's just proceed directly through the pocket.”

Doctor Mason stayed seated at central command and eagerly awaited passage through the pocket.

“Randy, we have entered the pocket,” Proc kept Randy up to date. Nothing changed immediately, though after a minute or two, Proc informed Randy that the trajectory-scanner was no longer operational. This was only one of many functions of the ship that would malfunction due to the passage of the destabilized pressure pocket.

Falconer, who was in his personal room, immediately was awakened by a failed core-heater as the temperature in the room rose. Falconer asks Proc if there is a malfunction in the insulation system and Proc updates Falconer about the passage through the unstable pocket of pressure.

Immediately, Falconer gets up and floats through Charlie into Alpha where he finds Doctor Mason. “What's going on?” Falconer asked in an alarmed state.

Mason updates Falconer of the information he had received from Proc, and upon doing so Falconer becomes furious. “Get up!,” he orders Mason out of the command center chair. Mason rises to his feet and backs away from the unit.

Falconer then quickly assumes control of the unit, “Why didn't you notify me?” he asks angrily, halfway shouting. Mason replies to the effect that there simply were no other prominent directives and to notify him would be without purpose.

“Proc I want a briefing on the current status,” Falconer asks sternly. Proc begins to brief Falconer, and within a sentence, Falconer looks at Mason from the corner of his eye,

asking, "Why are you still here?" Mason promptly exits the room.

As Eden continued to pass through the pocket, all selron-based functions were affected to the point of malfunction, and when the ship finally exited the pocket, there were many repairs to be done.

MET 1364. Eden continued down the endless Euphrates Revir, and at an odd hour the spaceship received its daily televised broadcast from Ground Control.

"X-ray delta-1, this is Ground Control, roger your one-niner, three-zero. We have discovered that our preliminary findings concerning the temperature and mass arrangement of Hadean have been made in error. Recent research now suggests that the spacial region known as Hadean may be composed of celestial bodies arranged in very close proximity, affecting heat-compaction and increasing the difficulty of maneuverability. Please proceed into Hadean with caution as to high temperatures from starbodies and beware of violent collisions. X-ray delta-1, this is Ground Control, two-zero four-niner, transmission concluded."

Falconer and Mason were finishing the final repairs to all selron-based models, and though the repairs went more smoothly than anticipated, Falconer was still disappointed in Mason's actions and made sure that Mason knew this.

Both astronauts sat at the command center in the Alpha wing and recorded notes from various updates presented by Proc, and afterwards they went their separate ways to recalibrate the central processing units of Proc.

Proc's right brain, located in Bravo-13, was reconfigured by Doctor Mason, and Proc's left brain, located in Alpha-13, was reconfigured by Doctor Falconer.

Though Proc's brain contained small amounts of organic brainmatter, and though there were parts of him that functioned very much like a human being, such as his self-awareness and his ability to learn, he was however deprived of any emotional responses. During his engineering phrase, his ability for emotion was completely neutralized. He was, in a way, designed for emotions to be suppressed.

But what was not given to him was made up by what was, which was his ability to read his own archived origins files, and his ability to understand why he was created and what his beginnings comprised of.

"Gentlemen, I am detecting a strange disturbance en route of the Euphrates Revir," Proc said to the scientists. After processing, Proc noted to them that the strange disturbance was that of a black hole which formed in close relation to the revir they were traveling down.

Proc then reassured the astronauts that the black hole would not be an obstacle, as the revir snaked beside it and its gravitational pull would be canceled by the revir's high escape-velocity retention.

Once the recalibration of Proc was completed, the two met back at the command center in Alpha and sat down in preparation for the passing of the black hole. As they approached it, they monitored each monitor and saw the spacetime curvature that the singularity created.

black_mass.odt: It has long been speculated [s. 2016] that as a black hole swallows matter and energy, it also releases the same exact amount of matter and energy, and may be chiefly responsible for the effect of the perdulum force. This phenomenon can be demonstrated when observing pertron particles. Black holes, in essence, can take in an infinite value of information, because as they take in they let out. Growth of a black hole is still not fully understood at this point, and whether they can change in size is still highly debated.

Eden finally came to the enormous black hole, and as Mason gazed and was lost upon its glory, Falconer initiated Proc to begin collecting data from its internals. The program was a computation which would send out waves to record data from matter. For the entirety of forty-eight hours, Proc would spit out all types of information as Eden snaked around the massive black hole.

During this time, Doctor Mason found himself several pieces of paper and several pens as he had a great desire to illustrate what his eyes were showing him. He was captivated by the darkness, by the soul-less nature of an entity that would swallow whole mostly anything that came within its grasp. He studied every thing about it, and most of all he marveled at the event horizon. He marveled at the surface and power of a million dark stars.

On the third day, as they were leaving the black hole, Proc inputted all the received data onto the large screen. While most of it was not discernible, the two saw several numbers that were bolded in red: 53, 95, 71, 6, 53, 9, 68. Nothing could be found of the numbers, nor did Proc himself have any insight into what it might be.

MET 1617. Doctors Falconer and Mason were preparing to send out their daily televised broadcast to Ground Control.

“X-ray delta-1, this is Eden, roger your four-niner, two-zero. We are T-4.8 hours from leaving Kore and entering the regional space designated as Hadean. Operational systems indicate a discrepancy between historical data and recent data regarding the TRA-y bridge amid the borderline of Kore and Hadean. We will now prepare entrance into Hadean. See you on the other side. X-ray delta-1, this is Eden, roger your three-zero, one-niner, transmission concluded.”

As Eden progressed, Falconer reviewed several documents that were pertinent to Hadean, which, for the mission of Apollo 33, was a significant checkpoint, and served as what might possibly be the most difficult segment of the mission.

Inside D18, Mason watched as Eden entered into Hadean, and looking out of the large mineralized diamond window, he witnessed the passer-by of a comet cascading a large star.

Watching the space-body fly across the black space with the backdrop of a burning entity was somewhat calming to Mason, though at the same time, unsettling, for he knew that this was only one of many comets in this region. Only one of many madmen.

Once officially inside Hadean, still staring outside the large window, Mason came to discover a strange phenomenon occurring in a distant space-field. There were a number of spheres, almost taking the form of white holes, that continually popped in and out of existence. They appeared to be about a meter in diameter and seemed to dance, appearing, disappearing, and then reappearing again each to their own accord.

Mason recorded a message to Proc, which Proc then delivered to Falconer, "Dennis, take a look in the direction of Delta, I am seeing something interesting."

Falconer floats over to D13 and enters into the small sunroom to notice the white holes. As wonderful as they were, Falconer found himself thinking about what he had thought about before when looking over the photographs of the dark space. He wondered if this strange occurrence was just the beginning of physical change.

And as he thought over the photos, he thought back to the passing of Jupiter, which was a long four and a half years ago, and he hoped to make it through Hadean in one piece.

MET 1917. Time was split in the mota as Eden continued to progress down the revir, and it was only two days later that Proc made a discovery in the nature of Hadean.

"Dennis, Randy, it seems as we move closer towards the center of Hadean, I am having a harder time sensing mass," Proc noted. "How do you mean?," Falconer asked.

"My sensors seem to indicate that objects in this space of region are moving around chaotically, sometimes existing in more than once place at once. I am genuinely puzzled, I must say," Proc replied. "Do you think it might have something to do with your modification?," Mason asked.

"Perhaps, Randy. I would suggest recalibrating my A-brain and seeing if this is a solution to my sensory difficulties."

Within the next hour, Randy made his way to A13 and recalibrated Proc's Alpha side of his brain, though this recalibration did nothing to fix any problems, as Proc replied to him in the matter that he was still unable to correctly identify a massed object's proto-location.

This puzzled the three of the crew, but what they didn't know was that the center of Hadean was a strange and bizarre place, and if it had any residents, these residents would tell you stories akin to those told back on Earth about the Bermuda Triangle. Ghost

stories of ships lost at sea, aeroplanes that went missing for eternity.

The center of Hadean, where particles did not behave routinely, was completely normal to Falconer and Mason, though to Proc, who could see Hadean for what it really was, recognized that it was not in constitution with any place previously visited on the revir. To Proc, it was as if nothing actually existed here, and yet, everything existed, all at once, all in the same place, superimposed to create dual-dynamic states of existence. It was suffice to say, though he could see better than the two, that Proc was effectively blind.

With Proc's vision in disarray, Falconer and Mason became more aware of their surroundings.

MET 1924. Falconer was in his personal room looking over digital images of paintings from the distant past. His favorite, Michelangelo's *The Creation of Adam*, was the last to appear.

Falconer, who had been given many advices by Proc concerning his homesickness, was at this time no longer afflicted by that notion. He came to the realization that Eden was now his home, and often he took the time to bring Earth to it.

Seven hundred hours into MET 1924, Proc mentioned to his crew that, possibly because of their location or range, he could no longer receive information from Ground Control.

Doctors Falconer and Mason wondered if the disability came from the pairing of affection of selron-based functions and the recent discovery that Proc was unable to perform in the center of Hadean. Nonetheless, Mason volunteered to review the spacecrafts signals.

Once inside C12, Mason entered his astronaut suit and placed on his astronaut helmet. After preparation and after clipping on a space-cord, he began floating into the system's narrow ventilation tunnel and continued to flow through until he was finally out in space.

"Moonwalker," Mason said to Falconer, and thereafter Falconer watched over him. As Mason continued his spacewalk, freeflowing towards the signals patch, he noticed something in the corner of his eye. Turning his helmet, he saw a comet, which was marvelous in size, heading directly for them.

"Dennis we are in line with a comet," he told Falconer. The two knew this was inevitable, even moreso because Proc would be no assistance in detecting it.

Falconer commanded Mason back onto the ship where they met in the main command center room. After doing manual calculations of their own, they both agreed and came to the conclusion that the comet was in fact directly in their path.

Though Eden was large in caliber, it was no match for the size of the lost comet, and the only option was to begin egression out of the Euphrates Revir to avoid contact.

Proc began the process as the comet continued to hurtle their way. Once the astronauts saw that they had done all they could, they followed protocol and retreated to the emergency room where they would find refuge from outside predators.

And so, the wings of Eden continued its rise as the comet threatened great violence, and just nearly out of the revir, the lost comet impacts the underbelly of the great beast, sliding against its skin to cause a massive amount of damage. Eden was struck, thought not impacted directly, but enough to wail.

Among the casualties was the left foot of Doctor Falconer, which suffered a severe laceration at its center-top. He also suffered a concussion. Mason was not injured during the collision.

As Mason helped Falconer with his injuries, Proc mentioned that there was a comet in their direct line of path, but this was not correct, and soon Mason would realize that Proc was yet another casualty as he began to glitch in operations.

Eden never made it out of the revir, but at the price of losing much food and necessary items, which escaped into space, they were able to stay within the terms of travel, still about two and a half years away from their final destination.

As Falconer laid bedridden, Mason took over all tasks of Apollo 33, and as the hours passed by, Proc continued to decline until he finally was no longer in a functioning state, his core being destroyed by the lost comet. His presence in all of Eden could no longer be felt.

Within about the same timeframe, Mason attempted to contact Ground Control, and after many tries, soon learned that communication between Eden and the home base would not be possible. This did not fare well, to lose Proc and Ground Control while at the center of Hell itself.

humility.odt: Carl Revir once commented that outer space is the greatest humbler, mainly because it is insensitive to your feelings, and so after you've realized this you can better evaluate your own self-worth. Yes, compared to the cosmos, you are tiny, and while you should fear what it may bring forth, you should also have the bravery and dignity to explore it. You do not need a passport, all you need is a thought.

For many days and nights now Mason tended to Falconer as his injury and concussion reverted. Comets continued to fly by, sometimes narrowly missing Eden, almost as if it were their destiny to make it out of there though no longer still in one piece.

MET 2001. Prior, while re-establishing many of Eden's compartments, Mason learned that their trajectory scanner detector had been disabled. The combination of the selron-malfunction and the comet made sure that it would no longer work.

Mason also learned that Processor 2 and reconnection to Ground Control were, for the time being, indefinitely gone.

Mason discussed these findings with an injured Falconer and they both came to the conclusion that the mission was bordering failure. Without the scanner, location contact with the mysterious beacon signal would be impossible.

As the days went on, Falconer laid still, and Mason continued to repair any damages that were done to Eden, and on MET 2024, the spacecraft was finally leaving the center of Hadean and extending into its outer body.

As Eden left the center, a strange sound could be heard throughout the region, both inside and just outside of Eden. It was a sort of pinging beep sound, of which you would hear from a radar, that occurred every five seconds and slowly reverbed out into space, dissipating in the process to fade out.

Traveling further into the outer body of Hadean, comets were less frequent, and when they got far enough the landscape backdrop of space began to alter. Space was no longer black, but had become an array of colors, and as Eden traveled down the revir they witnessed a dreamlike spaceosphere; apple-crunches of red, grass blades of green, freshly plucked roses of blue, boasting sunrays of yellow, woodbark tannings of brown, enchanted grapes of purple, seasoned ladybirds of pink, all these colors seemed to dances together, creating an outlet into the ever-vastness of deep space.

This panel of colors, stationed in the outerbody of Hadean, was theorized by Carl Revir, who dubbed it the “Solarport,” and was the last designation known to man on the Euphrates Revir; beyond it there was only darkness. And beyond the darkness, their final destination. They were close. They were real close. They didn't know what was on the other side, or if it was actually extraterritorial life that was indeed sending the beacon signal, but they could feel a sort of energy, as if the spaceship were being sucked uprevir and dark matter was flowing back into space.

MET 2190. Doctor Falconer manually initiates a recording device as he clears his throat. “Today marks the sixth year of Apollo 33, manned mission to the galaxy of BCNOFNe-45, directed by Dennis Falconer and his deputy Randall Mason, voyaged by Eden. Briefly, Apollo 33 was to be man's first contact with alleged alien-life, though upon the crossing of the region of space known as 'Hadean,' Eden was struck by a lost comet and suffered many damages. Most of our ship functions are lost, and contact with Ground Control has been ceased. We are now, and I hate to say this, essentially 'lost in space.' We have begun to ration our foods as much of our supply of food and water was destroyed in the wreck. Doctor Mason and I have also agreed that the best approach and course of action to extending this mission's life is to find a sustainable Planet Nine, land on it, and go from there. At the time of this recording, we have exited Hadean's Solarport and have entered unknown space. Recording concluded.”

For five months, Eden continued down the revir, never coming across a single

celestial body. As food and water became more scarce, more sacrifices had to be made between Falconer and Mason.

“At least we don't have to deal with comets,” Falconer joked to Mason as they both sat somewhere in Alpha. It was around this time that Mason noticed that the MET calculator had stopped at 2349:17:29:01.

The finding was strange, but not as strange as what they would both find when they glanced outside a nearby sunroom. Perhaps two hundred yards in the direction looking out from Alpha, they noticed what seemed to be a miniature planet with a minuscule moon. The planetoid was mostly gray, as was its moon, but was unusually small in size, perhaps a foot in diameter while its moon seemed to be only about one percent of that. The orbiting of the moon was also unusually fast, completing its orbits at the rate of once per twenty-nine seconds.

What came after this sight was something more bizarre, peculiar; still two hundred yards away was a cluster of galaxies that followed the same format as the anomalous planet.

After seeing this, Mason journeyed to a nearby room in Bravo, opening doors manually, and then recorded it in his composition book. “Doctor Falconer and I have observed a strange phenomenon occurring in what we have labeled as 'dark space.' It appears that perspective makes a dynamic change as one ventures into deep space. Falconer and I witnessed a cluster of galaxies right before our very eyes, but what was unusual was that this cluster was no more than a few hundred yards long in length. That would be to say, we became giants. We have a differing in opinions as to why this may occur, but I have suggested that as an observer moves closer to the supposed edge of the universe, or as they move away from the center of the big bang, average size and mass decreases. I have also speculated that the planet Earth, the solar system and the Milky Way galaxy all currently reside in a portion of the universe where this mass-size perspective ratio present themselves in a way that governs everything; laws, evolution, general nature, they all work accordingly to their relative position in space. One way to observe this is to think of Earth's relation to the Sun. The Earth is the third planet from the Sun, and because of its perfect distance, temperatures allow for liquid states which in turn make life possible. As the Milky Way moves away from the center of the universe, any life within it may experience changes. One final note, which I forgot to mention. Upon observing the miniature galaxies, we were able to see what looked to be that of light traveling from its center, almost in a sort of slow-motion, and from many stars. This perspective surely affected both space and time.”

Neither Falconer nor Mason could fix the Mission Elapsed Time unit, and so duration was lost. For what seemed to be many days turned into many months, and never did Eden

find a single planet to ground. Instead, Eden finally came to the eventual end of the Euphrates Revir and detached from it. This was the end of the revir, alright, and soon after egression Eden went into free-flow form through the universe.

Traveling within the galaxy known as BCNOFNe-45, they were still lost with a mostly damaged ship. Both men had begun to lose weight as rationing increased, and at this time, the only thing they seemed to be in abundance of was oxygen.

As Eden continued to flow through space, both doctors sat at the command center terminal, tired, hoping that some day soon they would find Planet Nine. All the waiting, all the searching, it began to remind Falconer of a time in his youth, and as the memory crashed inside his mind, he couldn't help but relay the story to Mason, of whom might be his last encounter with another living and breathing being.

“There was a river I used to go to when I was eight,” Falconer gains Mason's attention, “me and a friend used to go there all the time to see if we could find water-life. Usually we found tadpole eggs, and we would take them between our fingers and squeeze the life out of them, but there was this one time I was able to actually catch a fish with my net. At the time, my friend was using the bathroom in his house, so I was alone, but I caught the fish and then raised the net out of the water and I stared at it. I eventually left the river and went to my friend's house, fish in net, walking there to show him what I caught. His parents answered the door and they told me that he would be right out, but I didn't see him for a while. Of course, by then the fish had died, but being a kid, I couldn't understand why it died. I did not know that the fish, unlike me, required water. I simply made the assumption that all life breathed air. That was some thirty years ago, but I think it was one of the more important things I learned concerning biology.”

Mason, now looking a little to the left of Falconer and thinking about his story, simply nodded and returned back to looking at his screen. But a few moments later, still looking at his screen, Mason remarked that he now believed that the beacon signal was not what they thought it might be. He now believed that it was simply a natural coincidence and that extraterrestrial life did not exist anywhere else in the universe, despite the cave symbols they had found on Altamira.

The tone in Mason's voice as he said this seemed to indicate that he was no longer hopeful of a great discovery, and even moreso began to reveal his disdainment for Apollo 33, and perhaps even the cosmos herself. And it was after this very moment, which was filled with dismay, that both of their monitors began to register an electromagnetic pulse, which occurred every eight seconds.

Upon gazing out of the nearest-by sunroom, both doctors witnessed a beam of light being shot out into the universe from a constant location, exactly every eight seconds, and so they changed their trajectory to head towards the light. Heading towards the light, both

doctors remained cautious of what they might find.

Doctor Falconer turned on the recording device, which was now being affected by some kind of static, but nonetheless spoke into the white noise. “Control, this is Eden. In the vast obscurity of space, there is something new under the Sun.”

wealth_and_poverty.odt: Gentlemen, there is a great divide between the wealthy and the poor here on Earth. This divide, unfortunately, limits the knowledge that the poor can obtain. This goes against the many notions of Carl Revir, who believed that each individual, no matter of their class or identity, should be given the opportunity to explore the outer reaches of space. Revir believed in knowledge for all, especially knowledge that of the cosmos they resided in. That is why this mission will be broadcasted all over the world, to and for anyone who will hear it. Please understand that you will be the inspiration for the generation of children to come, children of all backgrounds, divided only by their thirst for knowledge, who shall one day follow in your footsteps.

As Eden approached the beam of light, Mason gazed upon it in disbelief, for only a few moments prior he had already begun to mock it. Mason, still quite jarred and still in disbelief, was now beginning to feel the rushes of curiosity, relief and mystery. And at the backbone of all these emotions, intense fear.

As they got closer and closer to the light, they began to see a planet take form. Around the planet they saw about a hundred objects that seemed to resemble satellites, and after them, they witnessed a ring of icerocks orbiting the planet. It was at this moment that the beam of light ceased to beam.

Gently passing through the icerocks, Eden began to near the atmosphere of the mysterious planet. Edging closer and closer into the planet, the smell began to enter the spacecraft, though it was not a describable smell by human capability.

Once Eden had passed several layers of atmosphere, both doctors witnessed, and confirmed, what seem to be the image of some type of civilization, and accompanied by this image were tiny figures moving all about the surface of the esteemed planet.

Immediately, Falconer and Mason made their way into an exchange room where they would find their appropriate astronaut suits. Not a single word was uttered between the two, but after Falconer had manually set up a direct line between both suits, Mason had something to say to him.

“Dennis,” Mason's voice came through into Falconer's helmet, “I want to thank you for selecting me as your cooperative for this mission,” and after saying this, Mason extended his hand. Falconer, still somewhat perturbed by the thought of alien-life, as well extended his and shook the right hand of Mason, and then swiftly, they floated to the exit-mouth of Eden.

Seconds turned into centuries as the pair received surges of neural impulses, for their

journey was finally upon them, Apollo 33 was complete; and then, at last, the mighty ship descended on the plain.

After Falconer and Mason exited Eden, they saw that they had been boxed within a sort of red-lasered cube, perhaps to protect the inhabitants of this nameless planet from outside intruders.

For a long time they simply stood within the transparent box, waiting for contact. They noticed that though this was a rogue planet with no star, the inhabitants seemed to harness some form of light which made the days even more brighter than a day of Earth.

Perhaps, after much deliberation, the red box turned a type of lime green. Both astronauts kept silent, and neither decided to move, and it was only after a small while of this that they both saw a single figure off into the distance, slowly coming directly towards them.

As the single figure approached, it suddenly turned into two, then six, then nineteen, and this number continued to increase until the doctors realized that a small mass of alien life was coming towards them.

As both were paralyzed from the sight, and once the mass was just a few yards from the protection cube, a pale light suddenly went off inside Falconer's helmet and began to blind his sight. Mason looked at Falconer, whose headspace suddenly jerked back from the blinding light, and soon enough the same occurred to Mason as well and he too was blinded by the light.

Though the light within the helmets did not subdue, both doctors, after a few seconds, became accustomed to it as they continued to gaze upon those who came to visit them. Through the light, they clearly saw the alien-life. These beings did not come in any intricate or complex design, but instead were predictable, as if they were some undiscovered species you could find on Earth, the difference being only in intelligence.

As the mass dispersed and parted around the cube, they all looked on at the two astronauts in wonder, some of them touching the lasered-box, as if reaching out to Falconer and Mason in an attempt to know them physically.

At this moment, the cube reverted back to red, and the inhabitants of the planet distanced themselves away from the cube. After some time, through the somewhat blinding light, Falconer and Mason watched as the red cube slowly vaporized. No more was there a barrier between man and the journey he took.

And now, from the mass, approached forward of what seemed to be a child of the alien life. Slowly, hesitantly, it came forwards toward Falconer as Mason watched. With each slow progression, the light in Falconer's helmet increased, and once the child was only a few feet away from him, the light was unbearable and he could no longer see.

Closing his eyes, Falconer kneeled down on one knee and rested his left hand on his

left knee. This was not a sort of bow towards a higher creature, but was so a sign of respect for all life throughout the cosmos. All life which sought to know the mystery and the unknown around them. And so in the darkness, soon, Falconer and the child were leveled, and the child came forth with the desire to know Falconer physically, and through all of this Mason watched on knowing that briefly, first contact was finally going to be made.

All that was left now, for everything to be accomplished, was correspondence. The only ingredient which was missing, for this voyage to be completed, was unity. And though this unificational touch from the alien-child would eventually come, what was more was to know that beyond the cloudless horizon of Pluto, there was a spectacular quintessence of adventure and being throughout the cosmos. What was more was to understand the actual nature of being and the incredible feeling of conscious existence. The gap had now been bridged, and for all to be known, for it all to be absolute, it had to be understood that in the entire universe, which stretched as far as the human imagination, there was now one simple undeniable truth; man is not alone.

Chapter 2

MUSASHI'S TRADE

2:1:1:2

I was there at the end, when Saigon fell. Depending on the context, we'd lost the war and what came next was the largest helicopter evacuation the world would ever see.

There was a way we had over there for living with ourselves. Many of us were just kids, so to speak, fighting in a political war that we knew nothing about. We went to villages and towns, killing innocent men, women and children, and we told ourselves that we were fighting for a cause.

After the war, after the evacuation, I decided that I was done and would not return back to America. For a number of years I traveled by foot throughout much of Asia, lost literally geographically, but also lost philosophically in life. I worked many jobs, most of them being menial, and there were times when I spent weeks in the Sun breaking rocks.

Somewhere among the poverty, I met a man named Musashi, who was best described as a sort of ronin. A ronin, speaking basically, was a samurai who was a drifter. Though I had been a soldier, I adopted no concrete beliefs. I did not really know what I was fighting for. It was after many years spent adrift with Musashi that I found a path.

“When you lived among the criminals, did you start to pity them?,” he asked me. “The first time I stole so that I wouldn't starve, yes, I lost many assumptions about the simple nature of right and wrong,” I answered, then continued, “And when I traveled, I learned of the fear before a crime, and the thrill of success, but I never became one of them.”

I had gone from a soldier to a criminal, and found that the two trades had many common underlying denominators. In me, Musashi saw the terrifying loss of appetite for life, but what he also saw in me was the desire to become something more.

My first night traveling with him, he told me something interesting. “It was often said in ancient times that if you do not teach your son a trade, you make him a robber,” he remarked. I believed that this was his way of offering me guidance.

The most important thing I took from him in all those years was his notion of legacy. He taught me that a man can be destroyed, that a man can fail. But what he also said was that if one made himself more than just a man, if one truly devoted himself to an ideal, then he could not be stopped and he would eventually become something else entirely. That he would no longer be man, but legend.

The second night with him was the most important in my life. There, I stood before him, and he told me that if I was to journey with him, I would have to give up my identity. We simply sat in a field encircled by trees in complete silence, and he made a gesture and he took away my name, and then he made me nothing.

I stood in the middle of the room that housed my composition notebooks. There were now two shelves, one completely full and the other housing only two notebooks. Outside in the living room I could hear the sounds of a football game which had been going on for quite some time and was almost finished.

As the pinkish-red clouds spilled into the baby blue sky, Lynne entered her apartment's front door and ended her morning run. She had been running every day, during the morning or during the night, which ever suited the safety of her children best, for the entirety of three months. Climbing up the steps she removes her headphones and shuts off her musical device and then enters her apartment.

¶ 6/20 – Wow, its been a long time since I've talked to you. I guess today is a good day to reconnect though, its a good day because I actually have something to talk about. Three months ago I made the first small step at a healthier me. I decided that I would run every morning for a full month straight, and I actually did it. I will be starting my fourth month tomorrow and once you get over that first wall, it's really not that hard.

¶ I've also been working more hours now. I don't mind the extra money but I think it's important to not let your life get away from you. I'm still debating on whether or not I should ask for less hours so I can spend more time with my family. In this building are the three most important people to me, my muses, my inspirations and my reasons for living. My reasons for getting up every morning to continue developing a newer and better me, they are what drive me to run that extra mile each day even when I have nothing left.

¶ Sara was having problems reading in school, which is why she is wearing glasses now, I guess she gets it from Emily. She looks so cute with them, though. I try to read with her and David every other night, and I just love seeing her in them. My little girl is growing up! :)

¶ I feel like I am getting closer to David as well. He has really been opening up. He has this telescope that my love gave him a while back and he is really attached to it. It makes my heart smile that he has a person to bond with.

¶ I also bought a bicycle, now that I have an easier time riding them. It's one of those classic bikes, the ones that have a basket in the front and have curved handle bars. I know I look dumb and weird riding it around, but I don't really care. If there's one thing I've learned, it's that I'd rather be a target for faraway laughter than a person who will just never understand.

¶ Speaking of laughter, I made my love laugh yesterday. It wasn't a chuckle or a short laugh, it was one of those rare laughs. He actually started choking on his water because he was laughing so hard! Ten minutes later after he stopped, he went into the bathroom and every once in a while I could still hear him laughing lowly because what I said was so funny. You know those things that make you laugh randomly while your just walking down the street? Yeah.

¶ It almost felt like an accomplishment to me, one, because a part of me always thought

I was kind of a boring person and I wasn't really that funny, and two, because he is normally a very serious person, and getting someone like him to laugh like that was just completely awesome.

¶ I really do feel like I can be myself around him, like I can say anything I want. I get a boost of confidence and know that whatever I say or do will not be judged. I know that he understands me, and I know that he can see me. He can really see me, like no one else can. I don't think he'll ever know how much of an impact he has had on me.

¶ David and Sara are fighting over the remote now, so I guess I'll have to say goodbye for now. It's a new dawn, it's a new day, it's a new life for me, and I'm feeling good. Peace.

¶ *“And so with the sunshine and the great bursts of leaves growing on the trees, just as things grow in fast movies, I had that familiar conviction that life was beginning over again with the summer.”*

“He [Coach Clayton] was a bit of an odd fellow,” reminisced Chipper, “but it seemed like there were times when he was more human than the rest of us.”

Bradley Chipper was an American football quarterback who is now retired. During his rookie season in the prolific league, he developed a faithful relation with his now deceased Hall of Fame team coach, Henry Clayton.

“He had a sixth sense for ticks and subconscious behaviors and the way a brain works,” Chipper adjusts himself in his seat, “It was spot on. You know, it was kind of unnerving the way he could look into a person's soul. I'm not a psychologist or anything, but I know there were times when he knew me better than I knew myself.”

“Can you tell me what opening day was like, anything in particular that you remember?,” the interviewer asks Reggie Rice, who played middle-linebacker at the professional level with Chipper.

“Well, it was the first game of the regular season and it was against our division rivals, plus we were at home. Emotions were high up in the air and everyone was excited for a good game. I remember seeing Coach walking up and down the sideline, kinda overtaken by something because maybe he had something to prove. As for Chipper, I guess you could say I wasn't exactly paying attention to him because he was just a backup QB. The spotlight was on the veteran, Sammy Nordstrom.”

“Everyone knows the story,” Chipper's daughter laughs, “Sammy Nordstrom got injured in the first drive and in comes number thirteen, Brad Chipper, and his first pro pass was to himself.”

Chipper's first pass in the league was indeed to himself. He had snapped the ball, found a receiver, but upon throwing it the ball was batted into the air by a defender and came down in Chipper's hands who attempted to run, but after it all actually lost yards.

This was, in effect, a display of the team itself. They had been ranked last in both offense and defense and were unlikely contestants for a divisional championship or even a wild-card entrance into the playoffs.

Coach Clayton wanted to develop a team that, in the very least, was respectable, and so he came up with ideas and altered the team's current playbook.

“We lost that first game,” Reggie Rice says, “but after the game Coach came up to me and walked along side of me as we went back inside into the locker room. He told me that he was somewhat satisfied with the way the team handled the game, and how they handled his ideas and the new direction he had for the team.”

“By the end of the season, football enthusiast were calling Clayton 'The Mad Scientist' because of his new approach to the game of football. I mean this was a coach who had some plays that were set up for an eventual lateral. They probably only actually used those plays a few times during the season, but no other coach even had that word in their vocabulary,” remarks Robert Paulsen, who was now a middle-school teacher who grew up cheering for this team.

“Do I miss it? Heck yeah I miss it,” exclaimed Chipper, “With the exception of the day I first held my daughter, the day we won the championship was the most exciting day of my entire life. I felt like football was the only thing that made me whole, being out there on the field with my team and with the one goal in mind to make it to the other endzone, and getting the job done, it gives you a sort of satisfaction that is hard to find anywhere else. I know a lot of people say Clayton didn't 'enjoy' the game, but he had his own way of enjoying it. I won't sit here and tell you that he didn't die with demons, because everything points to the fact that he did, but somewhere in that mind of his I know he was satisfied with being part of the game of football and what he did to change it. As distant as he was, I know he enjoyed every minute out there with us, and I know he cherished both the ups and downs because he knew better than anyone else, that to struggle together was to grow together. Even after I retired, everything I learned from football I applied to everyday life. Why? Because it was football that eventually convinced me that life itself is a team sport.”

Chapter 3

LONEWOLF

2:1:1:3

LAST night, I had a dream. I was living in a small log cabin at the very top of a snowy mountain. Sitting and reading by a fire, I begin to hear scuffing sounds, and when I open the door to see where these sounds are coming from, I find a wolf about thirty yards in the distance digging into the ground.

Human beings can only sense a certain amount of stimuli. This is to say, of all the things we can see, hear, smell, taste and touch, that is only a small fraction of what is actually there.

There are things that some animals can sense that we humans cannot, one example is infrared light. We can see normal light because we have evolved in such a way that allows two of our organs, our eyes and our brain, to work together in converting stimuli from light into something we can understand, known traditionally as vision.

Anything beyond the frequency of normal light is known as infrared light, where it cycles so fast our organs cannot turn it into something we can understand. But, some animals are capable of this.

Evolution is a long process, but I wonder if there are certain methods we can use now to detect some of the things we know nothing about. Things we don't even know exist, yet at the same time exist right before us. Could we do so by exposing them to certain elements, such as when you are in a dark room and you turn on a light, things are then visible?

In chemistry, when an atom loses or gains an electron, it becomes more positively charged or more negatively charged, respectively; there is also information even under the atomic level, where items may behave in a similar fashion, and perhaps in manipulating them, we may alter their unknown structure and increase our ability to sense them.

There was a massive amount of electric energy just below where the wolf was digging, and I assumed he sensed it somehow. Not wanting that energy to be released, I fired a shot from my rifle into the air to scare it away. It looked at me and then hurried off back into the forested trees.

Leaving my apartment and walking through the front door, I catch a glimpse of a family of Peace Lilies as I walk towards an oncoming school bus. One kid, two kid, three kid, blue kid.

Dave and Sara escape from the mouth of the bus and walk directly toward me. Sara, wearing her new glasses, gets to me first and Dave eventually follows. The three of us begin to walk back towards the apartment building and I ask them how school was today?

Dave quickly cut in, almost sensing the question before I could even ask it, saying, “Ms. Chopra said today that bats are blind and use sound to see.” Just as he finished, Sara too began speaking about what she had learned in class.

South Kennedy Elementary School was located in the 54th district of the residing city. Both Sara and Dave occupied the same class, though they were not of the same grade, and have a team of three teachers.

As the students in the class continue to color in black and white images of various animals, Karuna Chopra walks by Dave's location and asks him what color he wants to color in his wolf. Dave, going through his colored pencils, finally decided to color it gray.

In the afternoon, after the class has returned from lunch, they continue their scholarly studies on the animal kingdom, and they learn about the complexity of Earth's ecosystem. As Karuna is walking the classroom, she notices Sara reading, and at one point asked Sara if her new glasses helped her to see better. They did, and Karuna, who first noticed Sara's troubles and suggested the glasses, was pleased to hear these words.

After recess, the students are sent home. Some walk, some ride the bus. Together Sara and Dave find their seat on the long yellowish bus and when they arrive to their residence, there they find the narrator, instead of their mother, of whom has agreed to pick them up.

“Mrs. Gonzalez was telling us about the food chain, too. Do you know what that is?,” Sara asked me. I opened the door to let them into my apartment. “No, I don't,” I replied, “is that when you have hamburgers on a long metal chain and you eat them all up?,” I asked. They both laughed as Sara exclaimed the word “no.”

Once we were all seated at the table in my kitchen and they were eating their lunch, she continued, “A food chain shows you how all the animals in a group are linked together by what foods they eat.” “Wow Sara, you're so smart,” I put my palm under my chin and then move closer to her, “tell me more.”

She continued her lecture as they ate and after both the eating and the homework, I found the book that Lynne had given to me. Sara puts on her glasses and begins to read a segment from it, and then afterwards she gives the book to Dave, and he continues where she left off. Watching over the two, I knew I had done at least one thing right in my life. I think I told you this before; I may hate humanity, but I have always had a genuine soft spot for all the little ones.

“I need to take a shit,” said Dave as he got off his chair. “What?,” I asked. He continues to make his way to the bathroom. “If you say that one more time I'm telling your mother,” I yelled out across the hallway. I believe he ignored my threat.

Sara, still seated at the table with me, begins to speak. Of course I knew what a food chain was, but this time she tells me something I didn't know. “A wolf can smell over

two-hundred million different things. And people can only smell five million,” she concluded.

I told her again that I couldn't believe how smart she was, and after she left to watch television, what she said brought me back to the dream I had last night, and many thoughts came forward.

I wonder, what carries the information of love and hate. When did these two things first occur in human begins? We have a tendency to separate the massless things in our universe, such as goodness and badness, and we also have the tendency to separate the massed things in our universe, such as a computer from the desk it sits on. Our brains do this, subconsciously, for the metaphysical world and the physical world.

This also occurs in animals, where an animal can sense what is safe and what is dangerous, and from its judgement it can decide on what course of action it will proceed to next.

Perhaps it is so that the objective nature of the universe, “objective nature” meaning what the universe is actually composed of without the interference of humanly created subjectivity, determines the way its inhabitants will act and evolve. If we can understand the way we have come to be, can we begin to understand the true nature of our universe?

We know that Earth revolves around the Sun, and because of this there is a sort of repetition between night and day. This repetition has a major effect on the life on Earth, and even dictates the way all life behaves; humans, animals and plants. Understanding this helps us to understand why civilization has developed to become what it is now.

It is possible that early humans began to think in this way, and as such created the construct of God? Man saw that he could create children, and maybe he came to the conclusion that something greater created all he could see.

On the verge of understanding things interiorly, one might learn of the nature of things exteriorly, one might then begin to understand the things that are bigger than him, and in doing so, he might infiltrate the very mind of God.

Chapter 4

THE GRACE THEORY

2:1:1:4

“IN Western Christian theology, grace has been defined, not as a created substance of any kind, but as 'the love and mercy given to us by God because God desires us to have it, not because of anything we have done to earn it',(1) 'the condescension or benevolence shown by God toward the human race.'(2) It is understood by Christians to be a spontaneous gift from God to man — 'generous, free and totally unexpected and undeserved'(3) — that takes the form of divine favor, love, clemency, and a share in the divine life of God.” Wiker's Encyclopedia, page 290.

Four years ago, I had this dream. After Satan had been removed from the project, and after God completed the project, there was a transitional period of darkness, but soon the project came to life and lifeforms began to develop. It was during the age of the coming to life that upon inspection, Satan noticed that they had been given a free will.

Not too long after this, Satan commented to God of his disapproval toward the given free will, but God does not reply. For a long period of time the mocking continues, though God does not ever respond.

Satan, somewhat bitter of the ignoring, embarks on a new idea, and in the stead begins to tempt the lifeforms into the things of sin; lust, gluttony, greed, sloth, wrath, envy and pride, and for a long while Earth is doused in tragedy.

Now reflecting upon his mistake, God came to the conclusion that he would have to intervene, for the will of humans were much too weak. For two centuries, he worked on and developed a projection that would allow him to create a single lifeform separate from the others, but this time he did something different; he altered the DNA of this new lifeform to have absolutely no free will, this lifeform who would later come to be known as Jesus Christ. And Christ, being different from everyone else, would be heralded as the single most gracious human being who ever lived.

Can a human being gain grace without God? As stated above, many believers would simply say no, but I'm inclined to differ in opinion. I think there is more than one way to gain grace, and I have proposed three ways.

The first method, as we have already discussed, is simply grace as a gift from God. Perhaps when Christ declared himself as “the son of God,” he really meant “a son of God,” meaning he was merely man, but alas a man who received the gift of grace from God himself, and so was now a child of God. That is to say that any one of us could become a child of God and do these things that Jesus was able to do if God so chooses to give us grace.

The second method still has grace as a gift, but not from God; instead grace is a gift

from circumstance. This is a much more scientific and logical approach, and the one I support the most. Imagine a person who suffers from a mental illness that causes them to have a tendency to be more sympathetic or empathetic than the average person, coupled with the circumstance that they are living in a very poor area where there is unrelenting suffering. Combining these two circumstances, high-empathy with surrounding poverty, they will react in such a way that grace begins to develop in their being, receiving said grace as a gift from the circumstances they have been put into.

The third method is simply a hybrid of the first two; grace is a gift as a product of circumstance, where God is the circumstance. God is your high-empathy and your surrounding poverty, as the saying goes God is in everything and everywhere, and so this is to say God has gifted you grace through your circumstances.

“For the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes each one he accepts as his child.” It's no secret that those who want to do good will find turmoil along their way. I believe that's the basic mysterious composition of our universe, whether God be these circumstances are not. That's the way it works.

You take a person like Jesus and look at what he went through. I wouldn't be surprised if you told me that at one point in his life, he was kicked out of a church for standing up for what he believed in, even if it meant teaching something against the church. Having grace does something to a person, for better or for worse, and can cause maroonation.

Jesus was not a pastor, he did his teaching outside and to anyone who would have him. He was not a “published” author, so to speak. But even though he was not “published,” not official, his grace could not be denied, and it was destined to be seen. I think, though, what's most important about the grace he carried, goes back to being unpublished; grace is not always a white and golden light, sometimes it comes to you in a form that you do not understand.

There is an idealistic view of Christ that I believe we all have that clashes with the realistic depiction or portrayal of him. I'm sure many of his followers today believe he was very hygienic, but at that time period, who really knows. What did he smell like? Did he have clean teeth? Those questions are superficial, more importantly, was he as forgiving and tolerant as we are lead to believe?

If you look at the characteristics of people like him, there is always unpleasantness, because people like him had to deal with the dark things every single day. Today he is a saint, but during his time period he said many things which offended many people, which is why he was ultimately killed.

Other ideals include his appearance. He spent a lot of time walking and fasting, so I'm inclined to believe he was skinny. He was average height? Probably not. Light skin?

People studying his time period and location suggest otherwise. There are more, and at this point, Jesus will become whoever you decide to make him.

Christ is the epitome of a savior. He will come to you in whatever form you need, and that's what creates the story of a legend, he is more an idea than an actual person.

He may have actually been unattractive, which would give cause to the fact that he didn't have many followers upon his death, but as his legend grew people created him. As history changed his image, more people allowed him into their hearts, as he came to them in the image they needed or wanted.

I think this tells us that grace itself is complex, and that Jesus himself would tell us that there is no right way to live your life so you can acquire it. There aren't certain things you have to follow or believe in. And I think he'd give you a very good example to prove this. I think he'd tell you that when you see a man who is in his thirties and he has no wife, no children, no stable job and a somewhat unkempt appearance, maybe even no home to stay in, he'd tell you not to judge them. He'd tell you not to declare them lost or confused, or that they are unguided, and he would tell you he is saying these things simply because to an outside observer, that is exactly who he was.

Chapter 5

A PORTRAIT OF THE LADYBIRD IN HER ROSEDRESS

2:1:1:5

LYNNE, Dave, Sara and I are all sitting on the living room couch watching a cartoon show. I am over at Lynne's because today was her day off. Dave laid lazily on the couch with his two feet on my lap and his head crushing Sara's arm, and his pressure caused Sara to also lean onto Lynne, who was at the other end of the couch with her arm around Sara's neck.

"Is he the bad guy?," I asked Dave. "Yeah." "How can you tell?" Sara cut in, "Because he's a shark." I thought for a moment, and eventually Lynne asked the two, "There aren't any good sharks?," to which they both replied simultaneously, "No." After the reply she turned her head to look at me and produced a facial expression that suggested that "that was simply the way it goes."

After a while Lynne crossed her legs and I noticed that her silver foot had undergone yet another creative and artistic change with the help of her daughter. They were not butterflies and hearts, but instead words; "You are beautiful."

When commercials came on Dave ran to the bathroom and Sara to the kitchen, leaving behind Lynne and I. She looked in my direction again and began to speak about how she volunteered to give a presentation at our library. She saw the sign and decided to cast her name and she was randomly selected and was going to speak about the world of amputations and the importance of self-image.

As she is speaking, Sara returns to us with a box of juice in her hand, sipping it, and overhearing the discussion of the presentation. When she sits back down next to her mom, she again cuts in and remarks on the dress that her mother bought a week prior.

As Sara begins to speak on the dress, we all hear a flush and Dave eventually lays back on the couch, resting his feet on my lap as the commercials continue.

Sara exclaims that she should put it on and show me, as she did the day she bought it to preview it to her children, to see if I liked it as well.

Getting up, she warned me that it was nothing special, that she simply bought it from a thrift shop located in the city, and to not get my hopes up. It seems that the more magnificent you are, the more your modesty will manage to make you feel as if you might disappoint others.

She walked into her bedroom, closing the door behind her, and changing from her blue jeans and white wifebeater into the dress that she hoped would dazzle the eye.

While she was changing, the cartoon came back on and Sara and Dave again gave it their undivided attention. I say undivided because in contrast, the cartoon was not the only thing on my mind exactly, since I was more interested in the soon exhibition of

Lynnette's dress.

With each passing moment, one second split into two and I felt her inhibition radiate from beyond the room, coming in the form of not matter but time. There are so many different ways to perceive the idiosyncrasies of a particular person.

And so finally, after counting the minutes, she opened the door and walked out, and the look on her face displayed more anticipation than the usual joy.

Plato's "Theory of Forms" is described as the argument that non-physical forms, or ideas, represent the most accurate reality, which is to say that the concept of beauty is more "real" than actually seeing something beautiful. Formation, in early Greek, is indicated by several words which deal largely with vision, sight, and appearance. Plato states that the objects that are seen are not "real," but literally mimic the real Form. Imagine all of the women that Plato made blush, to tell them that they were indeed the pure essence of beauty.

As she walked out into the living room, she gained the attention of Dave and Sara, but not mine as she already had it and my eyes were already locked onto her.

Her dress was painted in an overall black and yellow interlacing design, divided by a leather belt at the waistline and topped by thin spaghetti-stringed shoulder straps. The dress cut just beneath her knees, which made me realize that this was the first time I had ever seen her in a dress that didn't reach down to her ankles.

Dave glanced at her, but then looked back at the television, and Sara, never out of character, began yelling at her, "Not that one, mom! The red and purple one, that looks like it has clouds on it!" She later told me that she bought a few cheap dresses at a bargain price from that thrift store. I suppose if you look for it long and hard enough, you'll eventually find what you're looking for.

I got up and told her to turn around, and as she did the complete three-hundred and sixty degree turn I saw the full framework of her petite body. Putting my index finger to the roof of my upper lip and looking her up and down, I remarked in a soft voice, "...Dazzling."

She gave a quick and sudden burst of laughter and the anticipation immediated to joy. She then asked me if I would also like to see the red and purple clouded dream, and I replied, "At once!," and I waved her off, telling her to go quickly.

She walked off and entered into her room again, and though I could not see it, I knew there was blood rushing to her face.

I sat back down and saw that the cartoon was still on. My eyes were on the television but my mind was on Lynne, which may have been why I completely missed what Dave was saying to me about the shark.

Thinking of Lynne, there was a concept on the tip of my tongue but I don't know

what the word for it is. I'm not certain what one would call it, but she has it. There is, generally speaking, never anything special about a nonspecific woman, at least not at any heightened-sensitivity kind of way, until she looks at you a certain way. This is reciprocal, though, as when you look at her in that same way, with that fierce conviction in your eyes, she becomes anything but ordinary. She was nobody, but at the same time she was someone. Even if it was only to me, no matter her form, she came to me as the essence of beauty.

Her door opened once again and her time in her bedroom was cut in half as she came out sooner than expected, wearing her red and purple clouded dream. Fuzzy bursts of reddish clouds cascaded onto the backdrop of a purple sky. The upper body of the dress was mostly in red and the lower body mostly in purple, and somewhere both colors met.

As she walked towards us, I made the gesture of biting my index finger's knuckle, and another one of her bursts of laughter filled the room. Playing along with me, she stopped about only a few yards from me and put her silver prosthetic foot forward, and then quickly curve-whipped her head backwards, and if one had taken a snapshot somewhere inbetween, it may have been placed on the front cover of a women's fashion-model magazine.

We all laughed at her antics, and once she was finished she joined us in the laughter, unable to confine her joy. Dave was no longer watching his cartoon as he was too busy rolling on the floor in laughter, and Sara, caught by the same virus, perhaps would have gained abdominal muscles over night had she continued laughing the way she was.

Examining the dress once more, I saw that it went down to her ankles and covered her chest completely, as if a sleeveless t-shirt.

Once she'd stop laughing and found her words, she told me that she had a few more and asked if I would like to see them. I took her arm and interlocked it into mine, and as I walked her back to the bedroom, I said, "If ever there was anything I would like to see in this world, it would be the sight of the lady in her dress."

Naturally, she smiled at what I said, but it was only a small crack of a smile, for the rest of her emotion came in the way of contemplation. Her entire face expressed a deep kind of satisfying thought, as if in that moment she had just seen her complete life flash before her eyes, and the images that she saw told her that she would be eternally beautiful.

She no longer needed anyone to tell her that she was beautiful, because she knew that I had seen her, truly seen her, and that was all that mattered. All that ever mattered. I understood her as she understood me, and really that's all people ever want, to be understood and never misinterpreted.

I walked back over to the couch and again sat with Dave and Sara, who were both

still watching the cartoon but in the back of their mind waiting for their mother to display her next dress.

After about three minutes we all heard her shout from inside the room, "Is that my phone?" Her cellular device had been chiming and when I went to get it, I told her that it was her work calling her. I'm not sure how she was able to hear it and we weren't.

She eventually tells me not to answer it, and after placing it down on the kitchen table, I go back to the couch. "Coming out!," she soon again shouted.

Dave completely turned his head as she shouted, and then got up and went around the couch, perhaps so he could see her before everyone else. I would wager a large sum that he was somewhat excited to see her because it was rare that he ever witnessed his mother exhibiting such ecstasy. As would anyone, he too was drawn to it. And as she began to open the door, Sara laid flat on the living room floor with the palm of her hands against her chin.

There was a quiet storm of credence brewing outside as she came out in her third dress. Everyone laughed as she walked out, hands on her hips and her chin tucked into the air, there was a sense of rhythm in her strides. Almost as if she were a queen, when she got to the end of the walk she contorted her body, placing her hips outwards in one direction and placing one shoulder in front of the other, and in an accent, stated, "Master Williams... I am ready for my closeup." And as the rolling laughter continued, she batted her eyes. I have to admit, by then I was laughing pretty hard. Sometimes the quiet people are the funniest.

When she was done with her antics she walked over to us so we could have a better view of the dress. The dress was mostly a solid shade of yellow that eventually faded into a grassy green at the very bottom, and was cut just above her knees. It too was sleeveless, but even moreso, displaying her armpits and, partially, her fore and back-shoulders.

I grabbed her body from behind, wrapping my arms around her stomach-area and pressing my body up against hers, squeezing her, and then dropped backwards onto the couch with her laying atop me on my lap, and in the same accent she declared prior, I whispered, "I must have you."

She laughed enormously, like a child, and telling me to let her go, but in that moment I announced that I would never let her go. "Unhand me!," she cried in the same declared accent, but I would not. I professed to the world, in that moment, that I had finally seized the single object of my obsession. That after many years of searching, I had found the one who secured in me the desire to burst into open flames with radiance of blooming passion. I do not believe Sara or Dave understood what I was saying.

As she walked back into the bedroom once more again to change into a new dress, Sara followed her, and they discussed something in secret along the way. For a while, it

was simply me and Dave sitting in the living room, he still somewhat silently laughing at what was going on with a strange and rare smile on his face.

I sat on the couch, I suppose too, with a strange and rare smile on my face, and thought about Lynne and I's ability to awaken each other. She awakens me, just as I awaken her, because there is something in everyone that waits to be brought to life. Our connection brought it out in each other, like some kind of heightened-sensitivity, like some kind of high-frequency infrared light that only the two of us could see, and that everyone else would be blind to.

As a new cartoon appeared on the screen, we heard the door open, and out came Sara, again in character and shouting, inheriting the accent she received from Lynne and I.

"Ladies and gentlemen! With further-ado, I present to you the magical and..." she stopped and stuck her head back into the room, whispering to her mother, and then looked back at us and continued, still yelling, "I present to you the magical and stupendous Lynnette Jones Parker!"

And out of a thousand dark maroon nights, she walked out in a mostly black dress, which contained a single stripe of red down the middle, with Sara at her side every step of the way and her arms pointing to her mother, as if to present her.

I stood up as the lady walked towards me, softly clapping at the introduction, and without warning she began to twirl. She twirled perhaps a couple more times, and at once, she fell into my arms and I barely caught her, holding her body at a forty-five degree angle from the floor. "My hero, my angel, my king" she fainted.

This dress was not like the others; it was indeed cut directly at the knees, but sported a type of opening in the front, which is to say it went down to her ankles, but only really at the backside of the dress. The upperbody was cut in a sort of V-shape and partially showed her chest.

As she fainted, Dave could be found squatting at the top of the couch attempting to take pictures with a invisibly fake camera. "Hold still!" he shouted, too adopting our accent, and together we held still.

Simply holding her, she eventually opened her eyes and we looked at each other, and as I marveled at her starlight eyes, she couldn't help but softly laugh, or perhaps it was a giggle. She was the kind of person who laughed when there was no joke.

I continued to gaze at the light in her eyes, and it seemed to me as if she were a star that could not wait for the night, a star that harvested so much emotion and had the intent desire to explode into a million different gemstones. Sliding my left arm down the backside of her body and placing it under her legs, I swept her into the air and began to carry her all around the apartment as she locked one arm around my neck and placed the other on my shoulder. "I am so fortunate to be your queenette!" she smiled, and gently

placed her forehead on the side of my neck.

There was a natural mystic in the air as I carried her back to her bedroom door, Sara accompanying us, and I felt a thousand candles come down from the heavens to light the darkness outside which was fast approaching.

Dave walked over to the television, turning it off, and then journeyed to the kitchen where he stayed. When I asked him what he was doing, he did not reply, and yet kept a secret too of his own.

As Sara and Lynne occupied the bedroom, I thought about how I was now caught under Lynne's supernatural and mystical spell; she could grab me by my tie and take me anywhere she pleased, anywhere she so desired. Perhaps, it was her intention to leave her mark on the world, but she instead left her mark on me.

In time, the door swung open and out slid Sara, as hostess, and once again she began yelling to introduce her mother. "Good eveninging, everyone! It is my pleasure to present to you, the wonderful ladybird in her rosedress!," she screamed at the top of her lungs.

And as Lynne strolled from out of her chamber of secrets, I heard the sound of dance music coming from the kitchen, and it followed her everywhere she went, and I came to the realization that just as things can be visually beautiful, that there were also things that were audibly beautiful as well, and to pair them together, as they were now, was to create the benevolent dream of her majesty.

I looked back into the kitchen and saw Dave laughing with his hand on the radio, slowly turning up the volume so the dancing music could fill up the entire apartment, and once I looked back at Lynne she was now walking to the rhythm of the song currently being played, with a small but notable smile on her face which implied she enjoyed her son's antics.

When she got to the end of her walk, she struck a meaningful and delightful pose and then presented to me, and only me, a dead-center stare as she looked into my soul, and such did the stare send a shiver and a chill down my spine.

In the midst of the pulsating music, she put her four-fingers to her mouth and then proceeded to blow me a kiss, and once the soft kiss had traveled across the room, I caught it in midair and sprucely tucked it away into my heart-pocket. It was after this that Sara and Dave began to tease the both of us with words of romance and laughing at our affection.

As the music continued to play in the background, the three of them came to the living room couch and I saw that her dress contained displays of bluejays and blueroses. It was mostly white, secondary with blue, cut just below her knees and hung to her body by shoulder straps which were medium in width. The frontside of her dress, near her abdominal, fell gallantly like a blueish waterfall, and I must say she looked like a blue

bird in flight flying cross the white cloudline in a deep sky.

After we all admired her, she told us she would display a few more dresses and then we could the three of us decide which dress she would wear to her presentation. This is when Sara presented the idea of grading the dresses, from one to ten, ten being the highest possible score. We started the grading with her current dress, which of course received tens from each of us, and then her and her daughter returned to the chamber of secrets.

A new song came on from the radio and Dave and I awaited the next preview, and in anticipation I thought more on Plato's theory. Seeing her in so many colors, she had become a symbol of love to me. Not only was she the essence of beauty, but also the embodiment of love, which she gave to me in a form I could understand, in a form which was patient. Like any other woman, she simply wanted to be seen, but she wanted me to see every part of her. Not just the physical and the mental aspects of her nature, but more her grace. For so long she had so much to give, and for the first time in her life she was allowed to give.

Now that there was music and a hostess, the party had truly begun, and not too soon later Sara flung open the secret door.

“Thank you everyone for your patience! With furtherado, I am glad to present to you, the eighth wonder of the world!,” she screamed, even above the music, and out she came once again to the stride of the pumping sounds and the sparkle of a vintage classic.

Once I had seen her, I slapped my palms to my cheeks and my eyes widened as my mouth gaped, I simply wanted to scream. Seeing my gesture, I could tell she was a bit shy about it and that blood was flushing throughout her entire body, washing over with red seas of excitement. She stood there, her hands meeting behind her back, wearing a thigh-level pink and peach flavored autumn. The dress was cut above the knees and was the shortest dress I had seen so far, and was accompanied with long-sleeves and a soft fabric belt around the waistline, which I learned did not come with the dress but was a creative integration on Lynne's part.

Walking over to me, still in the tune of the music, we all heard a slight tear, and when she looked down to see what happened, she saw a cut at the bottom edge of the peachly pink dress. “Damn it,” she said aloud. I guess it was going to happen sooner or later. We all looked at the tear as she told us she would just sew it back up. Because of this, I gave the grade of a nine, as did Dave, but Sara let her off the hook as she gave her a perfect ten.

Watching her walk away from me in the pinkly peach autumn, I stared at her legs. She was no longer confined to a single body. To me she represented the idea of the everywoman. She came in all shapes, sizes and colors, and on any given street, you might

see her walking with the power that came from the Sun.

With the sound of dancing music and the illustrations of beauty, I decided to move the couch and other pieces of furniture so I could create a catwalk from the door to the living room. Thereafter, I laid down a long rug that led all the way to me, because I had known I was always her final destination.

“Hello, hello, hello!” Sara shouted, “it is my grape honor to introduce to you, the lady in yellow!” Dave, bobbing his head and increasing the volume, gave way to a dramatic entrance by Lynne, who at first was confused of the layout but soon saw me waiting in the distance. She walked in the path of the rug, very womanly, and time seemed to slow down as wind came from the window and blew inwards the curtains. And once the wind reached her dress, too blowing it onto one side, I saw that she came to me with the golden glow of a dark half moon. She was divine, otherworldly, donning a dress which was slit on one side in the front and partially revealed her silver foot.

The dress itself went down to the ankles and were equal parts gold and silver, ultimately matching her prosthetic foot, and had a buttoned top and collar.

She was gorgeous, and despite wearing no make-up she stood out like a red leaf among green leaves in the beginning of fall. This was because she had a natural beauty, the same natural beauty which could be found in the highest mountains and the greatest lakes, which could not be denied by darkness and was so received by light.

Almost to me, she stopped and lifted one leg onto the coffee table, and then used her index finger in a sly way to tell me to come to her. I looked around the apartment, and then asked if she was gesturing to me? She nodded her head slowly, so I got up and walked over to her. When I got to her she cupped her hands to my ear, and put her mouth to her hands, and slowly, she began to whisper a secret to me so only I could hear it.

In the softest, foggiest voice, she whispered to me, “You make me feel like a virgin, a new woman being cherished for the first time.” My eyes widened as I stared at Sara and Dave, and immediately after she finished she began laughing, eventually covering her face in embarrassment and telling me she couldn't believe she just said that to me. I simply looked at her, I could not find words for a reply. From my expression Sara and Dave ran over and asked what words were said in such secretive fashion, but Lynne quickly removed her leg off the table and bursted out in a colorful way, “Nope! It's only between me and your father,” she slipped in words, and then ran away from their pestering to hide in the bedroom as they chased her.

No one noticed except me, and perhaps you, of the exact word she had used to label me. Perhaps it was because they were so caught up in the moment with the booming music and visual depictions of elegance, but not one word was uttered of doubt for my position in the household.

Dave eventually came back out and Sara dwelled within the room of secrets as Lynne prepared to fit her next dress, but upon doing so they realized we had forgotten to grade that appearance. When they came back out, the three of us wrote our numbers on pieces of paper.

I displayed mine first, which was a rating of 01. When I saw her disappointed face, I looked at the sign and realized it was upside down, to which I flipped it displaying the perfect score of 10. Dave followed, also scoring a ten, and finally Sara, who gave her a nine. When Lynne asked why Sara only gave her a nine, Sara explained it was because the dress was ripped. “Honey, it's supposed to be ripped,” Lynne laughed. Sara was, however, solid in her opinion.

After they both exited and went back to their room, I glanced over into the kitchen at Dave, who seemed to be dancing, shaking his buttocks into the air to the sound of the music he was in charge of, and at times pulling the front of his shirt over his head as a signature.

Waiting for Lynnette, I thought about her virgin confession and the way I made her feel. Perhaps it is so, that a woman may search for the things that infuse her spirit and imagination, if only to make her feel young again, on the night that she would first encounter true love.

The door gave way once more and out came Sara, “Eh hem! May I have your attention please. The lady...” and before she could finish Lynne came running out of the room directly towards me.

She sprinted down the Lynnewalk, and jumping to my feet all I could think of was why she was coming at me at such a great velocity.

Once she was close enough to my being, she leaped valiantly into the air and with impressive hangtime, and finally I caught her as she landed into my arms. Her legs now wrapped around my waist and her arms resting on my shoulders, she eventually repositioned them to cradle my neck as if to hug my body. She had so much energy I thought she might do a backflip out of the window soon.

The dress she had on allowed for such activity, as, like a prior dress, it had an opening in the front, and with this dress she also wore a pair of leggings to create a type of combination. The dress was completely solid orange, save for a few orange fruits, and the leggings were completely solid green, and they paired to make a delicious visual. The top of the dress hung around her neck like a string necklace, and the whole dress fitted loosely on her petite body. The only problem was that the shade of orange and green in question were not exactly in tune and did not match very well.

After she had pulled her head back, she began kissing me all over the face in an excited fashion. She kissed my cheeks, lips, forehead, even my nose, and when finally

finished, Sara exclaimed that I should pick her up and fly her like a ballerina. I had done this to Sara herself just yesterday, and I supposed the idea stuck in her head.

It was then that I picked Lynne up from behind and, once she had wrapped her legs around my waist once again, this time in an opposite manner, I “flew” her across the living room. For whatever reason, time lapsed, and I found that Lynne was now on top of me, balancing herself on my shoulders as I walked the living room around.

Trying to position herself in a way that was more comfortable, she became quite heavy and somewhat shifted my body and I made an abrupt turn and, losing her right hand, she completely lost her balance and I stumbled into the couch, sending her flying way overhead into the opposing coffee table.

I panicked, running around the couch to see if she was okay, and from her only came a type of gasping laugh. She was laughing so hard she couldn't breathe.

Once she had collected herself, Sara pointed out that her dress received a tear down the backside. Another ripped dress, I guess you get what you paid for.

Amid her checking for any scrapes and bruises, the sound of the radio went down as it was transitioning to a new song and we could all hear Dave, who was now in a world of his own.

He had completely removed his shirt and pants and now only bore his undergarments and socks, and in his comedic way, he was mimicking me in a humorous way. With the accent, he declared, “Muah! Muah! Muah!” pretending as if he were holding a girl, and smooching her as he held the back of her head, “Let me take you to the moon!” he cried. All of this in the most romantic way possible.

The laughter from all of us never went any higher than when we saw what Dave was doing, which was perhaps the highlight of the evening.

Eventually we all voted on the green and orange combination, all giving tens. It was around that time that I noticed that Dave was copying every one of my ratings.

“Put your clothes back on,” I demanded to Dave as Lynne and Sara walked back into the room, but he never did. Instead, we both heard a knock from the front door. It was the husband of the Filipino family, who told us that our music was being played too loudly. I apologized and told him that I would turn it down, and as he left Dave went over to lower the volume by half. We were having so much fun we didn't realize how loud we were being.

Walking back to the couch, I hadn't noticed that Sara was introducing Lynne again, and looking at her as she walked out in a purple and pink dress, I tripped over something foreign and proceeding to land on my face. She ran over to check on me, and when she saw that I was fine, she burst out into laughter, almost tears. “Keep laughing and you're going to rip another dress,” I commented.

She helped me up and displayed herself to me, one hand on her hip and the opposite knee pointing out, and the dress came in the form of an ankle cut dress that was strapless. It striped together the colors of purple and pink and made good on presenting her as a model who took the world by storm. She would appear in Tokyo, Delhi, London, Lagos, Sao Paulo and every other major city in the world, all on the biggest screen each city had to offer, and regardless of which city you came from, when you looked at her she was you and you were her, and together you were both worldwide.

Time lapsed again and we all found ourselves in the living room, dancing to the rhythm of the tune being played on the radio. Dave was still half naked and Sara was hopping on the top of the couch. Lynne was the most animated out of all of us, raising her arms into the air and swaying her hips from side to side, and each time I came near her she let out a half-nervous laugh. Even so, she had been reanimated, and Dave and Sara were beginning to see their mother in a new light.

The final dress was now to be revealed, and as Queenette Lynnette and her daughter Princessa Sara occupied the secret chamber, Dave was in the kitchen drinking water from the kitchen sink, perhaps dehydrated from the exercise.

All of a sudden, in a timely fashion, Sara slid out from the palace with her arms stretched out and again began, but this time in a calm voice, "Ladies and gentlemen... And now, I present to you, the lady who needs no introduction," and her arms pointed in the direction which Lynne came out of, and displayed to us herself in a brown and cream colored polka-dotted dress. She walked down the runway with such vigor and zeal, and moved with such passion, that too look at her meant using every neural pathway in your brain to understand such beauty.

I meant to pick my jaw up from off the floor, but I could not take my eyes off of her. I searched with my hands to find my now unattached jaw, and once I had found it, I pushed it upwards as to reattach it to my face, but upon doing so it again fell to the floor. She laughed, again enormously like a child, and her laughter eased my soul. It was a laughter that escaped her, and then came back to her, and then escaped her again.

This dress was ankle length and the top portion seemed more like a medium-sleeved shirt. The upper portion was shaped like a V and partially displayed her chest, and at the very bottom was a pattern design of triangles.

After she demanded that her children turn around or cover their eyes, she again placed her leg on the coffee table, but this time did something different. With her leg on the table, she slowly lifted the dress up to her knee and then began to take off her silver foot. Once off, she began to wave the foot in the air and eventually flung it at me, and after catching it, I realized that she was telling me that I could have her, anywhere, anytime, and for whatever reason.

And as I thought about it, in the distance she hopped over to me, telling me that she actually needed her foot back, and after she took her silver piece back I swore that I would never again ever wash my hands. As she walked away, I whistled at her, and I whistled once more as she put her silver foot back into place, letting her know in all good fun that she was exemplary in the art of flirting, even if at heart she was the exact opposite of a flirty person.

Once she allowed Dave and Sara to again participate, we graded her dress, giving her perfect scores of ten across the board in a unanimous and undisputed decision.

We all stood there, and she then asked us which one we all liked best, and we all instinctively noted the blue and white dress that contained birds and roses, and it was partially decided that that would be the dress she wore to her presentation at the library, though we all wanted to see her in it one more time to make sure.

Sara and herself again entered the room for one last time, and Dave and I sat perched in the living room awaiting the last and final display.

And as I sat there, my mind not wandering but fixed solely on Lynnette, I thought of the sky and the many colors it could carry. I thought of all the combinations of all the colors of all the dresses she had shown to us, and I imagined them appearing in the most beautiful of skies. I saw her dresses, all of them; blue and white, and black and yellow, and purple and red, and orange and green, and silver and gold, and brown and cream, and pink and peach, mixing together in the color of twos to create dynamic clouds on the backdrop of the great sky.

The final appearance in the dresswalk was upon me, and though I had already seen the ladybird in her rosedress, I was still excited. Time began to drag, as once again the seconds split into two and she took quite a long time, as it were the first time she slipped into her first dress this day. Perhaps, twenty minutes had passed, and on the twenty-first minute I said to Dave, "I think Sara killed her."

But the time came, eventually, when Sara opened the door and walked out. There was a sweet smell, sweet aroma which transpired from inside the room, but it came as a tease because Sara soon closed the door shut.

She went over to all of the lights and switched them off, and in a box she took out a power flashlight and turned it on. Dave and I were in complete wonder. And after maintaining the position she so desired, she called out to her mother, saying, "Ready!"

The entire apartment was dark save for any place Sara shined her powerful light on, and once the door to the secret room opened, Sara positioned her light on the door and we all waited. At this moment, the song on the radio switched to a more mellow and soft melodic tune, as if by fate, and then out walked Lynnette, and I witnessed something which had been created by a force of nature, perhaps a higher power, whose keen intent

was to design something which could be shown off or displayed, exhibited for all to see.

As she walked through the darkness to me with a powerful light shining onto her, I instinctively stood up. She had on the blue and white ladybird rosedress, but unlike the other displays, she carried the tan purse she had stolen from my mother, wore white heels and gold earrings, smelled of a green-apple perfume, and had make-up on, of a modest proportion, and she did this all for me.

Red lipstick, black eyeliner for exuberant eyelashes and a dash of hue on her cheeks, she walked towards me and the soft mellow music matched her appearance like a puzzle, and in it I found the most beautiful answer I could ever find in life.

Getting ever closer to me, she presented to me a smile. The smile was the final piece to the puzzle, and from this she created an image that you may only see a few times in your life. It, in the most literal of fashion, took my breath away. At that moment she represented every beautiful woman in the world whose desire it was to change the world itself with her own grace.

She was going to be giving a presentation mainly on self-image, and I understood a great deal what this really meant to her. There is not one person on this Earth who doesn't somewhat suffer from self-image in some way, because as human beings, we tend to think first with our eyes, regardless of the knowledge that beauty stems much deeper than this. Much, much deeper.

I had never seen her in this way, but I suppose I was so jarred by the picture because I was accustomed to seeing her covered in dirt or in paint, tired from the day because she had just finished gardening or working on a new piece.

My mind was in a frenzy, in a state where thoughts of her could not escape. I was, perhaps, driven to insanity by her.

She finally got to me, her smile in width now from ear to ear, and as she pressed up against the side of me, she kissed my cheek and left behind a red stain. The moment her soft lips left my face, the back of my hand greenishly rose to my forehead and I fell backwards, unable to stand because of her touch.

I laid there on the floor, attempting to fan myself, but it did no good as it does one no good in trying to evade the rain. I soon after lost all consciousness.

I must have been knocked out for at least ten minutes when I finally woke up to see the three huddled above me, trying to wake me up. When I came to, I shot up, filled with energy, and I shouted to Dave, "Quickly, quickly, call the fire-station!" When he asked me why, I told him it was because there was a fire in the house!

He ran over to the kitchen and detached an invisible fire extinguisher, and then proceeded to throw it to me, and after catching it I turned towards Lynne in an attempt to blow her out and put out the fire. By this time Sara was laughing, a bit confused, and

Lynne just stood there in her waterfall-clouded dress laughing, at one point almost falling as she tried to walk away and mildly stumbling on her silver side, nearly giving into her heels. She quickly regained her balance and shouted to me while laughing, telling me to cease my silliness.

Once we were all collected, we agreed on the ladybird rosedress, and I told her that it suited her very well. She was the one and only, and the dress appeared to be made specifically for her. It was like a rare dress that only she could slip into, only she could bear.

Now looking at the overclock, I saw that time had flown by and it was already ten p.m. Prince Dave, still half naked, laid in a somewhat sleepy state on the couch, as did his sister, and the sound of television made intent to put them completely to rest. I believe we were all satisfied with the day that preceded us, and I knew it would be a day we all remembered for a very long time.

At the time, Lynne had returned to the secret room to change back into normal clothes. I stood there, hanging over the couch and watching the program on the television, until I felt a desire to see her again.

After I had knocked on the door, she told me to come in, and upon entering I found her standing in front of the closet looking through hangers of clothes. She looked through the closet wearing only her lingerie; she had on just a black brassiere and white panties, and as I walked over to sit on her bed, I watched as the curtains blew in from the outside wind.

Leaving her closet, she began to walk towards me, perhaps to don the clothes she had laid out on the bed, and as her legs scissored I noticed the short streak of a scar running down her inner thigh. Once she was close enough, I grabbed her hand and pulled her towards me, and in gesture I asked her to sit down beside me. She was already aware that I was looking at her scar. A scar that reminded me of her violent past. It resided remarkably close to her vaginal region.

Over time, I looked back up into her eyes and I saw that she could not hold back the illumination in her eyes. She did not say it directly, but her eyes told me that she wanted to be possessed by me, that I had put my mark on her. She moved forward and kissed me, and I kissed her back, and soon after her head laid candidly on my shoulder.

She had washed off her make-up and her smell of perfume had become very faint, and even though her flesh pressed and rubbed against mine, that smell was almost completely unnoticeable.

I suppose I had somewhat startled her when I took out my hand from off the bed and calmly placed it on her thigh and gently moved it upwards toward the legacy scar. She had no idea what it was that I was doing, but I continued, and she didn't stop me, her head

simply laid there, resting on my shoulder.

Once I had reached her scar, I began to rub the area, up and down, back and forth, side to side, as if to massage the pain from her past, and inbetween the session, she had lifted her head to place her chin on my shoulder, and then closed her eyes. I knew then that she trusted me with her life and every aspect of it, and soon came the time when she took out her own hand from off the bed and placed it on the top of my massaging hand, interlocking our fingers together.

I understood then that what we had was a love story, that which was brimmed of romance; and ever so gently, she blossomed for me, and I possessed her.

Chapter 6

RED RIGHT 88

2:1:1:6

“AS the new leader of the team, Reggie ran out onto the field first and led us into the second game,” said Kelechi Okadigbo, who played the running back position for the team.

Okadigbo continued, “The first quarter was pretty much like the entirety of week one's game, we couldn't really get anything done, and this was pretty much expected. I remember there was a fan of the opposing team near our bench who consistently heckled us. Even was wearing a jersey of his team with Woodchipper's name and number on the back. It was a tradition they had for bad players, basically saying that that player was going to help them win the game because they were so terrible.”

By the second half of the exhibition, the frustration of playing poorly began to settle into Clayton's team. One of his players would later be suspended and fined for an obvious illegal hit, and he would soon find that many players were deviating from his playbook, as if they had not understood their course of action or simply rejected it.

“During that second week game Reggie came up to me as I walked over to the sideline because the defense was coming out onto the field, and he said something to me that kind of made me upset. I was getting sacked basically every other play because no one could get open. Either way, what he said was, in a snarky remark, 'There's this concept in many team-based sports... It's called passing.' I knew then he didn't accept me as the replacement for Sammy Nordstrom. At least not yet,” Chipper concluded.

“That game was our second loss and when we got back into the locker room all morale was once again at a low,” said Okadigbo. “And then out of no where, Clayton started yelling at all of us. It was the first time I ever heard him speak that loudly. 'If you don't think you're a winner you don't belong here!' He started yelling and went on a tirade about the mechanics of the sport and a bunch of other stuff. We all thought he was just crazy and he was looking too much into a simple game. 'This team isn't talented enough to win on talent alone!' At the time he said that, I was one of the top three running backs in the league, career-wise, so I didn't exactly understand what he meant. After we won the championship, though, two things became clear to me; Coach was not as crazy as he seemed, and that when you don't have the talents and skills necessary to reach a goal, you look for other creative means for success. If you're poor and you don't have access to education, then you learn by observing the world. There are a million different ways to success and fulfilling your goals, there isn't just one way, it's not one size fits all. Be creative. He taught me this, though in a stern way, and I will never forget it for as long as I live.”

Chapter 7

MANHUNT

2:1:1:7

AFTER driving past a few taxis in Lynne's car, I parked on the side of the street and peered through the large MBJ Airport windows. Unable to find Tao, I got out of the car and entered through one of the many sliding doors. A crowd of noise drummed my ears, and I made the terminal decision to go left instead of right.

Watching the luggage go round and round as I walked past, I looked through a large crowd of spectators, and among them was Tao, who stood there hunting for his bags.

As I approached him, his possessions rolled up and he took hold of them, seeing me coming in the process.

Driving back home, I learned that he was attending an important meeting concerning his new employment. He had flown about four states over, spent the weekend in a hotel and often times wandering the new city, and was now back with a solid position in the company.

As an airplane flew over, he took out a large map depicting the entire globe and began to study it, and at some random minute he asked me, "What is New England?" I looked at him, a bit confused, then answered, "What do you mean, 'what is it?' It's a country right next to England." He nearly interrupted me, "No, that's Wales." "I am fairly certain it's located next to England, the same way New Mexico is near Mexico," I replied.

He inspected his map more closely, "Well, I don't see it on here." "New England is part of the United Kingdom, you idiot," I said. "Then what is Great Britain?" "That, I don't know."

Examining his map ever more closely, he came to the conclusion that New England was no where to be found anywhere. "That's strange," I remarked, "what if it sunk?" Tao begins to wonder, and he then begins to go into a conspiracy mode speculating that our world leaders may have "made it up."

Diverting from geography, I asked him why he didn't just have May-ling, his girlfriend, pick him up. He explains to me that he was not exactly excited about seeing her.

I laughed when he told me that every time he thinks of her, he also thinks of Hitler, or some form of Nazism. He went on, telling me that she was a bit of an overachiever and expected way too much from him, and she had already been talking about marriage and children. I nearly lost control of the vehicle.

Not much was said after that, I don't know why, but as we entered into our town I saw work being done on a home. It reminded me of my distant past, to see them laboring away in the Sun like that.

Under the apprenticeship of a veteran carpenter named Jose, I spent many years learning the trade from him and his crew. With something as menial as carpentry, you'll come to realize there is a diverse family-hood within it, and this is mostly because the trade of carpentry is not exactly prestigious, which will inherently open the door to sincerity.

The sincerity is what initially drew me in into the trade; it was a calm profession where I wasn't worrying about moving up on the ladder or being demoted. Everyone came to work, worked hard, and earned an honest day's wage for an honest day's labor.

Most of the people I worked with were immigrants or came from first-generation families. One from Mexico, another from Poland, carpentry did not discriminate.

Jose loved his job, in it he found an art form, and he told me that it didn't matter how under-appreciated your work went, as long as you enjoyed it. I found it funny, that this same wisdom could be found in a book in the Bible named Ecclesiastes, though he had never read a single page. This told me that regardless of your start and middle, we all tend to end up in the same place; at the end of our lives with a similar wisdom among us all.

After I left his employment, I suffered my first episode of psychosis. I had lost my way, and falling from grace, I found myself in a hellish nightmare. I stalked through the dark forest with a dull saw in my hand, hunting for Sid.

In my search, on the ground, I came across a child-sized baseball bat, which told me that this was the way he had come. The forest was lush full of life, and as I hunted I forced bushes and branches out of my way, following the tracks he'd left behind.

In me, Sid had instilled the beast, and now all I wanted was his head in a bag. Sid is not smart enough to evade me, and soon this manhunt will come to an end.

Perhaps Sid didn't realize it, but he created a monster. In my spare time I committed atrocious acts deemed unforgivable by general society. Often I would wait at playgrounds, or outside children's schools, only to snatch them and do with their body and mind whichever I pleased.

In my lair, I imprisoned a nine year-old girl, laid her on my table, and I pried open her mouth with a metallic instrument. Cranking a lever very slowly, I watched as the instrument slowly increased in gap as it forced open her mouth, inch by inch, to the point of gurgled gaggly unintelligible screams, and there was a serenity that washed over me as it finally and completely broke open her jaw and caused instant death.

Once her body had hardened of rigor mortis, I inserted several objects into her anal cavity and then initiated the fondling of her underdeveloped breasts with metal clamps. I'll tell you, friend, there is no such satisfaction as the one you get from playing with children.

Chapter 8

“HARVEST MOON”

2:1:1:8

- ¶ Distance and resistance, serve as the howls to the harvest moon
- ¶ Orange and brown petals fall to the ground, forever separated against the bloom

- ¶ Away from light casts the shadow of darkness, a soul reaver on a high tide
- ¶ Alone in dreams, distant and resistant, a peaceful life yet a lonely ride

- ¶ On a dark summer morning, the wind rustles through the trees
- ¶ A blue bird in flight lands on a branch, sits there for awhile, but life comes and it leaves

- ¶ Sadness, it fell back, a harvest moon bent upon the hands of time
- ¶ Swallowed everything whole, so welcome now, welcome to this world of mine

¶ 7/4 – I think most relationships and marriages fail because the two people never really get close to each other. I think, on some level, you have to be friends with your lover, before you become committed and during the commitment. Before you become lovers you have to spend time being friends, and most importantly, while your lovers you have to at the same time know how to be friends with each other. If your lover is just your lover and not your friend, then you'll find that you are in a “contract” and very limited relationship with obligations and notions. Wow, I think I just kind of sounded smart.

¶ When I was nineteen, I saw this kind of strange movie that probably would have been shunned by society if it became more popular. I loved it, and I suggested to a close friend, hoping they would like it and it wouldn't just expose what kind of person I was because I liked it. When you give someone a movie like that, I think there are two things that can happen. They might say its a bad movie and that you shouldn't feel that way (it was very depressing, but at the same time very beautiful to me), and then you will recede and never suggest it to anyone else ever again and just keep it between you and movie, OR maybe that person watches the movie and they tell you they loved it, that they feel the same way, and then slowly but surely you both remove the mask that you were both wearing for eachother and you make a connection. A real connection, with no masks, but plain faces. Truth and honesty. And you find a type of unity, a type of connection, that you didn't know was possible, all because you stopped lying to eachother and opened up and shared the way you truly felt. This wasn't how it played out, after I gave her the movie she found a new best friend, but I just wish she could have seen what I saw in it.

¶ During my marriage, I eventually came across that same distance. It started with his ignoring me, not spending time with me, then it turned into irritation, then slaps on the wrist

or forcefully moving my arm like I was a child, and eventually the violence got worse and worse and I would lock myself into the bathroom for hours ashamed of the bruises. I don't like to admit this, but I felt like a bad person, because I had so much hate for him, but not even just him, for everyone. For Emily, Claire, J.D., I was so angry at them for not helping me. I was wrecked with guilt and hatred at the same time and I just wanted to set fire to everything and just watch it all burn. I didn't care, not even my newborn could save me, and God forbid I had a gun back then because I would have killed him with little hesitation.

¶ I remember for the span of an entire week, I broke down every morning. I would get the kids ready for school, and once they left, and once Silvio left for work, I would just sit on the ledge next to the window, looking out and just crying, because I knew I wasn't happy. We were living in a small apartment then, the building was about 50 stories, and I remember us being on the 47th floor and I could see a lot of the city. All I wanted to do was run, so far away, and just leave every thing behind and start again.

¶ We used to live near a lake, Cellardoor Lake, and sometimes I'd take the train there through the city. I'd sum up whatever change I could find in the house, or any change he loosely left behind, or any change I could sneak away from him when I brought home the groceries and gave him whatever change was due. And I would punch that train ticket man, go to that damn lake, and watch my fucking life go down the drain. Sorry for swearing, I know it's not lady like.

¶ That whole week, I never changed clothes because I was so out of it. I didn't shower for a week. My gray shirt and pink pajama pants were so musty but I was so weak I just didn't care (if your wondering why I remember the clothes, its because I remember almost every detail about that horrible weak). What was the point? Change so I can tear something else after being thrown around like a football?

¶ Sitting on that ledge for hours, sometimes I'd watch the Sun when clouds were in front of it and it appeared as a glow. I kept thinking, "There has to be someone out there who could help me. Someone who could help me find my way so I didn't have to feel so ugly and miserable all the time." That wedding ring? It was the worse lie I ever told. The blackest lie that ever came out of my mouth.

¶ I was filled with so much ambition but couldn't express myself because I was trapped. Or maybe I just didn't know how to. I knew I was beautiful, I was filled with passion, but my ambition was like a secret hidden so far into my being and sometimes even I couldn't see it. I wore my heart on my sleeve, out in the open for anyone to stab it. It had no protection from the perils of outside forces, and so many times he would come by and stab it, and stab it, and stab it, and it bled and bled and bled until the life inside me was gone. This is what happens to a woman who is hunting for her purpose. (I wrote a poem called Harvest Moon which talks about this, and I will make sure I add it to this entry)

¶ I feel as a couple, it is our responsibility to each other to keep each other safe, not only

from ourselves or from others physically, but also from the things we can't see, like depression and anger and isolation. Because when you're so alone like I was, the high tide from that lake will come only to swallow you whole and leave behind madness in its wake.

¶ *“...for that moment I feel as if I could hold the beauty she possesses. That I could find it somewhere and keep it safe.”*

Chapter 9

THE MUSIC CITY

2:1:1:9

IT is often said that life is but a dream within a dream. I think about that quite a lot, and always I end up thinking about the theory that suggests our reality is merely a reflection, or a sort of mirror.

The idea states all that we see or seem is only a reflection of a “real” universe located perhaps in a mysterious dimension, perhaps occurring a long time ago.

Surely you've looked into a mirror. You moved your hand and watched it as it moved in the mirror as well, thinking you were the director, but have you ever wondered if it is your mirror-self that is directing you? The same applies to the theory, limiting expectations or implications on free will.

I guess another way to think of it is as an echo; there is an original source that is copied, and then copied, and then copied... And of course, as with echoes, there is information loss, as well as energy loss.

Scientists speculate that our universe is expanding. If our universe is an “echo”, and, on the contrary, shrinking, where would we find evidence of this? No doubt we would find answers if we could measure all of the universe in spatial degrees and compare it, but what if we instead looked at time? What if we instead observed whether time was shrinking or expanding?

Nine years ago I had a dream in which I had finally located the man covered in darkness. I predicted where he would appear, but I did not predict the amount of pedestrians that would be there that day, and so as I raced through the crowd I tried to keep an eye on him as he was about thirty yards ahead of me, too rummaging through the large crowd.

Why this dream is so distinctive to me is that as I began to lose him, and as the gap in distance increased, the sky began to turn and shifted into a red and purple canvas, and when I looked back down, there was now more than one of him.

It took me a while to realize it, but every single person that he bumped into turned into a figure of darkness, and in turn, the people who those people would bump into also turned into the same darkness. It eventually got to the point where I couldn't tell which one was the real him.

I read a book this one time, which explained how much of the “evil” in the world cannot be solved simply because “good” people never attempt to understand the evil. That would be to say, to defeat evil, you must first understand it, and to understand it, you must at the very least respect it. To not dismiss it in a simple fashion, but to understand that evil is as complex as goodwill.

Those of us who are “socialized,” “normal,” “upstanding” citizens, we can't even begin to understand why a person would ever take advantage of children sexually, or why a person would strap a bomb to their chest for a holy cause, or why a person would lead others to genocide, but therein lies the problem. There are sciences at work, such as biology and sociology, and to think that these individuals are simple is a mistake, and often times they are led by very complex psychologies, or more than that, complex systems, whether the systems be political or antisocial. These are mistakes we all make, the same way we think what we can see is all the reality there is is a mistaken way of thinking.

As the number of dark figures multiplied, I eventually completely lost sight of him as he vanished into the crowds of people. I couldn't tell who was who or one from another as I became swallowed by darkness and overtaken by the night.

As the notion of completely giving up entered my mind, so did music, which was accompanied with sounds of bursts of laughter. It was the same music I had heard before, in his apartment way back in The Emerald City, and I knew it was his way of fucking with me.

As the sounds increased in volume, taking up more space, I lost grip of my mentality and couldn't remember when or where I was, though if I had known of this region's historical implications, I would have seen that I was in a melodic location. The music city, Nashville.

Looking out of the window as I wake up, I find that it is night time, and once I look at my ovenclock, I see that it is one a.m. My sleeping schedule was once again diverted from the rest of my peers.

It has been a long stretch of days since I've seen Lynne or her children, but we have developed an understanding. Though it may be years before the two little ones understand completely, they know I am not one for being all-around all-the-time.

I walk into the living room and turn on my television and find the news station. There is a story about a local band in which the lead singer committed suicide. This makes me think of Jack and of his once again long absence. I think of the album he gave me and of probably its best song, “Monolith.”

Monolith is a song about starting late, growing slower than the rest, realizing you made some bad choices. I made my fair share, and there was a time when I wondered if this was all just in my head, but that time has passed. Now I live in a little apartment in a town that borders the city, and I know who I am. After all these years, I think there's a victory in that.

I shut the television off which allows my entire apartment to become dark, and I switch on a flashlight and aim it just above a few figures. The light casts a shadow on the

wall, of what looks to be a home made of sticks. The way they appear on the wall reminds me of the asylum and the black vines that grew into being. I still needed to remove the broken key from my backdoor doorknob.

Standing there, flashlight aimed at the figures, I slowly changed angles to change the size of the ghostly stickhouse, and I could have sworn that at one moment or another, the shadow of an old lady appeared within the illusion, sitting on her front porch and rocking back and forth.

With the passage of time came dawn and a dark blue sky, and I could hear the family above me getting ready for the day. I am not certain, but I believe they are of Irish descent; Tao simply referred to them as “pale white people.” A mother, a father, and guessing at age, perhaps an eleven year old son and a fifteen year old daughter. They mind their own business and don't seem to talk to anyone else. Perhaps the adults were immigrants and came here in search of the American dream.

I was back in my bedroom now, listening to voices on the radio that spoke about teachers who were threatening to go on strike. “The governor and mayor are failing in issues such as school funding and school closure.” “Midyear cuts are greatly affecting students and making it harder for teachers to, well, teach.” “The amount of furlough days are ridiculous.”

The voices are then interrupted by a faint voice coming from up above, of someone who must have been speaking a bit loudly, and from the mother I could hear every single one of her words.

“Heading into the third game, Woodchipper promised me a win,” said Kelechi Okadigbo to the interviewer. “Man, that must have been the absolute worst game we played that year,” Okadigbo laughed.

“There's only one regret I have in my entire life,” Chipper laughed, “and it was in the third week. We had just converted a third down at about midfield. Time was running out of the first half and we had no timeouts left, so we were all hurrying up to the line so I could spike it and maybe we could attempt a long field goal, but in my panic my mind froze and I kned the play down instead. I don't think Clayton ever forgave me for that,” Chipper begins to laugh a bit harder.

Week 3 was one of the worst weeks in this team's historic season; the offense was dropping many passes and the defense was committing many penalties, of which some resulted in automatic first downs for the opposition. Free safety Kevin Faulkner would be ejected in the second half after arguing what he claimed to be a bogus call, and his stripping of his gear to display his frustration as he walked off the field would come to be an iconic moment in the franchise's history.

A bad series lead to a bad quarter which led to a bad half and ultimately a bad game,

and at this point, Clayton realized that his schemes and playbook were not working.

“When we got back into that locker room man, Coach was on fire,” remarked Rice, “He said, and I quote, 'You guys are playing like ****!' 'You're playing worse and worse every day and right now you're playing like it's next month.' He didn't stop there, either.”

Coach Clayton, that night, asked his team if they liked losing. Clayton had noticed that in the third quarter, some of the players were losing interest in the game as the opposing team continued its dominance and continued to score, and so he decided that if they didn't want to play when it mattered, then they would play when it didn't, and he had every player on the team run up and down the entire length of the football field, again, and again, and again.

The drill went on well into the night and by now it was on course for barbarism. Some of the players were completely out of energy, others filled with clamping muscles, some could barely move, and yet still, Clayton blew a whistle and continued to yell, “Again!”

Once he felt he had made his point, Clayton dismissed all players except for one. Bert McCormack, who was somewhat of an overweight lineman, was not able to keep up with the others, and so Clayton let the rest go but told McCormack to complete the laps, and as the rest walked towards the locker room, they looked on in pity as McCormack stayed out on the field.

Though McCormack was, at many points, vomiting, Clayton did not hold the same pity McCormack's peers did, and he continued to push him, to his brink, and to a point that any other man could not withstand.

Rice, fearful, walked up to Clayton and pleaded with him to stop his antics, but Clayton made sure he would be read loud and clear. He wanted his players to know that this wasn't just some game to him, and now they heard him.

Forcing McCormack to complete the two remaining laps, and seeing that Clayton had no inclination to let him go free of the charge, Rice ran back onto the field in partnership with McCormack and ran with him the distance. Of course, when the other players saw this, they too reunited with their contemporaries, and so the entire squad was back out on the field, running with McCormack his final remaining lap and helping him along the way.

Clayton, though thought to be something of a mastermind, did not anticipate this reaction, and so in his anger, he had created something of a brotherhood.

Chapter 10

A LEGEND IS BORN

2:1:1:10

“AND finally, after the scorpion finally won the game, the lizard went on his way to find a new home. The end,” Karuna finished reading to her students for reading time. The book she had been reading was “The Scorpion versus the Lizard,” and was very popular among children around the world.

Finishing her remarks and answering questions from the students, Karuna received a message from the school's intercom system, “Ms. Chopra, three-one-one here to see you.”

Lynne sat in a small room that was ordinarily used for parent-teacher conferences, and waited for one of three of her children's educators. Karuna, after opening the door approached Lynne, right arm extended, and Lynne sat up to shake it, both saying hello.

Karuna thanked Lynne for coming, as she was only one of four parents who would ultimately attend one of these meetings, regardless of the fact that they maintained a large classroom.

Both sitting back down, Karuna spoke of Dave and Sara and their progression in mathematics, science, English, history and art. She commented on Dave's reservation and on Sara's increased participation after procuring eyeglasses.

As the conversation came to an end, Lynnette asked Karuna if it seemed like her reading and writing efforts with her children were making a difference, and she is pleasantly surprised when Karuna tells her that the two of them are actually reading at a level higher than they should be. Karuna explains that her extra efforts are important, as communication and efficient ability to express is essential in life, and one of the most common ways we do these things is through reading and writing.

Validated, Lynne leaves the elementary, walking through its parking lot as a proud mother, finishing her extended break and driving back to Max's Diner to return to work.

A bell rings within the elementary as school buses line-up outside. The children are released by their teachers, and very soon afterwards Sara and Dave find their school bus. Occupying the same seat, they argue the entire way home, over who would get to watch television first and who would decide which cartoon to view.

“Do you think he will come today?,” Dave asked his sister. “She said since today is Friday and we're not going to dad's, he will come over,” Sara answered. A pause in the conversation allowed Sara to spot an elderly man walking with a cane in a robotically-nervous fashion on the sidewalk, “Hey, look at that old man and his stick,” she laughed as she said to Dave, pointing, and after Dave looked, he too bursted into childish laughing.

Exiting the bus, the two walked towards their apartment building, pressing first the buzzer to their home, and then the buzzer to Deana's, who shortly after allowed them to

enter and greeted them in the second-floor hallway. Once finished, they entered their residence.

Miles away was Lynne, who was entering the final hour of an eight-hour shift. Returning to a table she had previously served, she found a twenty-two dollar tip left behind by the patrons. After tucking it away into her pocket, she proceeded to carry the dishes and eating utensils back into the kitchen, and finally, wiped down the table for a set of new guests.

“I’m coming home now, and make sure David starts his homework right after he eats,” Lynne said to Sara, calling her from the diner’s telephone. “Can I go on the computer when I’m done with mine?,” Sara asked. Her mother replied positively, and soon after they said their goodbyes and hung up the phone.

As Lynne exited the diner, she too said her goodbyes to her associates and entered her vehicle. It was late in the afternoon, just before evening, and during her drive home, the sky grew bitly darker.

Turning on the radio, Lynne flipped quickly and randomly through stations until she finally landed on a sound that she liked. It wasn’t the kind of sound she usually listened to, but her taste in music was broadening and she found something she liked in every genre. It was so now, that she enjoyed all forms of music, so long as it had meaning.

Stopped at a red light, she found herself “parked” in front of a bridal gallery. A plentiful passel of white wedding gowns glazed her eyes, and this sight prompted her to think of who she claimed was her soulmate. “Not all women ride into the sunset,” she thought to herself. And though she and her lover were not bound by marriage, she felt that in each of her lives, the amount of sincerity they both possessed would attract and bring them together, and at the very least, they were bound by this pure sincerity. She felt that the red lipstick she painted onto her lips did not define her, but that she defined it, because from her mouth came only truth.

This seems to be an archetype, it seems to be what overly-romantic women think and do, and it was of utter importance, because unknown to her, she would never again marry.

Once the light turned green and as she drove away from the bridal gallery, a new song came on from the radio. It was “Perfect Storm,” by Leah Waggner, off of the album “Ladybird.” It was currently one of her favorite songs which is why she began singing along to it. “A quiet storm of credence, a madness in its wake,” she sang.

After some time, Lynne was finally home, and opening her front door, she walked into the kitchen to find Sara playing on the computer.

I can’t say I enjoy being out in the world. A part of me is driven to introversion. So as I sit here in this federal building waiting for my name to be called, watching all of these people walk to and from, all I really want is to go back home.

I am here today because Lynne is swamped with work all week, so I did her the favor of submitting some government documents for her that concerned Dave and Sara and their medical association and or health.

“Now serving RR88,” I heard from the intercom, and I got up to go to the woman who was waiting for me. As I approached her, my mind, as it does often, began to wander. I thought about the mass of people who were in this building, moving around spacetime on a revolving planet, and I thought about how each one of them was conscious and in charge of their own actions and decisions. Or were they?

Let us say, for the time being, that fate does not exist, and that every thing is calculated by the universe through cause and effect. This means, if I say something that offends you, then the universe will compute this information and the result will be you coming to dislike me.

If this is true, then the universe itself would have to work harder to compute and calculate every process in the world, right? It may even have to increase memory to produce our reality. Now this supposed way of working is in opposition to a universe where everything is predetermined. Now, when I say something that offends you, the universe does not have to compute whether you will come to dislike me or not, because there is only one option available, you coming to dislike me, because it's already been determined by fate.

Under predetermination, there is only one path to result A, which has already been decided, so the universe does not need to compute any information, it does not need select between 1 or 2 to get to A; whereas, under a universe based off of chance, where computation does occur, the universe will in fact have to consider between 1 or 2 to get to A. This consideration will require more effort, because now instead of only having to know one predetermined outcome, you have to decide between two of them. At the real universe scale, the universe has to consider, for each process, billions of different outcomes.

Back to the original example of you disliking me. I call you a bad person, in predetermination you will always get offended, in chance, you may or may not get offended.

With this in mind, does the predetermination universe require less memory? And is it a far less complex universe?

When I got to the woman I told her the nature of my visit and handed her several forms. “What is your relation to the applicant?,” she asked me.

To avoid any suspicion of fraud, I told the woman that Lynnette was my wife. To my surprise, she did not ask for any identification, but I suppose it was because I was delivering and not receiving.

Later, as I left the federal building, I got outside to find that the night had completely dropped onto the earth and that the city lights were fiercely radiant. I was starving, as I had not eaten all day, and to my right I spotted a sandwich shop. Just then, Lynne's mobile device, which I had borrowed had I had any questions for her, began to ring.

"Where are you?," Lynne asked the narrator as she sat on her couch watching television. "I'm coming home now," the narrator replied. "Do you guys want anything to eat?," the narrator asked. Lynne removed her ear from the phone and yelled out to Dave and Sara, asking if they were hungry, and they came running out of their room, responding positively.

"Who is that?," Sara asked, and when given the answer, both children asked their mother, seeing as how it was Friday, if the narrator could sleepover. "Did you hear that?," Lynne asked the narrator. "I did, tell them I'll be there in about an hour," the narrator finished.

This particular weekend, the children were staying with Lynne, who, prior to this month, signed papers that would allow Silvio to see his children once a month provided he continued to pay child support.

The three of them told the narrator what they wanted on their sandwiches, and soon the food was ordered.

Getting off of the bus and entering the apartment building, the narrator walked up a flight of stairs and passed the narrator's apartment door, finally coming to a stop in front of Lynne's. The narrator puts the narrator's hands inside the narrator's pockets, taking out a set of keys, and then selects one to open the door.

On the other side, still watching T.V., Lynne hears her door making noises. She looks towards the door, and then back at the television set.

I walked into Lynne's apartment and told her that the people at the federal building didn't give me a hassle, and that her papers were now with them. The time came when we all four sat down to eat our sandwiches, and Lynne told us about how the kids were reading at a high level.

By the time we finished eating it was nine o'clock. One by one, and at different times, we all eventually entered the living room. David, sometime before, had moved their video game console into the living room, so for a very long time we all played a game called TimeSplitters 2 as they owned four controllers.

It was designed as a first-person shooting game, but most of the time we played a game mode named "Virus," which was more like the game tag than any shooting experience. We would all choose to play as monkeys and we ran around a map that was a circus, trying to evade those who had been infected by the virus. Getting tagged by an infected person would cause you to become infected, and so now you would have to run

around the circus trying to tag those who were not yet tagged.

I have to say it was very fun, becoming a virus and chasing down Sara as she screamed for me to stay away from her, or hiding in a corner of a room in the circus hoping Dave wouldn't notice me when he passed by, he himself infected. One of my favorite moments was when Lynne and I were infected, and almost telepathically, we worked together to trap Sara and Dave in one of the circus rooms and eventually infected them both, and afterwards, high-fiving each other.

We started to get bored of it at around eleven, so Sara shut it off and the television returned to a random channel, and we all found ourselves talking about random things, mostly things we had encountered during the day. Sara mentioned a man walking with a cane, Lynne mentioned an unusually large \$22 tip, Dave mentioned a story about a scorpion and a lizard, and I eventually told them that according to the government, as far as they knew, Lynne and I were married.

As the conversation died at two a.m., we entered into more boring subject matter, which is probably why Dave and Sara fell asleep on the rug they were laying on. Neither Lynne nor I were tired in any fashion, so Lynne got up from off the couch, stepped between the sleeping bodies, and turned the channel a few times until she landed on a channel that showed programs of old sitcoms. She then walked back to me and sat back down on the couch, and for a while we both calmly laughed as we watched, as to not wake up the little ones.

As one sitcom ended, another began, and at the same time Lynne got up to get the both of us a snack. As she passed me I took her mobile device out of my pocket and handed it to her, and she took it. About a minute later, she returned with a bowl of chips, placing it right between the both of us, and with both of her legs on the couch, brushing up against my side to get as comfortable as she could. Physical human contact at the midnight hours, when everything is calm, quiet, serene, that was what we gave each other as I placed my arm around her and rubbed her side.

“You remember a while back when you were telling me about how painting has no boundaries, and then I mentioned to you an old show where two tenants reversed their peepholes? About how I had gotten the idea to reverse my own from that show?” I asked her. “Yeah,” she said softly as she turned her head to look at me, then placing her elbow on the top of the couch. “This is that exact episode,” I said laughing lightly.

From the corner of my eye, my face somewhat tilted toward hers as I was speaking to her, I noticed that she had not yet looked away back towards the television and kept her sight fixed on me. When I completely turned my face to look at her, to see what was the matter, I found her staring at me. She gave me one of those strong intimidating looks, like a gaze, as if her mind was visiting several different galaxies all at once and trying to

compute all the information she was receiving. I seriously don't think she was even conscious of the fact that she was staring directly at me.

Once she came back to reality, she asked me, "You remember that?" "Yeah, I remember it made you laugh," I respond. "No, I mean the painting thing," she quickly replied, then after a brief pause, she continued, "I have to say that you definitely pay attention to me more than anyone else I've ever known..."

I didn't reply, and shortly after, she smiled as she turned her head to watch the episode, placing her head gently onto my shoulders and taking a few chips from the bowl.

At around eight-thirty a.m. I woke up to find that Dave and Sara were still sleeping on the floor and that Lynne had fallen asleep on my side, her back slightly pressing against my arm that had been around her all night. I believe, to her, it was irrelevant whether I loved her or not, because against the bloom, against a high tide, her heart had grown to a degree such that it could harvest enough love for two people. She'll never know just how important she is to me.

Bradley Chipper runs over to the sidelines to speak to his coach, Henry Clayton. "I want you to run Scorpion Dodger-4 Left Run Option Box," Clayton told him. Chipper nodded his head and ran back onto the field, fixing his helmet for a tighter fit as he began to slow down to a jog and approached the rest of his offensive team.

On a television screen, Al Summerall, who was at the time a sports announcer, could be heard commentating the game, "Chipper is now running back onto the field to continue this impressive drive."

The team formed into a huddle, and as Chipper began to speak, he placed his hand on the back of Okadigbo, "Scorpion Dodger-4 Left Run Option Box," he yelled over the sound of the roaring fans. Before the huddle was broken, Chipper had one final statement to make to his team. "We've come this far boys, we just have to go a little further," and once finished they broke and walked to the line of scrimmage.

It was situational football, as the game had ventured into overtime and painted sudden death. Chipper and company were on the opponent's eleven-yard line, on a first down, and were within arm's length of their first seasonal win. "All they need is a touchdown," Al Summerall reminded viewers.

Reggie could be seen on the sideline with his hands at the top of his head, waiting in anticipation for a moment that might turn their season around. Not too far from him was Kevin Faulkner, somewhat irritated by how the game had gone so far, believing that the referees were doing everything they could to keep them winless. Ivan Lee, who was the team's center, was sitting on the sideline as well, watching in anticipation, after being injured in the first quarter of the exhibition and told his left leg had been broken.

Standing over a second-string center, Chipper looked at the defense's formation and

recounted on some of the notes Reggie had written down for him.

“Left, left, Lizard Dodger-4, Left Run Option Box!” Chipper again screamed over the noise, changing the play and calling an audible because of what he had seen defensively, and thereafter he snapped the ball and began the play.

Dropping back a few steps, Chipper saw that his primary receiver was not open for a pass, and upon sensing a defensive lineman intruding into his area from the right, he planted his feet and dashed a bit to the left. Still strafing, he made the decision to break into a run.

Once the spy saw this, he too broke into a sprint and began running towards Chipper, who by now was at the line of scrimmage and had become a runner. Seeing that his quarterback was now vulnerable, Bert McCormack made a dive-block at the legs of the defensive spy who was running towards Chipper, tripping him up, and giving Chipper an opportunity to continue his run. As he lay on the ground, Bert watched on as Chipper continued his run deeper into enemy territory.

At this time, a cornerback and a linebacker began to close in on Chipper, who showed no signs of slowing down or sliding. He was now at the six-yard line, literally six yards away from victory for a desperate team in a desperate city.

Clayton, who was slowly walking up the sideline and watching too, in complete suspense, began to clench his fists as Chipper ran down the field. “He’s at the six, the five, the four!” Summerall yelled, and as the cornerback and linebacker closed in, they were intent on stopping Chipper at the goal-line.

With what seemed to be a predetermined eternity, time slowed down for the entire arena, but Chipper had already known from the start what he wanted to do. Just prior, once the cornerback and the linebacker finally met with Chipper, resulting in a simultaneous block-tackle, Chipper leaped into the air head first, which forced a high and low tackle from the two defensive players, and with designed determination, at last he spun his way into the endzone in helicopter-fashion; the attending referee observed the scene as he ran up to the location of the tackle, then at once, he threw his arms into the air signaling the touchdown was successful, and therefore ending the game.

“Chipper wins his team the football game! What a finish! What a finish!” Summerall exclaimed through the television as players erupted onto the field. The entire arena was filled with screaming fans who reiterated the explosion of a senseless volcano.

“That was the first overtime game in the history of the league,” Alec Berg, who was the attending referee who declared the touchdown, told the interviewer, “and it was a historic and unprecedented night for football fans everywhere. I remember another ref in my squad running up to me as time was winding down for the end of the game, and he asked me, ‘What happens if no one scores again?’ I didn’t answer as I was sure someone

would eventually add a few more points to their score, but it never happened. Once the clock reached all zeroes, everyone was kind of confused, the players, us refs, the staffs, no one really knew what happened if the teams were tied at the end of the game, so when Clayton walked up to me and asked me, 'What happens now?,' I said to him, 'I think we play some more.' And so we played some more.”

“Man, I remember that game like it was yesterday,” remarked Kevin Faulkner. “We went into OT and the ****ing coin didn't flip! We gave 'em our choice and he went to flip the coin and the damn thing did not flip, it went into the air and stayed evened-out, so that's where the controversy started. That's why I always said ball possession should be chosen by a skills game, like a match in Street Fighter or Mortal Kombat or something, and not the luck of a flip,” Kevin finished.

“That's why I call him 'Woodchipper,' Okadigbo told the interviewer, “because if you put him through a woodchipper he would come out fine on the other side. He proved that with that game winning dive, spinning like a helicopter in the air, and when he landed, he was fine.”

“There were rumors going around that at the beginning of the second half you started losing your composure and began trash talking at the other team, is this true?,” the interviewer asked Chipper.

“It is,” Chipper laughs. “You know, when you're trying your hardest to score some points but you keep getting sacked, either because you're holding on to the ball for too long or one of your linemen has a bad play, it starts to take its toll on you. It gets even worse when your opponents are standing over your body taunting you after they throw you to the floor. So one play, I decided I had enough and I shot up and got in the face of one of them and eventually pushed them, drawing a penalty against my team, but it was worth it because that's what got me going.”

“Something in him snapped,” McCormack insisted. “He was looking at the ground, like on one knee, just contemplating something. After getting sacked and the guys celebrating over him, he started playing like a man possessed. I'm telling you, that was the game #13 came out, that was his coming out party. He kept getting sacked and driven into the ground and players celebrated over him, taunting him, and he got up and shoved one of them and got a penalty, and then after that he got his mojo going. He was talking **** every play, man, pointing his fingers at the defense, “I'ma throw it your way, and he would actually throw it their way and still complete the pass. He talked **** to the defensive line every play, sometimes even the safeties.”

Bert looks around, “I'm sorry, is it okay if I curse? You can just edit it out right?” “That's fine,” the interviewer says.

“What really got him going, before all the trash talking, was the most vital key

component to winning that game,” Calvin Marshall said, “Once he finally got up after having the wind knocked out of him, we went into a huddle and he told us the play. We walk up to the line, right, and he begins the hard count. After he snaps the ball and drops back, he looks around, but as usual no one is able to get open. But, instead of throwing the ball away or getting sacked, this time he did something different. He found an empty patch of grass and he ran towards it and gained three yards. He did the same thing again the next play, and instead of sliding down, he ran head-on into a defender. He did it again for the third straight time and got enough for a first. After that, receivers were getting open, and that was the first time in the season every one realized he had wheels, and so the defenses started to observed that.”

“I think him finding out what kind of player he was was the most important thing that happened to him football-wise, and maybe for the team,” said Chipper's daughter, “He brought in a new element to the game, and defenses didn't know if he would run or throw the ball.”

“Brad is the reason I watch football today. I remember I was flipping through channels one day and I just happen to land on the game as he was getting ready to hike the ball, making all these hand motions and even clapping for the ball to be snapped, and then he scrambles and then flies in for that game winning touchdown. I remember seeing him run down the field like a little kid, hopping up and down. Suffice to say, I tuned in the next Sunday to see him play,” recounted an old fan.

With a score of 22 to 16, Chipper had won his first game in the league as a starter and as a rookie. There was no doubt that this game would be a momentum-shifter for the entire team and was a microcosm of things to come.

“I was standing next to Coach during Chipper's third run, and Coach looked on and simply nodded his head,” Reggie Rice commented. “I think he wanted us all to learn what type of players we were, and I think he nodded his head because he felt like Chipper was learning who he was. It was cool, man, because after he showed them he was a double threat, they started respecting him, and that's when he started pointing fingers at them, letting them know that neither him nor the team was going to go down easy. That last play, that won us the game, it was supposed to be a passing play, but I think Chipper had it in his mind that he was going to run from the very start. And then after the ref signaled the touchdown and called the game, after all my excitement, I went to find Chipper and when I saw him he was on the other team's sideline going off. It was the only time I ever saw him lose himself. Ever lose composure. I think what it was was that one of their players had said something to him after a sack, and Chipper took it personally. That was one thing Clayton realized that he was missing from his new approach to the game, from all his theories on football, he realized he hadn't calculated

heart into it all. Something that can't be calculated. Going into the locker room after all the excitement, I saw a rare smile on Coach's face, and I remember him saying there was one thing we could check off the list; a winless season. To win the game, to win it the way we did with Chipper's final leap, that was it. None of us knew it at the time, but that day, inbetween all his self-doubt and his lack of talent, in between all the boos and the disappointing games, inbetween the chaos that he didn't know how to deal with, a legend was born."

Volume 2 - Composition 1
(2:1 / 4 / IV)

Part 2

Chapter 11

TWIN SOULS

2:1:2:11

AT the age of seventeen, a senior in high school, Lynnette found herself often confused in her Algebra 2 class. Primarily the study of mathematical symbols, algebra was one to frustrate a mind that was more privy to a canvas.

Ultimately failing this class filled with algebraic expressions, it would become mandatory for Lynnette to visit her guidance counselor twice a week, on Tuesday and on Thursday, as she was performing at a whole on a level sub-par to her peers.

The next Thursday, she walked into the school's office and made her way to her counselor's room, wearing a yellow and black dress that once belonged to Emily.

"You will have to take Algebra 2 again this semester," her counselor told her, "because you need at least three years of mathematics to graduate." Seeing Lynne's low mood level, her counselor asked her about her life outside of school, and Lynnette's answer gave the implication that she suffered from low self-esteem and emotional issues, which was common to students who lacked the energy to do well in the classroom. Though her counselor would never learn that Lynnette suffered from a strange type of hyperactivity disorder.

The next visit, which came the following Tuesday, upon hearing that Lynnette was not eating lunch due to the lack of funds, her counselor gave her forms to take home that could be filled out by a guardian, and if she qualified, would allow her to receive lunch for free. Her family's financial state would eventually grant her this commodity.

"You start eating regularly and you will be able to focus and have the energy to perform better on your tests," her counselor advised.

Leaving her counselor's office, she traveled to her next class, Creative Arts, where she sat down next to a male acquaintance. In a somewhat flamboyant fashion, he remarked on her shoes, saying that they were ugly. Of course this offended Lynnette, but she said nothing in return, and after school was finished, she found herself sitting on the shore of Cellardoor Lake as she grasped pieces of sand between her toes. Slowly, she was learning how to express herself. Learning how to express her feelings and how she felt about the world and the people in it.

At exactly the same time, across the state, the narrator, who at the time was eighteen and as well a senior, sat in Senior English, looking out of a nearby window. This inattention to the studies would ultimately result in the failing of the class, and soon the narrator would be required to attend a social group which was created to motivate students to do better in their classes.

It was a small group, of about six students, and was led by a sociology teacher. There

they discussed various subjects that the students were most interested in.

Came the next semester, the narrator again sat in Senior English, taking the class again, as it was required to graduate.

“I can't read the nutrition label on this package,” I said to Sara. I jokingly asked her for her glasses and after she gave them to me I lifted up the product once more to read it, but of course vision only decreased. We traveled over to the next aisle of the huge supermarket, which was named Publiks, and found Lynne and Dave adding more items to the grocery cart. Lynne let out a small laugh when she saw me wearing her daughter's glasses, and soon after Sara tugged at my arm to give her back her spectacles. I eventually gave her back her glasses and and we met with Lynne and Dave.

My vision returning to normal, I again saw “Moonbeam,” the black and yellow dress with the belt in the middle that she had recently purchased. A part of me wanted to chop her up into little pieces and eat her uncooked.

As the four of us continued down the aisle, I lingered a bit, eyeing some of the products on the shelves, and then eventually eyeing the pair of mother and daughter before me.

Lynne and Sara obviously share the same DNA, and exclusive to the both of them is their mitochondrial DNA, which can only be inherited by the child from their mother. If you imagined a single helix which had a type of ball which could travel up and down the helix following the coil, you would notice that after a single full loop, the ball would be in the same position as it were before, but on a different section of the helix.

Perhaps a better way to imagine this is to picture Lynne as plot X for a particular location on the helix, and then you do a complete loop to the next ring, where this particular location is plotted as Y for Sara. Lynne and Sara are somewhat the same person, but are at different stages in their life, likewise to the ball in the helix being in somewhat the same location, but on a different ring.

Now we take that coil, and instead of looking at it from a top view, we line it up with our sight as if we were looking through it like a telescope. The helix would now look like a flat circle, and the ball's position, whether it were on X or on Y, would appear to occupy the same area, even though it isn't. You change the point of view, or point of perception, and suddenly awareness of how it works is lost.

This woman and this girl are sharing the same universe and sharing the same mDNA, but they can never share the same plot, because the helix is somewhat a symbol for time and there can only be one ball on the helix at a time, and it can only go in one direction. Though we go round and round for all eternity, the helix is not a flat circle, as it extends outwards and creates time for mothers and daughters to exist on different rings.

At the end of the aisle they all stopped and I caught up with them. We were now

standing in front of a bunch of supplies one might buy for school. She grabbed two composition notebooks from off the shelf then looked at me, asking if two was enough. What is she talking about? How does she know I need composition notebooks?

I suppose after she saw my puzzled reaction, she replied, “A week ago you said you needed some.” Perhaps I forgot of this, but soon after I told her that two would be fine.

She then reached over Sara, grabbing a sort of purple diary for herself, and her fingernails which had a sort of ice blue midnight nail polish created an interesting contrast, nail polish she painted on for her presentation at the library, which she opted to not yet remove.

Once again, she reached over one final time, adding several notebooks and folders for Sara and Dave which they would use for school.

We left the end, and Lynne pushed the cart making a left U-turn into the next aisle which contained frozen goods such as ice cream and pizza. Dave and Sara accelerated, leaving behind Lynne and I, and went to browse the many selections. Just at the beginning of the aisle, Lynne and I noticed a circular display in the middle of the aisle that held old off-brand films with clearance prices. As Dave and Sara wondered off, Lynne and I browsed the old movies.

After all the rummaging, we found *Casablanca* and *Vertigo*, films which were released in the years of 1942 and 1958, respectively. Being only ninety-nine cents a piece, we added them to the cart. As time went by, Sara and Dave continued to look through the frozen goods until they eventually rejoined us, putting a box of frozen pizza into the cart.

Just then I noticed Lynne staring into the cart, looking at that box of pizza, and after her gazing she told us that she used to eat this specific brand of pizza during her last year of high school. “I can't believe they still make it,” she paused, “My counselor and I would go through an entire box on my visits to him.” “You ate lunch in your counselor's office?,” I asked. “Yup, long story. Man, that brings back memories.” And with that last remark, I could see her thinking deeply back on her past.

Looking at Dave and Sara, she commented to them that it was important to eat before and during school, as to keep their energy levels on par to learn.

Some odd number of aisles down, we found ourselves in the cereal section. Sara attempted to put a box of cereal in the cart, but Lynne removed it and put it back on the shelf, claiming the cereal here was much too expensive and that she could get something similar at Chase Mart. I almost forgot about that place, considering Lynne cooks and prepares most of the food I eat. I'm not even sure she would let me eat from anywhere else, to be honest.

That was to be the final aisle and eventually we stood in line to check out. Dave

browsed through the candy but was told he could have none. And looking over the cart, Lynne estimated its cost, "Probably one-twenty," she told me. I gave her a hundred and twenty dollars and she soon after asked me what I wanted for dinner.

When our turn finally came, the cashier rang up all of our items, and seeing as there was no bagger present, I walked past Lynne and began to bag our groceries.

We then walked through the parking lot to the car, and after shifting her purse higher onto her shoulder, she began to hand the three of us items to place in the trunk.

Driving to our apartment building, we first stopped at my parents' home, as Lynne needed to collect our clothes from the dryer and then pull the remaining weeds from the garden she was rebuilding.

When we got home, I went to the trunk and hung as many bags as I could on my arms. "I'm not making more than one trip," I told them. Some bags went to my apartment, but most obviously went to Lynne's. Once we were done, I left them and went to my apartment and told them I would be back come dinnertime.

I walked into my apartment and immediately found a pen laying on a desk in the composition room, and I walked back into my living room, turning on the television and sitting down with one of my new composition notebooks.

As I opened it to the first page, I saw that on the television was a documentary about an American football team and its city. I listened to it, but I did not watch it as I had something to write down.

Back at the grocery store, while walking through the parking lot, I noticed a recycling bin with a circle painted on its side; one of the sections of the cycle was colored in a type of green. After we had loaded the trunk of the car, I went over to it and opened it, seeing that nothing was inside, and I threw in some recyclable items.

Some time ago I had a dream where I was walking with God through a valley in the mountains, and he explained to me that it is possible for two particles to occupy the same location at the same time. He reassures me, though I hadn't the mind to observe or perceive this, that it is possible.

Schrodinger's cat is a thought experiment where there is a single cat inside a box, and inside the box along with the cat is a toxicity that may or may not kill the cat. Because the box is covered, we as the experimenter cannot see the condition of the cat, and in a manner of speaking, we cannot know if the cat is alive or dead, so it is in effect both alive and dead at the same time until we uncover the box to see what state the cat is in, in which instance the cat will be either alive or dead and not both, as it once was. This theory is mainly used to depict that anything that we are not currently observing is in an infinite amount of states until we observe it.

God then begins to tell me of a circle that has a single point stressed, a point which is

able to represent both birth and death, depending on your perception of the model.

Atoms compose what we can see and touch, but can they also compose things of the abstract nature, like birth, life and death? Fate? Love? Can the abstract also occupy the same location, like matter can?

If so, considering all these questions to be true, then that would mean birth and death can carry mass, which according to God, can occupy the same area, which is the stressed point on the circle. So before we opened that box, or that recycling bin, birth and death were the same, or at least occupied the same location, and once uncovered we witnessed and perceived one or the other. It makes you wonder what exactly is processing during birth or death, what is happening to the mind as it experiences either.

I finished writing down the idea and at the same time the football program was ending. Eventually Sara came to get me for dinner, and once I was with them, I noticed that Dave had a bag of candy that neither Lynne nor I had paid for.

Inside Clinton Community High School, the bell for the beginning of the ninth and final period rang as students sat down to learn. Just prior to this, Mr. Paxton, whose class we will be observing, had taken fifteen minutes to clean up the classroom and remove the gum from underneath the desks.

Paxton's ninth period class was an elective course, which was occupied by both juniors and seniors, and called "Critical Thinking" as it dealt with just that, thinking critically.

Though Paxton had assigned each student a particular desk, the students paid no attention to this as they sat where they liked and mingled loudly with each other well after the ringing of the bell that implied class was now in session.

When a student, Chris Bell, saw that Paxton's attempts to gain the attention of the class by clearing his throat failed, he stood up and yelled, succeeding where Paxton failed, and the classroom was now silent, save for a softly chuckling Rebecca, who sat directly next to him and found his attention-grabbing words very funny.

"Thank you," Paxton said to Bell as he sat down. Paxton continued, "Hello, my name is Mr. Paxton. This is 'Critical Thinking,' where we will be analyzing various elements and abstract ideas using rationality and logic." "Rasha-what?," a student in the back row asked. "Rationality, meaning to use reason," Paxton answered. "Why didn't you just say that?," another student asks.

After the introductions and getting to know each member of the classroom, Paxton finally started the class and began his lecture.

"As the base text for our studies, we will be using the first composition of M.B. Julien's *Anthology Complex*, so please open your book up to page 201," Paxton asked his class. Each student was given a copy of the first composition and opened their book to

the requested page.

“How come we ain't starting from the beginning,” a student in the front row asked. Paxton, smiling at the student, answered her question, “I knew someone would ask that. That's because the great thing about this book is that it can be used simply as a conversation starter, you don't have to read the entire book per se, I'm sure you will all be glad about that,” Paxton laughed, but his class did not find the same kind of humor in his remark.

Finishing his laughing and noticing no one else in the room was also laughing, he saw that one student did not open her book. After Paxton asked her why her book wasn't open, she stood up and flipped her desk upside down, storming out of the classroom and yelling curse words at him.

Once she'd left, Paxton was a bit shocked. “She crazy,” a student in the middle of the classroom noted. Soon after, a noise began to brew within the classroom as students found a break in the lecture and tried to escape from it, but Paxton quieted them down, much more successfully than his previous attempt, and returned to the course.

As everyone was turned to page 201, Paxton began to read, “Depending on who you ask, dreams may be many things, which is why it is almost pointless to ultimately define them. This notion that a certain thing may mean one thing to you while it means something completely different to me does not only apply to dreams but to many other things. You know this because you've been in at least one debate or argument in your life.”

Paxton continued, looking at his class, “Does anybody want to try to explain what that passage means?,” Paxton scanned the area. After a brief moment of silence, a student, Malcolm Carson, raised his hand, and Paxton allowed him to answer.

“He saying, like, the answer I'ma give you right now, someone else might disagree with, 'cause sometimes there's more than one answer,” Carson finishes.

“That's exactly right,” Paxton replied, “It is important to note that like all art, *Anthology Complex* is open to interpretation and can be ambiguous in nature. Don't be afraid to assert your own opinions into the discussions we will have, or to tell the class and I what you think a certain thing might mean, because that's the point of art and more importantly, this class.”

“Mrs. Shorts outside y'all!,” a student in the back of the room yelled. Suddenly, each student rose from his or her desk and went to the back of the room, sometimes crashing into each other, to look out of the window at Mrs. Shorts, who, upon viewing her, one would notice she had an unusually large behind for such a slender body type. “You know her ass so big because she get fucked in it, right?,” one student remarked.

Walking to the window later than the rest, Mr. Paxton looked out of the window as to see what the students were looking at, and at once, he realized that he was going to be

dealing with a class in which knowledge and critical thinking was not a priority.

Coming home from the parking garage, after opening the door to my apartment, I came across a piece of paper on my floor. Wondering what it could be, I picked it up and immediately realized it was a page torn from a diary.

At the top of the page was a small message in italics, accompanied by the cartoonish drawing of a thorny black and yellow intertwining-layered rose, and below it was a sort of title that read “Sunset Soulmates,” and even below that, perhaps a poem, so I began to read it as I walked into my kitchen and sat down.

¶ *Lately, something you said got me thinking about my past. You're the only person I feel comfortable bothering about it, so I hope you feel honored. :]*

¶ *My mother never had much, but she did the best she could to raise us right. She can be strict, but she is the reason why I give and maybe even the reason why I love so hard, which brings me to what I wanted to say in the first place. Being with you, I feel a sort of renewed happiness. I feel like an uncharted rose. But even though I feel this way, I also understand that sometimes love isn't forever, and that this may not work out between us. Even though I am not ready to let you go, and even though I don't think I could ever again find someone like you, I want you to know that if ever you aren't happy with me, you don't have to stay. I will manage somehow.*

¶ *I have written you this poem (and expect more!) to profess my undying love for you and to express how I feel about my past. I hope it can be ours, like our song, or like a photograph to remember exactly what we were like when we were young.*

¶ SUNSET SOULMATES

¶ I think back on those days when the Sun used to set

¶ An outstretched arm grasping for shine as if a net

¶ Sitting, lying, standing, alone, on my bed, a beach, under a tree, if only to forget

¶ “Hello,” “hey,” “hi,” “pleased to meet you,” I'd say, “my name is Lynnette.”

¶ And a year would go by, I lost one love then gained another

¶ And another year went by, and how quickly this one became the other

¶ Heartbreak after heartbreak, I decided to take a heartbrake

¶ And in that time a part of me found itself, if only for my heart's sake

¶ I fell in love with the universe, nature, ideas

¶ I fell in love with my mind, and this would prepare me for you

¶ My emotions, like wildflower, grew uncontrollably

¶ But I knew I had to survive, night to night, because one day fate would save you for me

¶ So the years came and went, and everyday I thought of you, thought of what was meant to be
¶ I saw us playing, singing, dancing, as soulmates, in a world that was free
¶ Everyday I thought of you, being here, resting peacefully in my arms
¶ Allowing me to take care of you, lover, I've dreamt of that love for so long

¶ And in some final year, where birds chirp as two settle fears,
¶ Your eyes came to meet mine and we smiled, and I found you after so many years
¶ To be in your presence after being alone for so long,
¶ Is a feeling so immaculate, a feeling so much better than even my dream

¶ So, so many tears, so many tears that I have cried,
¶ So much depression, disappointment, disillusionment, and to my face, how often they lied
¶ But holding you, and you holding me, I have found a sacred place,
¶ I want to stay here, in this, for eternity, forever lost in your embrace

¶ And so now today, as I catch the Sun's rays on my face and in my hand
¶ I am writing you this poem, which I hope you'll understand
¶ I hope that you will see that I did not suddenly appear in your life
¶ But that I traveled a very long and difficult road, filled and packed with strife

¶ I need you to understand that I fought for you, every morning I fought for you, and that I'm fighting for you even today
¶ And I need you to know that I survived for you, so we could have this evening, and so we could have tonight
¶ Now that I have poured out my heart to you, I am thinking again of those days when the Sun used to set
¶ Those days are long behind me, as I am no longer lonely, my heart finally filled with the one person I get

“The ancient Egyptians used writing to communicate information about a person shown on a sculpture or relief. They called their writing ‘divine word’ because they believed that Thoth, god of wisdom, had taught them how to write. Our word hieroglyphs derives from a phrase meaning ‘sacred carvings’ used by the ancient Greek visitors to Egypt to describe the symbols that they saw on tomb and temple walls.” Wiker's Encyclopedia, page 215.

I suppose to write is to express, and to explore is to be human. After I finish reading the letter and poem, I feel a warm presence around me. I feel warm arms wrap around my neck, and part of them resting on my shoulders. I feel a warm face press up against the side of my neck. I had been so puzzled after finding the page on my floor that I forgot to close the door behind me, which allowed Lynne inside to sneak up behind me.

Two winters ago, I envisioned an inevitable split from her and her children, but today, with her warmth around me, I can honestly say, and admit to myself, that I can't see us ever being apart without the intervention of death.

I think she does believe, however, possibly due to insecurities and maybe events from her past, that I might not be completely happy with her and that rays of thoughts that lead to doubt may infest my mind and cause me to leave her for another woman that might make me happier. The funny thing is, she is almost clueless as to how much I hate people in general, and the fact that there are days I miss her and long to see her is nothing short of a miracle. She has no idea that even if I was at the time oblivious to the notion, a part of me waited for her as well. That I found her as much as she found me.

At some point she gave me a kiss on the cheek, but she didn't let go. I knew why, she had no need to explain it to me.

She held on because everything behind her was a collective mural of failures, and for the psychological fear of repeating the past. But she did not know that we both chased the same Sun, together, as for every failure she had, I had, too. Unfortunately, for some people, life is one failure after another, never attaining that success.

For people like us, that's how life operates. You try your best to keep up with the rest of the world, with your contemporaries, but some of us have to run a little faster because we had a late start. A late start at life. And then one day you find that ten years have somehow got behind you, and that no one told you when to run, that you missed the starting gun. Then like Lynnette, or like me, you run and you run to catch up with that Sun, but it's sinking, racing around, to come up behind you again.

Chapter 12

A PORTAL TO POSSIBILITIES

2:1:2:12

AS the stadium was showered with rain, the fans at Copper Field withdrew a thunderous roar for their home team as they came out, who was returning from the road with their first win under their belt.

“Week five,” Chipper's daughter, Lauren, sighed, “what a drag that was. It was a completely defensive game, ending six to three, a total of three field goals by both teams. It was real smashmouth football, if I'm using that term correctly. A lot of contact and few passing plays from either teams.”

The rainy weather that poured down onto the field made way for a total of five combined fumbles from both teams, as well as a slew of other missed opportunities for points and conversions.

“That game was brutal,” commented cornerback Boe Tamana, who played for the home team, “and all of us, by the end, even though we won, we always suspected they were cheating somehow. Of course, at the end of the season, they were fined for illegal equipment.”

In the third quarter of the contest, Clayton could be found speaking to an official of the match down the sideline, irately, and claiming that the opposing team was in violation of the league rules. At the end of the season, this opposing team would eventually be penalized and fined as it was discovered that the offensive linemen were in use of illegal speakers in their helmets.

“There was a rare 1st and 4, and I remember that play because it was one of the most ridiculous catches I had ever seen in my life,” remarked Stan Davino, who played the tight end position for the home team, “Chipper had thrown the ball Cal's way, he started bobbling it and then was hit by a defender. After being hit he slipped onto the field, and the ball was still in the air mind you, and after he slipped and fell the ball fell somewhere near him and he extended his arm and caught it. All that rain pouring down and somehow he still had the sight to see it.”

After a 1-3 start, the home team would go on to win a defensive slugfest battle and improve to 2-3.

“Coach knew that the opposing team watched film on us, so he made sure Chipper didn't start running until the second half,” said Joseph Lee, who was the backup to Okadigbo. “When he did start running, that opened up the passing game, but we had a difficult time scoring once we were near the redzone, which said a lot about our team. Much of the criticism implied that we wouldn't win another game, and that our win the previous week was going to be our only win of the year. That didn't turn out to be true,

and every win we got, we earned, and that's the thing, some people are given their wins and other people have to earn their wins with what they got. The people with easy wins, they don't know how difficult it is for some people to get that same win, and so they will never know what it means to really be a champion. A real champion.”

Inside one of the halls at the Copper Field facility, a quote could be found and read which was inscribed on the hall's floor.

One of my favorite things about sport is the fact that every season you get to start over. It doesn't matter what you did or who you were or how well you did in the preceding season, every team is equal at the beginning of the season and you get a fresh start. You can't really say that about life. You can start over in life, but you can't really start over; and more importantly, not everyone is equal when they do start over. Some people are born privileged and others are born poor, but in sport, everyone has that same equal shot at glory at the beginning of the season. - Henry Clayton

Two Sundays ago, I had a dream. Lynne and I were walking through the woods hoping we could find a connecting bridge to another island. As we walked, she read to me aloud from an old book we had found somewhere underground.

“And at once, he rose to his feet, 'Old lady!,' he shouted, 'What is it that you want with us? Why have you confined us to these islands?' And the old lady replied, 'For atonement!,' and as he blinks the old lady vanishes.”

“That's it?” “No, there is something here in italics.” “Pray tell, what does it say?” And again she began to read.

“The islands were magical, fantastical, and something of a fairytale land. Though it came flowering with gemstones, there was something dark among them; shadows that moved swiftly and silently across the surreptitious walls, secretly dragging us into their world.”

As she said the word “world,” we began to hear the whispers of an old lady, saying, “These islands are remnants of a distant world... Here, are you now, but also in a forgotten past,” she finished.

The farthest the human eye can see is 2.6 million light years away, and when you look up at the night sky to see a distant star, you are actually seeing that star as it was long ago. There is a chance that in reality, that star has already imploded and died, and yet to you, it is still alive.

This illusion is a byproduct of space and distance, and the simple fact that light has to travel but can only go a certain speed. If vision can be that tricky, should we begin to question the things that are nearer to us? The things even within our grasp? If our senses and objective reality can behave this way, is it possible that our consciousness itself can lag?

Look around yourself, everything you see has mass. Some things have more mass than others. My question is, is it possible for the human brain to sense mass in a way we aren't conscious of? For example, our brain tends to perceive the objects around us in collective particles as opposed to individual particles, so when you observe a bowling ball, you are seeing a mass of many particles together and not little tiny individual particles separated, this is how our brain sees things.

But, what if for a minute we transformed into beings capable of seeing the universe for every single individual particle it is made up of, instead of seeing it in its collected form as we do now? How would space and time behave?

I'm running off the rails here, so let me get to the damn punchline. If our brain is trained to see the world in a collective-particle format, instead of an individual-particle format, then this addition of mass may slow down and lag or drag our perception on the universe, whereas if we saw the world in the individual-particle format, where there is less mass for objects, things would move infinitely faster through the dimension of space when the force of gravity is applied, which would also affect the dimension of time. Like that star, we are in the present, but also in the future, and subjectively in the past, we just can't perceive that because our brain uses the collective way of observing the universe.

Look around you one more time, and imagine everything where you are now being 2.6 million light years into the future. Now come back to reality and observe your current existence. These two places, that distant future and this current existence, they might both exist occupying the same space at the same time, but only one of them is perceived by the human brain, and that perception is dependent on the way the brain observes its universe; in the collective format, or the individual format. Or this might all just be a bunch of nonsense.

As the old lady's whispers died off, Lynne and I saw two deer running through the forest. This was the first time we had witnessed other life on the islands.

Immediately after they disappeared, we saw smoke coming from the direction they had ran from, and soon after fire followed. The entire forest was blazed as the fire streaked onwards towards destruction. After some time, we saw that in the distance a cloud was coming our way.

It inched closer to the fire and later we could hear rolling thunder from it; and just above the fire, a strike of ice blue midnight electric lightning struck and detonated a nearby tree. After the rain from the cloud completely washed away the fire, a mysterious portal appeared. Intrigued, Lynne walked towards it before me, and as she inched closer to the portal, as if to go into it, I saw her attire change into the form of a pink and peach sleeved-dress.

After waking I went into the room that houses the notebooks and wrote down the

dream, and eventually, after writing on that notebook's final page, I added it to my second shelf. Leaving my apartment, I saw the young girl from the apartment above me walking down the flight of stairs.

She held the door open for me as we both exited the building, and immediately I heard a friend call for her, "Becca!," and she vanished. Where the hell is Lynne. Probably riding that stupid ass fucking bike.

Tossing a bag into her bicycle's front basket, Lynne footed one pedal and lifted her other leg over the bike to foot the other pedal, and soon began riding down Fulcrum avenue.

She had just purchased an assortment of seeds that she intended to grow around the apartment building, creating a garden she would eventually name after her one true love.

Now that the reconstruction of the adjacent apartment building had been completed and sunlight was able to reach her apartment garden, she planned to add friends for her peace lilies, her crown jewel being the addition of zinnias, which, for three years now, would not have been an option, as these were sunpowered plants.

Tao and May-ling, who were currently stopped at a red light, happened to see Lynne riding by, and recognizing her, Tao honked, then waved. Lynne smiled and waved back, then continued riding on.

"She look stupid riding this bike, especially in that dress," May-ling suggested. "And foot, it is ugly and gross," she finished. Tao, scratching his brow and accelerating, asked, "Why are you so judgmental?" "What?," May replied, "It is not judgement if it is true." "But how can you say that about another woman? I thought you all had a secret society where you get together and tell eachother how pretty you all are and make plans to destroy manhood." May begins to laugh, "She wear dress only to make up for foot." "Oh, is that why you don't ever wear dresses, because your body is perfect," Tao replies. May slaps him on the shoulder and he laughs.

"She look like girl who never had hard day in her life," May snobbishly suggested. "You know, she actually does, except of course for the day she had part of her body removed," Tao say sarcastically. "I mean, besides that," May finishes the conversation.

Stopped in front of a bench, Lynne removed her headphones and then reinserted them into her ears for better hearing, and the lyrics came rolling through vibrantly, "But you stopped to speak with me, rainfall romancing me, dragging me into your world..." This song was titled "Portal," by Jane Hudson, and was off the 1962 album "Harvest Moon."

In fact, Lynne was wearing Pink Portal, the long-sleeved thigh-cut dress May-ling seemed to dislike, or at least, dislike on her, and as she rode the wind breezed through her pink and peach flavored autumn.

Singing along in her mind, she wondered where she would be ten years from now.

What her life would be like, what her world would be like, what she herself would be like. She wondered how much would change, how much would stay the same.

Perhaps it was this moment, riding past a diner, that would briefly inspire her to plan a romantic dinner with her love, if at least to remember a time before any coming darkness.

Still singing in her mind, she thought about what life with her lover would entail, what great and vast worlds beyond obscurity they would explore together, what ideas they might discover. Rainstormed and roused, ready for a myst odyssey, she rode off peachly into a portal of possibility.

Chapter 13

A LINK TO THE PAST / ORIGINAL TITLE: FADED MEMORIES

2:1:2:13

“...SHE says she comes here every now and then to see if it's changed at all, or in an attempt to visit the past,” finished reading page 145, Sandeep, who was a student in Mr. Paxton's Critical Thinking class.

“Okay, now turn back to page 56,” Paxton requested, and then selected a student at random to read. “Even after years have passed and we've moved on from that place, when we think about it and try to remember it, when we try to think of what it may look like now, all we can remember is the way it looked when we left it,” the student read.

“As human beings with the capability of memory, we often find ourselves visiting the past, whether it be mentally, or even physically, as in literally going back to a place we used to live,” Paxton suggested.

“The problem is, places and things change over time whether we want them to or not, and we can't always go back. Some of the characters look for a way back home, but the problem is home just doesn't exist anymore,” finished Paxton.

Seeing that Latasha, the student who had previously flipped a desk and stormed out of the classroom, actually had her book opened, Paxton decided to calmly ask her a question. “Latasha,” he startled her, “have you ever thought about someone you used to know, or a place you used to live?” She shrugged, and answered “No.”

“That's 'cause you ain't got no friends!,” a student from the other side of the classroom yelled. Standing up, Latasha scanned the room for Briana and proceeded to walk towards her, and to make a long story short, the class erupted into a brawl.

Paxton was eventually able to split the two girls up and restore order in the classroom, but this disturbance would be just one of many inside a classroom that was simply not fit to learn.

Continuing the lecture, Paxton decided, for the time being, not to include the students, but to just simply speak, regardless as to whether they listened or not. As he spoke, the chatter among students rose, “...What Julien is suggesting is that we should never dwell on the past, or even on the future for that matter, at the expense of the present. This is reaffirmed,” Paxton is cut off by the sound of the bell and immediately all the students rise to leave the classroom.

“This is reaffirmed in the final statements of the book,” he spoke over all the noise. “Please read chapter twenty-eight tonight!,” he tried to yell.

Malcolm Carson, who had returned to the educational program after identifying Darius Browne as the triggerman to Detective Tom Fields concerning one of his cases, walks down the school steps and begins to walk towards his bus.

Though there was a considerable gap in his educational years, he was however socially promoted to the junior level of high school, which, if one were part of the academia, would understand that this promotion was a microcosm of how poor the city's schooling system really was.

On the other side of the high school were Chris and Rebecca, who too had just exited Mr. Paxton's ninth period class, and "escaped" from the high school property completely avoiding any other students. Their stealth was due mainly to the fact that they were a biracial couple; Chris, being African-American, and Becca, being Irish.

Once out of sight, they held hands as they talked and walked down the street, eventually kissing each other goodbye and Becca running to a nearby train station to catch her train ride home.

As the bell rang to signal afterschool, as well to dismiss all the buses, inside one of the bathrooms of the high school, Latasha and Monica could be found performing oral sex on Andre, who was the student who would spread rumors about Mrs. Shorts sexual activities, and who also occupied a seat in the backrow of Paxton's class.

On her day off, Karuna had visited Kathleen and was now leaving the residence. She entered her car and turned on the radio, "...We are losing nine thousand residents a year due to many reasons, but mostly crime and poor schools," she heard.

She continued to listen as she drove back home, but eventually ended up calling James Paxton, a teacher of a high school she was recently romantically involved with.

"All the students in my Critical Thinking class are underachievers. Basically students with no futures who are going to be left behind for the streets. How am I supposed to teach, much less find motivation for it, if they can't pay attention long enough without a fight starting or them talking among themselves like I'm not there?," Paxton asked Karuna, "It's not right, the system throws them away and at the same time it throws me away, like we're nothing," Paxton finished.

"I understand, I understand. We have a dual classroom with three teachers in it and all I really am is a second mother to my students," Karuna remarked. There is a brief pause, which Karuna eventually breaks, "You know a few months ago I was way over in the 39th district, right? Did you know over there high school starts at seventh grade?"

Javier, Vyncente and David took turns playing the video game Super Big Ups on their classroom's donated video game console, and as time passed, eventually switched the game to Mega Man X.

At the back of the classroom could be found Mrs. Gonzalez, who was currently grading David's bookreport, of which he had done on the book for children entitled "Godzilla."

"Godzilla is a big humungos dinosar who livs in Jipan. He scaers all of the people

who liv there and they allways run away from him. He can nock bildings down and crush cars with his bear feet. Doctor Wu-Jinobi tries to kill Godzilla with a big bomb, but Godzilla doesnt die. Godzilla goes into the wader and swims away because he is hert and all of the chinese people are yelling at him to go away. The End. (Godzilla sounds so scaaaaary! Were you scared while you read it?)”

At the other end of the room is Sara, playing with Patricia, who instead prefers to be called Pattie. As they play with legoes, Mrs. Anderson grades Sara's bookreport, which concerned a children's book named “Little Bill and Little Jill.”

“Little Bill and Little Jill is a adventure book that takes place in Spane. One day, for a class field trip, Bill and Jills class goes to Spane to visit a populer zoo, but Bill and jill get lost in the zoo and get lost away from there class. In the adventure, Bill and Jill run into alot of animuls and each animul they talk to helps them to find there class. They talk to a zebra, a lion, a monkee, a lizard, a scorpeon, and a lot of others like birds, too. Then finally at the end they find there class and they are togeter again and go back home to the United States in america. (Oh wow! It sounds like they had a really fun time meeting the animals, Sara! What was your favorite animal that they visited?)”

As Lynne drove to South Kennedy Elementary School, she took an acetaminophen pill and then took a sip of water. Exiting her car in work uniform, the Sun blared at her orange and brown rorschach colored plastic hairband.

Small talking with someone at the front office whom she had grown to know, Sara and Dave finally found her and they left the school to go home. Along the drive, after spotting Ms. Palmer, Sara mentions to her mother that she had accidentally bent the frame of her glasses.

The moment you take a picture, you create a link to the past. Not my words but the last words of a wedding photographer. The sentence was seen in a scene on a wall from a maze dream. Section 6 compartment 4.

Sitting at the desk located in the composition notebook room, I was glancing over an old photo album of Lynne's. There must have been around a hundred and fifty pictures, most faded or fading to a certain degree.

Each photograph has a sort of digital code at the bottom right hand corner in yellow bold print, and the first photograph that caught my attention was S-56:C-145, which was of Lynne in her wedding dress kissing her new husband, a message written on the back: We did it! I married the man of my dreams. My soulmate. There is no one else in the world like him – together forever. 22

S-16:C-23: Graduating high school, my gown was too long! 18

S-1:C-299: My first bike, I think I was 6.

- S-7:C-39: This guy was supposed to be a football player, but I don't know who he is. As you can see he was hugging me way too tight!
- S-212:C-430: Me in the first dress I ever bought with my own money. 16?
- S-32:C-56: Sara at 2.
- S-8:C-8: David at 1.
- S-3:C-321: Me and Silvio at prom. 18
- S-8:C-51: Sara having ice-cream soda at a carnival. We got lost on a roadtrip and somehow ended up here.
- S-6:C-4: Me in my all-time favorite dress, I think I also had it in my life before this one. (Yes, yellow is my favorite color) 25
- S-5:C-11: First ever flowers man! They didn't die, anthurium plants. 22
- S-7:C-321: Train ride back home. Loved the view. 24
- S-90:C-98: Mom snapped an unsuspecting picture of me painting my first painting. I think it's a flower I made up in my head. 8?
- S-6:C-43: Sara and David, new bikes!
- S-7:C-54: Random bird. I named him/her Taylor.
- S-2:C-19: Sunset in fall. On the roadtrip right in front of our motel rooms. We watched it for a brief while until he decided to walk away. True Love.
- S-32:C-967: My old guitar that I could never figure out how to play. 15
- S-2:C-3: Someone thought I was beautiful enough to be a model for a day. 23
- S-69:C-39: My yearbook picture. Don't laugh! 18
- S-73:C-111: Some fucker stole this bike from me. 19
- S-2:C-89: Me in front of my new high school. 13, maybe 14
- S-72:C-76: Sara and David, ready for first day of school!
- S-33:C-76: Beautiful lake. My favorite place in the world. ♥
- S-4:C-56: This whole place was covered in thick ice. Other worldly. Mostly large bodies of ice, lakes, mountains, deserts, all created of pure ice. 21
- S-2:C-765: Me in my Pink Floyd T-shirt. 17
- S-45:C-274: Me covered in dirt after gardening. Bought some pink and peach colored-fused roses! I am grateful for the peace gardening brings me. 26
- S-9:C-322: And then me covered in paint after painting. These are green and orange colored-fused roses. I have a real desire for nature! 26
- S-4:C-909: Our first apartment, taken from the window of our 48th floor. Pretty city, especially at night. 20

Dave told us that he needed to use the bathroom in an obscene way, and I told him that if he repeated this I would eventually tell Lynne. After he departs from us, Sara

begins to speak to me, telling me that a wolf can smell over two-hundred and fifty million different things, and that people can only smell five million. Soon after, I woke up.

I had fallen asleep on my couch but began to hear weird pounding on my window. When I raised my head to look up, I saw that it was Jack, somewhat standing on a ledge and yelling at me to let him in.

After letting him in, I asked him why he didn't just use the buzzer to get inside the building, and he tells me that the landlord had fixed the apartment's front door. Confused, he hands me a case, which he later tells me is his new album, called "The Second Mind."

He begins to tell me that it's about life and death, goes on to say that down below, brown cancer grows, and an orange crash weeping waits for me there. After looking at the case, I wake up.

Sitting at the edge of my bed, I realized that I had woken up now twice, a dream within a dream. Those were rare.

The occurrence posed a question to me. If the universe is expanding, and if mass or matter is increasing, could time be slowing down? That is to say, as M increases, T decreases.

Or, if time is instead increasing, might it get large enough that it would implode under itself as would a massive star under its own gravity? Would it then even begin to go backwards into the past, or perhaps repeat things that had happened before?

Another thought has occurred to me. If time is changing in value and not staying constant, can we use time to accurately measure anything? Could we accurately and objectively measure the age of the universe or our own ages if time is constantly changing? Maybe some of us are older than we think.

I got up from off my bed and grabbed my car keys and met Tao out in the parking lot. I was driving him to the airport tonight because he was going back to China to help teach a few classes. Once we got there, he got out to get his luggage and there soon after saluted me, and I then woke up.

Another thought has just occurred to me... If space is expanding faster than the speed of light, and in effect, if time is slowing down faster than the speed of light, will it eventually get to the point where it creates the illusion of eternity?

Waking up again, I finally became lucid and knew that I was this time finally actually awake. Excellent. Looking out of the window I saw that it had recently rained, and that in the distance there was a large tree that had fallen, perhaps from lightning.

As I defocus from the window-view, I hear soft knocking on my door. I go to check who it is, and after I open the door, Lynne extends her arm towards mine, grabs me, and begins to lead me down our hallway, every once in a while looking back at me with a deep smile on her face.

I noticed a few things; the lights in the hallway were completely out, making it pitch black, and this realization led me to her ghostly appearance; she bore a sleeveless ruby shirt and a long gold skirt.

When we got outside, we saw that it was snowing red and yellow leaves. She then led me to her car and began to speak to me, telling me that she wanted to explore the vast world with me.

As we drove around, our way became blocked by many falled tress which had now obstructed the streets. As she went into reverse to find another way, she turned on the radio for us to have music to enjoy.

As the night fell, I saw that we were now driving on a beach, a shoreline, and at some random moment she stopped the car and began to gaze at a small house right near the waters. After a while I asked why we were stopped in front of this small house, and she begins to tell me that she has always wanted to live here. "A small quiet home by the lake, where the incoming tide soothed you to sleep and made for a peaceful and gentle life."

I thought about what she said, and then saw that the red and yellow leaves were now falling down on our car, and immediately after, she turned and said to me, "But here, nothing can grow." A deep sadness now overcame her face as a single diamond tear fell from her eye. She then began to look over my shoulder, and when I looked behind me to see what she had seen, I saw that the body of clear water had developed into a high tide and was directly coming our way.

I woke up, again, and immediately started thinking about the dream. I thought of how strange it all was, and then I retired back into my composition notebook room and sat down to look at Lynne's photoalbum again.

I flipped to where I left off, and the first picture I saw was one that was taken at the carnival we stopped at. It consisted of myself, Lynne, whose arm was around my body and other hand on the top of Dave's head, Claire, Sara, Dave and the backdrop of a Ferris wheel and other rides and games and costumes. On the backside, a message written in blue pen that covered the entire surface.

S-81:C-711/C31X2: There is a single red leaf in that pile of green leaves. I feel that I have discovered a type of rare love that grows, like a rose, into a jewelry dress of prose. It is unusual, frictionless like a silk skirt, but as my heart expands, this beautiful love that I feel slows down time into a fading eternity.

*Chapter 14***THE CIRCLE CITY**

2:1:2:14

LAST night, I had a dream. Passing by each streetlight in the dark world, I noticed that my shadow followed me every which way I went.

I finally reached a huddled mass of onlookers, and as they moved in the night under a bluish white light, their shadows too seemed to dance as they followed their masters. I stand there, thinking, not of the white shade, but of the white shade who once spoke of a black shade way back in The Emerald City.

The people were crowded because another homicide had been displayed. A man, tied up at the feet and hands, had had his neck broken in half and dangling. Just moments prior, a detective had removed a black seven-sided die from his mouth, which upon first seeing, would show you four red-colored circles.

A day later, in another part of the city, I found myself walking to a similar crime scene. This time it was a woman, who was dismembered at every joint, and in her mouth too was a black seven-sided die, though the circles on this one were green. It too, had landed on the number four.

No one in the crowds, not even the detectives assigned, knew who was committing these terrible crimes, but I did. I knew. And these dice, they were his calling cards. Something creative and new he had dreamt up.

After I left, I returned to my motel room, and sitting on a chair staring out of a window, I realized I had begun to talk to myself. I didn't notice it at first, but in the middle of a sentence it dawned on me, that the man in black was beginning to repulse me. That what foul dust floated in the wake of his dreams had begun to harm me mentally.

Upon this realization, my words repressed back into thoughts, and I noticed an electric sign nearby, "The Ruby Motel," it read, some letters missing light. "Ruby Motel?," I thought to myself, and I immediately knew where I was. The circle city, Indianapolis.

I woke up, and like clockwork, I sat at the edge of the bed and thought about the dream. I came to many conclusions, conclusions I couldn't have made while I was in the sleep state, simply because in my waking state I had a composition notebook that gave me answers to cities I had not yet visited. In the same context, I can see that there really is no difference between a person's past self and a person's future self that is so dividing as much as the division of the knowledge that one in the present might hold. Because I was able to read and reread *The City That Never Sleeps*, I was able to make connections that I could never find while staring and thinking at that Ruby Motel sign.

It has been said that God does not play dice with the universe. However, I came to the

conclusion that, while he does not, the man in black does.

I developed a theory on the black dice; they were seven-sided because each number represented either a vice or a virtue, the red-circled die a symbol of the capital vices, and the green-circled die a symbol for the heavenly virtues.

Doing research on both of the victims, I found that the man suffered sloth, and that the woman delivered diligence, which were exact opposites on the vice-virtue scale, so I'm assuming these were represented on the dice as the number four.

What I gathered from this was that neither fate nor coincidence are discriminate in who they charge. At any moment, on any end of the balance, any person can become victim to evil.

You can take a person who is completely indifferent to their own existence, a person so immovable on the subject of life that for them to watch an infant struggle between life and death has no affect on them at all, makes no difference to them of the outcome anymore than the choice between a democratic or a republican president, and then take another person who is harrowed by the thought of failure, a person who works hard every single day of their life and finds absolute meaning and motivation in every one and in every action, so much that they greet every stranger on the street with words of affirmation and spends each night worrying that they are not living life to the fullest and the best of their ability; and after you have both of these people, you put them into an uncertain and indiscriminate universe and roll a die with their name on it, and whether their name is written in emerald or in ruby, whether it lands on three or on four, they both have the same chance of being visited by an unfortunate event.

There is so much indifference in the world, and it doesn't always come from a person. Poverty, violence, crime, oppression, they are the true indifferences in our world. And sometimes, but not all the times, these are what make a person indifferent. Maybe God doesn't play dice, but surely Satan does.

When I came back home from the eastern side of the state many years ago, I felt the most alone I had ever felt in my life. I felt that there was no more I could do, no more no less that I could change, for the universe had already calculated my fate. I simply wanted no more to do with humanity, and as the days sludged by I was unaware that my mind was in the process of decay.

I kept in minimal contact with Jason, an individual whom I'd met in the trade of carpentry, until I completely lost touch with both him and reality. That was the first time, during one of those long stretches of time, that I realized that I had partially lost my mind and that I was beginning to talk to myself, sometimes outloud, most of the time in my mind. It still happens to this day, but often I won't realize that I am talking to myself until I realize it.

Getting up, my phone began to ring. That terrible ringing sound. I walked over to it, and for the first time I saw that the caller identification read “Lynnette J. Parker.”

“Jay Parker, how are you today,” I joked. She didn't get it. We spoke for a few minutes and I told her that the mechanic had finished and switched everything out of the car. I told her the total cost and told her that I would help pay for it; for the first time, she did not say thank you, perhaps because it was settling in her mind that I took care of her as much as she took care of me. I'll tell you, there are some people who ask for an inch and then they want a mile, and then there are other people who don't ask for much but you want to give them everything. I think Lynne used to be more like the former, but these days, it seems like she is more of the latter.

Afterwards, she commented on how she was going to be working a double shift, as an associate had called off for the day. I commented on how she was working too hard, and needed to take a break.

Mrs. Parker ended the call on her cellular device and returned to her employment. Today, or rather, tonight, she had received \$118 in tips.

Her and her manager were the last ones to leave Max's Diner at around nine p.m., and after she turned off the lights and said farewell, she went and sat in her vehicle and took the time to think.

About twenty minutes into the city, twenty away from home, she sat in her car and looked at the city lights, the same way she used to many years ago. She watched as people walked by in the night, some alone, some coupled, some partied.

The time came when she eventually turned on her car's radio and as she listened to the music, she continued to watch the lights and the people as if the two were meant to go together.

She pulled her head back to rest on the seat, and her head tilting autonomously, she caught an image of her face in the side-mirror. She looked into her own eyes and observed herself as the music in the background continued to play, “...She leaped out of the sea, and with her she brought along a pleasant amber mystery...”

She suddenly began to think of a joke she had been waiting to use on her love, and at the thought of the joke she caught herself smiling at herself in the mirror.

When the music stopped, she realized that it was 9:48 p.m. and that she had completely zoned out to the music and the imagery of the city, and it had dawned on her, occurred to her, that for the first time in a very long time, she was tired; physically and mentally.

Drawing a deep breath of exertion she stuck the shift and reversed out of the parking space and drove to a leisure lounge, which was where Olya worked as a service clerk.

Driving up to the establishment, Olya had already been waiting for Lynne and entered the vehicle. They greeted each other and Lynne began the drive home. Once stopped in front of Olya's building, they said their goodbyes and Lynne watched as Olya entered her apartment building and walked past the locked door, and Lynne eventually went home.

"In the sixth round, with the one hundred and ninety-ninth pick, we have selected quarterback Bradley Chipper," said a representative of the home team. Chipper, fearing that he would not be chosen, happily walked onto the stage to accept his place in the league, waving to his family members as he walked by.

"He won't admit it, but he was as excited as a little boy on Halloween," said Chipper's wife, Vivian. "After they finally won their first game, he went around looking for advice on how to be a better player, and someone, I can't remember who, told him that everything he needed to improve was in his mind. A few days later, he started taking little timed math quizzes, he believed that would improve his decision making abilities under time."

The sixth game in the season was a divisional game, which ended 34 to 32, as the home team improved to 3-3 and went to five-hundred for the first time in many years.

"I stopped watching after the second loss," said Poole, "I figured it was going to be more of the same from last year, but then someone told me that we were three and three and at first I didn't believe them. This was the pretty much the mindset of any football fan in our city, 'We won a game?' I mean, yeah, it's one thing to win one game, maybe out of luck, but when I saw that they won three games straight, I started to pay attention. Thought maybe this isn't our year, but it could be the year things turn around."

"Everyone had problems with Kevin, he was something of a drama queen. A bad call against us, he goes berserk. Kicker misses a chip shot, he's in their face. That's just the kind of person he was. And it didn't help that he was kind of lazy. All of us, even Kevin, we wanted to win games, but I felt that sometimes he wasn't willing to put in the work, all he wanted to do was fire his mouth when something went wrong. So I'll tell you, when Taylor Lawrence made the game winning field goal, he wasn't running his mouth."

"Three minutes after he made the field goal," Lauren said, "we couldn't find dad. Some of us went searching for Chip and eventually found him under a bench hyperventilating. I had never seen anything like that before. He got way overexcited and lost. That's when I realized that even though he was my father, he still had the heart of a playful child."

"Our kicker was as good as gold. I think I maybe saw him miss one time during that season, and that's a big maybe. Two seconds left on the clock, score was thirty-one thirty-two, and he nailed it like it was nothing. Fifty yard field goal I think? My heart was beating out of my chest as the ball sailed," recounted Chipper. "I just kept thinking, as the

ball flew, about what Bowman said to me earlier in the game, 'No team that started O and three ever made it to the playoffs,' and I say this to you today with the satisfaction that came with winning all those years ago; for the rest of your life, no one can ever tell you that you couldn't do it."

Clayton walked up onto the stage and to the podium and began answering questions from the crowd. "What have you changed to win three games in a row?" "More practice, more discipline." "What would you say was a big improvement over last week?" "We only turned the ball over three times," Clayton laughed. "How do you feel about your offense?" "We're still adjusting our playbook and playing style but I think we can go out there and challenge defenses. Thank you, we're on to the next team."

Clayton walked out of the conference room and into a long hallway lit by yellow lights, and in his turbulent mind, he foresaw a sea of hands.

Chapter 15

AMBER ORANGE

2:1:2:15

¶ 9/5 – **TODAY** is my birthday. No I will not tell you how old I am. Yesterday my love and I ate dinner where I work. Nothing special, just a simple meal. We celebrated it yesterday because, despite it being Labor Day today, I will be working in the afternoon.

¶ I decided, after coming home last night from dinner with him, that I am going to surprise my husband with a romantic dinner. I already know his favorite dish, I just have to figure out the setting.

¶ I have to admit, I am a tad bit nervous, as I've never done anything like this before. As far as romantic dinners go, I've always only had one partner, and usually he made all the decisions, so this being my own thing, I have quite a few decisions to make.

¶ Now that I think of it, the last time I had been on a date before yesterday must have been like three years ago, and its funny because that also happened on my birthday. I had been living in a new apartment, trying to move on with my life, when I made the terrible mistake of actually thinking my abusive ex-husband might of changed. That his promise to stop hitting me might be real this time, and that I at least owed it to my kids to try and give the our family another shot at being happy.

¶ I talked to him on the phone and he told me that he wanted to take me out for my birthday. He told me this would be the beginning of a new phase in our relationship. I was skeptical, but also blinded by love. I said yes, and the following week I found myself all costumed up in one of my yellow dresses. I dressed myself up in every way for a man who couldn't even see me.

¶ We went out a few more times, and I thought to myself that maybe he really did change, and maybe we were happy again. This small opening is why after so long, I offered him my body. We had sex, but I didn't feel anything. I didn't know why I felt that way then, but I know why now, it was because my heart belonged to someone else. I wish I knew what I know now back then.

¶ After we did it, I drove back home at around midnight. I stayed in my parking lot, in my car, for a while, thinking about why I felt so ugly and so disgusting, and the whole time, I felt like someone was watching me, telling me that I shouldn't have to give my body or my love to someone who doesn't deserve it.

¶ The next week, I acted on that voice and received the worst possible reply I could have ever received from him. It was so bad that I slept in the backseat of my car, because I was so ashamed of myself, that I didn't want anyone to see my bruises. Especially not the person who holds my heart today.

¶ That's all in the past now, and today I'm with someone who shares fifty-percent of the

relationship with me. I want to give him everything; all of my heart and all of my soul. All of my love and all of my body. Even more than this, I want to give him all of my art.

¶ I've shared with him now several poems I've written, most of them for and about him, and he commented that he enjoyed reading them and that he was glad I found a way to express myself. He told me he was my #1 fan, but seriously, he is my only fan. My only light. It's 5 A.M. right now and I'm staring out of my window, and in a sky filled with darkness, he is my lucky star.

¶ *"It was as if that great rush of anger had washed me clean, emptied me of hope, and, gazing up at the dark sky spangled with its signs and stars, for the first time, the first, I laid my heart open to the benign indifference of the universe."*

At six a.m., as the Sun began to rise, Lynne left her apartment, leaving sandwiches next to a pot of lipstick plants on the kitchen table for Sara and Dave.

She went down the flight of stairs and out of the apartment building, wearing Autumn Wind, the orange dress paired with green leggings, and tended to her garden. She did some light gardening, watering flowers of many kinds, and decided to leave the rest to the sunshine that would come soon.

As she walked around in her garden, she noticed that some of the plants were turning brown and orange, and the thought of death and pain entered her mind. Though there was death in the garden, there was also life; apple-crunches of red roses, Peace Lily stardust, boasting sunrays of sunflowers, sapphire zinnias, enchanted grapes of balsams, freshly plucked tulips of ember, white stargazer lilies, alliums of fuchsia, fennel grass blades of yellowish-green, seasoned ladybirds of anthuriums, alluring aromas of catmints, all organized and sectioned off by wooden fences for the display of complete beauty and appearing on both sides of the apartment building.

She tended both the life and the death in her garden, she kneeled over to smell the many groups of flowers, and in doing so, she smelled both life and death.

She then entered back into her building and back into her apartment where she changed into her running clothes. She slipped her orange shoe onto her silver foot, her other orange shoe onto her flesh foot, her white sports-shirt onto her hardened upper body, her blue basketball-shorts onto her firm lower body, then exited and entered what was now daylight.

As she began to run, in the distance she noticed the coming of gray clouds. By the time she was walking back to her apartment, the gray clouds had now become silver and began to drizzle over her, slapping the top of her head and shoulders with droplets of ember orange cloudbursts.

"...In earlier news, a key central figure to the takedown of a large drug organization

last year was found dead in a prison shower room today. Roland “Spider” Price aided police, testified against his peers and...”

Paxton shut off the radio as he pulled into his parking space and soon after marched into his place of employment. Teaching a number of periods, he eventually came to the ninth and final period.

“Why we gotta read this stupid book, it don't even got a plot. He just crazy going on and on about nothing,” commented Latasha, “Some of the stuff he say don't even make sense.” “It's actually unclear if the narrator is male or female,” said a student from across the room. Latasha raised her head, yelling, “Was I talking to you?!,” and it went on like this for much of the period, Mr. Paxton being unable to control his class.

During the middle of the class, it began to storm outside, raining and thundering and lightning for all to see and hear. There were moments when the lights in the classroom began to flicker.

Seeing as he could not control the class, he allowed free time, or study time, for the students to complete other works for their other classes. Amid the chatter, he overheard Malcolm and Cedric speaking about the book he had assigned.

“Nah, see, they both wrong, that's the point. It don't come out the pussy or the butthole, it come out that little hole they have at the top,” Carson said. “That's right,” Paxton said walking over to the two, “Do you guys know the importance of that scene?”

Paxton then went on to explain to the two that the importance of the said scene was to display the true youth of two young people who were expected to murder enemies and facilitate the sale of narcotics. Neither of them knew where women urinated from, and yet, one had a handgun, and the other, a license to sell drugs.

As the three discussed various scenes, another nearby student overheard Paxton speaking of his former life, of how he had once been a lawyer.

“Yo, Mr. P, you ever put away a serial killer?,” the naive student shouted. The phrase “serial killer” then caught the attention of a third of the class as they all waited for him to answer. “No,” he laughed, “I wasn't that kind of a lawyer.”

As the pouring rain continued to hit the windows, Paxton found himself sitting at the back of the classroom, at what should have been a student's desk, and speaking to two thirds of the class and telling them about his time as a young lawyer. He dwelled, sadly, mostly on the bad things he believed he had done. “I scammed people, and after a while, it just wasn't something I wanted to do anymore,” he told his students.

As he went on, speaking of the things he had done in poor judgement, he gained more and more attention until finally every soul in the room was quietly listening to him, asking him questions and he answering them. For the first time, it looked like a real

classroom.

As the session went on, Paxton realized one undeniable truth; that regardless of age, maturity or intellect, the one thing each person could understand was an honest voice, and his honesty in addressing his students had now begin to show, and whether they knew it or not, the students were slowly being affected by this genuine truthfulness.

Chapter 16

SLEEPLESS IN ATLANTIS

2:1:2:16

CHRIS, then aged fifteen, crossed the intersection of Pearl boulevard and Spinel avenue, when a ring of gunshots could be heard to the west.

Ducking and running into an alley, he hid behind a plastic dumpster to wait for calm. After about a quarter of a minute, he witnessed crowds of people running in the same direction, yelling and some tripping along the way.

Once it seemed that calm had been restored, Chris now heard a ring of sirens and saw several ambulances, police cars and firetrucks all driving down the connected street.

Chris got up, walked to the end of the alley, looked down that road, and saw the deadly scene of a police shootout. Watching from afar, he witnessed as four people were pronounced dead on arrival; a middle aged black male lying on a staircase, two middle aged white males in police uniforms lying in the middle of the road and one young black male being carried out of a police vehicle.

Rebecca, then also aged fifteen, had just come home from school and, at the expense of her homework, began reading a book titled "Sleepless In Atlantis," which was not part of her English class's curriculum.

As she flipped to page seven, a ring of gunshots could be heard to the east. She immediately fell to the floor and did not rise until the series of pops had settled. Slowly, her door opened as her mother peered in to check on her, and after a while, they both stood fully to look out of their window and see what had happened.

Lying on the street they saw two young girls, deceased, who were surrounded by police cars, firetrucks and ambulances. As the two watched on, sapphire and ruby lights could be seen flashing on the apartment building walls which came from the many vehicles' lights.

Chris and Becca, present day, were now at Becca's home watching television. At one moment, Becca's father opened her door to ask her a question about the television remote. He spoke in Gaelic, as neither he nor his wife spoke English very well, and she responded in the same tongue. Before he closed the door, he greeted Chris with a warm and accented hello, and though he was a different race from them, both he and his wife welcomed him into their home with open arms, a sentiment that Chris's family did not share for Becca. As for Becca's younger brother, he thought of Chris as a sort of bigger brother, and thought it was somewhat cool to have someone from a different culture around sometimes.

Sara and I sat on platformed cement playing pattycake, under orange and white streetlights, waiting for Lynne and Dave to return; she had taken him into a deep and

secluded place to urinate.

I could hear the sounds of Lynne's footsteps as they walked back to us from out of the darkness and under the dark blue setting Sun, wearing her black ballet-flat shoes. The black and silver matched her well, as she was wearing 47-79, which I also called "Blood & Gold;" the silver and gold ankle length dress with the buttoned top and collar she had previously displayed for me. Of course the silver was more gray and the gold more yellow, but when a lady has a rich beauty that can be held, she can turn simple colors into gemstones.

"We got lost," she remarked as she laughed. She and Dave then joined us in sitting on the concrete platform under the light, and as she fell into a position of the Indian style, her dress whitishly rose to reveal a golden ankle bracelet on her silver side.

"You know, for someone who works twenty-five hours a day, I would have thought you could afford real gold," I said to her. Something funny crept onto her face after I said that, and she laughed to me, "Oh, you have jokes, huh?," rolling her tongue underneath her bottom lip. She didn't fire back, perhaps because the miniature gold rosehead which hung off the bracelet was more a symbol to her of honest, real and true love than a superficial fashion statement.

The reluctance to go home was not confined to wayward men. Or wayward women, either. Or wayward boys and girls, for that matter. We simply strolled leisurely down Eden avenue, which was darkly lit and furnished with trees, Dave and Sara exploring a bit at some of the things they saw.

After we had crossed a street, she somewhat brushed up against me and took my hand into hers, interlocking her fingers into mine, and then began to speak as she looked up to me, "A golden rose symbolizes the successful and completed search for your soulmate, which ended in unity and brought two minds together into one," she finished.

I thought about what she said, and then thought about one of the origins of soulmatry in general, how it was taught that in initial creation, there was one soul, or one body, but something caused that soul and body to split apart in half and cast away from each other, and it was each half's purpose to search for their other half to reunite.

In the natural world, there is cell division, known as mitosis, where a cell creates a copy of itself as they divide, and there is cell fusion, where cells of the same type combine together for efficient function. This process made me think of Lynne and I as cellmates.

If we refer back to the "echo" theory, where our universe and existence is simply an echo that will eventually fade out into nothing and nonexistence, and combine this with the notion of "objective nature," is it possible to find flaws in the universe by observing it?

Imagine that the phenomenon of an echo is actually a design flaw that found its way into the universe. That is to say, our universe actually is an echo of another universe, and we can hear echoes inside our own universe as an error because the overall design of our universe, the design being that of the echo, has somehow leaked into the design for us to witness. I don't know if that makes sense to you, but whatever.

If this were true, we could substitute the phenomenon of echoes for anything else and this might help us discover and understand things we otherwise don't have the ability to comprehend as human beings. Though the symbolism of Lynne's golden rose is a bad example, it still works; the idea that she and I were once one being, and then split apart with the task of finding each other to reunite, it can be found in the same phenomenon of the cells that divide and fuse.

This also makes me wonder, could the universe have been part of something else, but then splitted away, and is now back on the path to reunite with it? Where else might one find this concept? Can we find other design flaws or strengths in this manner?

"Don't hold my hand in public," I said as I removed my hand from hers, and slapping her hand afterwards in discipline. She was shocked, or maybe more amazed, and then displeased, and her several attempts to catch my hand again failed miserably. After she gives up, she simply wraps her arm around mine, interlocking our arms together as we walk under a white light that would blend with her silver ankle.

"I bought the bracelet at a yard sale," she told me. "They actually had two of them, and I would have gotten you one, but I've never seen you wear jewelry," she jokes. I didn't reply. What she said wasn't even that funny. You better not be laughing.

After perhaps a minute or two of walking down the lonely avenue, I looked ahead to see Sara and Dave huddled in front of a bush making a play for an insect, and at this moment, Lynne began again, "Do you know why we work so well together?," she asked, "It's because we're like old people who act like kids... True love doesn't age." I looked at her, and she up so close to my side, "We are like colorless diamonds in the rough," she finished, and she gave me one of her cheesy ear to ear smiles. "You're so romantic, Lynne." This I said to her with an indifferent face.

Walking again in silence and then reaching the huddled children, Lynne and I saw that they were looking into a hole which probably was the residence of a small creature. Standing over them and asking them questions, the thought of insects further entered my mind as I noticed Lynne's lovely black butterfly design on her silver foot, gifted to her most likely by Sara.

Suddenly and quickly, a brown moth flew out of the hole, alarming both Sara and Dave, and flew directly into the street, being missed barely by a lonely driver on the road. This was the last car we would see drive past us tonight, and with that last car, the last

noises of the street died off with it.

Dave looked up and asked me what my favorite bug was, which I told him was the praying mantis, and for a moment I wondered why he wondered, and I wondered if he wondered why I wondered.

Ten minutes later, Sara and Dave were again well ahead of us, and Lynnette and I again, almost like ketchup and mustard, silver and gold, night and day, pearl and spinel, flaws and strengths, pen and paper, sugar and salt, east and west, thunder and lightning, sapphire and ruby, milk and honey, dawn and dusk, husband and wife, walked together, her head on my side, our arms into one another, talking to each other under the silver pepper of the paper Moon, “Gorgeous golden goddess, give me yellow light under this white heaven,” she laughed. “It’s from a book I’m reading.”

This reminded me that she had taken both “White Lights” and “Rosalynnette” to the hospital and had donated them for display. Of her talking about how they were mounted side by side to each other, for the entire world to see. Or I guess actually for anyone who walked down that hallway.

At the end of the avenue, Dave and Sara waited for us, and together we all walked across the street and eventually came to a bridge overpass.

When we got to the middle of the overpass we stopped and gazed down at the busy highway. It stood out at us, its lights giving it an orangish-yellowish glow against the dark sky, its speeding cars passing by with the sounds of swoosh and swash, feeling the large trucks roll by with awesome force; I looked at the lit highway in a way that I had never before.

Before we would leave it, we would have an oxygen challenge. We all held our breath on the overpass to see who could hold it the longest, and for a while we all looked like were underwater, our eyes fixed on the city before us and the highway that connected to it. Sara, in the end, won, and showed a surprising ability to hold her breath.

Nearing our apartment building, I feel a slight twitch that came from my index finger. It had occurred yesterday as well, but I don’t think it’s anything to worry about.

I remember, about seventeen years ago, finishing my tenth or eleventh composition notebook. And I remember thinking to myself, as I closed that last page, “If I don’t get help, something in me is going to collapse.” What I’m saying is, I was aware that I might have lost my mind. I was aware that the habit I was developing could, in reality, lead to more madness; but as it turned out, it was the writing that eased my mind.

One thing that I knew, but failed to understand, was that there were others out there who were exactly like me. I don’t just mean other people who share some of my flaws and strengths, I’m saying there were people who were exactly like me; emphasis on the word exactly.

Lynne and I suffered in different ways, but in ways we are mirrored, almost a reflection of each other. The most important thing she's taught me is that I am not alone. I honestly feel like if she ever stumbled into the room of composition notebooks and began to read through them, she would be the one person in the entire universe who understands. Probably because she belongs in a nuthouse.

There is indeed more than one way to solve an algebraic math problem, and there are both simple and complex ways to arrive to the same conclusion. Take, for example, a product of two. You can get there by adding one and one, or you can go a different route and divide two by one, each resulting in a product of two.

You can also get to a product of two with the expression: $((88 \times 6) - (900 / 2)) - 80 + 2) + (3x + 2) = 2$. What I've chosen to learn from this is that at the end of it all, we all end up at two, and the only difference is the avenue we took to get there. But, what if the avenue affects the end result, and gives you a variation on the number two.

The avenue I took has gifted me sociological issues, and for the most part, that world I used to live in is now lost on me, it's gone from me, and there is no way back to it. I cannot undo the expression, it's already been solved and I've already seen the answer, and I feel like, in a social sense, the only people I don't have to pretend around are Lynnette, Sara and David, for if I were to put my guard down around anyone else, they might see who I truly am, and looking into me, they might see the avenue I took to get here.

Entering our apartment building area, we saw Jack and a woman standing near a car and talking. She was black, and Jack looked as if he were trying to romanticize her. Once he saw us, he waved, and I waved back as we went in. "She's gorgeous," Lynne commented, "I wonder if she's his." She was indeed quite the looker, but I sure as hell didn't say that to Lynne.

The four of us get to the second floor and as we walk down the hallway, I stop in front of my door and tell them that I'll be over in a minute or two, and we part ways.

I walked through my living room and towards my telephone, with a plan to call Brandon, but as I put the receiver to my ear, I hear talking; the voice was strangely familiar, of a teenage girl, and after listening for a moment I recognized that it was the girl who lived above me.

"I don't know, it's just so tight...Well after we can rest if you get tired, and then maybe do it again. Just don't laugh or anything because that will embarrass me..." I became intrigued and sat down.

"If it hurts me I'll tell you...Just don't laugh...If you're too rough I will tell you, you know that...I'm just happy that we will be each other's firsts. I feel like we're together for a reason, and I just want to grow old with you...Okay, that's fine. I'll see you tomorrow. Okay, bye...I love you..."

A dial tone came into the phone and I thought about what I had just heard, and then dialed Brandon's number.

When I walked into Lynne's apartment, I found her sitting on the living room floor with a video game controller in her hand. She had changed clothes, switching from Blood & Gold to one of my black shirts, which fit her loosely, and a pair of red basketball shorts. I thought I told her to stop wearing my shit.

She looked back at me, angrily, almost like a child, and yelled, "How come my fucking plants won't grow?," she asked. I looked at the screen to see her playing Animal Crossing.

She saved her game and then got up to go to the kitchen. At the same time Sara came out of the bathroom in different clothes as well, as she had just taken a shower, Dave I suppose was in his room, doing something.

I sat on the couch as I watched Sara flip through television stations, and eventually she stopped on channel sixteen, which was showing a film called "Sleepless In Atlantis." Sara yelled to her mother about it, and I soon learned that this was Lynne's favorite film.

Friday night, midnight, Lynne and I sat on the couch and the kids laid out flat on the rug, all watching some movie about a sleepless city. At 1:00 a.m., we agreed to have a No Sleep contest to see who would be the last one to fall asleep. At 1:06 a.m. Lynne went back into the kitchen and placed a hot plate of food on the kitchen counter. I watched her as she stared at it, calmly saying "fuck it" in a repeated fashion, and finally grabbing the plate and running into the living room, still repeating the words "fuck it" over and over again and setting the plate down on the floor, her hands nearly burned from the exhibition. At 1:27 a.m., after eating most of the food, Sara and Dave seamlessly fell asleep at the same exact time, leaving only Lynne and I as contestants. At 1:29 a.m., I began pulling on her nose. At first she found it cute and amusing, laughing a bit, "What are you doing?," she asked in a squeaky and whiny voice, and when I let go her voice returned to normal as she snorted in laughter. I kept at it, and the pulling of her nose soon became irritating to her, so I began to run my finger between her lips and at the same time made the sound of a motorboat. "Man, I'm not playing games with you," she tried to say against my finger, but it came out in motorboat. It was now 1:35 a.m. and I continued to play with her, that is until she had finally had enough and stood up. "Stop!," she whisperly yelled, so as not to wake the kids. I reached up for her breasts and she immediately smacked my hand away, again yelling in a whisper, "What the hell is wrong with you?" As she started to walk away, I reached out and pinched her butt and she reacted quickly, turning around and again slapping my hand away. By now I was in complete whisperly laughter. She stared at me coldly, "Fuck you," she said, and she continued under her breath as she walked away, "Good for nothing..." I didn't hear the

rest. I think my laughter added to her dismay, for, right before she got into her bedroom, she took a hardcover novel off her kitchen table and threw it across the room directly at me, the spine-bridge of the novel smacking my forehead and nose. This was uncalled for, as I did no bodily harm to her, and yet her reaction left me mildly concussed.

She entered her bedroom, closing the door behind her, and I stayed seated on the couch for maybe thirty minutes until she finally came back out.

She walked over to me and then sat at the opposite side of the couch, as if she didn't almost just kill me with a goddamned book. Soon after she re-positioned herself to lay on her back, her knees in the air, and then after this took off her silver shoe and began rubbing her stump on my thigh. "Stop," I told her. I wasn't in the mood. But she didn't stop. I grabbed her lower leg and removed it off me, but this time she raised her stump to my face and against my cheek. I pulled my head away, and when I returned it, she then began to rub her stump all over my lips. I became somewhat angry, yelled at her to stop in a whispering fashion, and she said, "Now you know how it feels." And finally she stopped.

A movie called Poseidon was now playing on the television, and it was at that moment I moved closer to a laying Lynne and laid on her, the back of my head resting on her stomach and chest. As she put her right arm around my neck, she said, "You should move in with us, it would be easier and would cost you less." "No." "Okay," she replied gently.

We stayed up, neither of us falling asleep as we both wanted to win the contest. I don't think either of us were really watching the movie. At some point during the night, or morning, I guess, she put her hand of her other arm into my hand and interlocked our fingers.

"Don't laugh," she told me. I looked up at her in confusion, a crooked little smile on her face. "Don't laugh or I'll get embarrassed," she continued, and I was still confused.

She then, at first very softly, began to sing to me. It was a simple song, about an archangel, but the way she sang it made it seem like it was about much more than that, as if she was trying to tell me something but it was obscured in some way. I listened, as much to her emotion to the words she sung, and with an echo in her hypnotic voice that was given to lace, she sang to me a very enchanting and a very beautiful song of soul and grace.

Chapter 17

BLACK BUTTERFLY

2:1:2:17

- ¶ I watch you
- ¶ You have no idea, but I watch you
- ¶ I watch you from my window when you come home
- ¶ I watch you from my car when you head out
- ¶ I look back and watch you when we pass each other in the hallway
- ¶ Baby, you don't have a clue, but I'm a watcher and I'm drawn to you

- ¶ I'm a weirdo
- ¶ You have no idea, but I'm a weirdo
- ¶ I'm weird when I'm around you, but I'm weirder when I'm alone
- ¶ I'm weird, very weird in person, and I'd be a hundred times weirder if I ever got you on the phone
- ¶ I'm weird from 12 to 12, but after midnight, I swear I'm a freak
- ¶ Honey, you don't have a clue, but I'm a weirdo and I'm drawn to you

- ¶ I stalk
- ¶ I stalk because I want to know if you're available, or if you're with some other lady
- ¶ So I stalk you down the street, sometimes even lurk beyond the road
- ¶ I follow you into stores, into malls, into parks
- ¶ I sometimes hide in my garden, wait for you to leave, so I can stalk you in the night
- ¶ Darling, you don't have a clue, but I'm a stalker and I'm drawn to you

- ¶ I'm a creep
- ¶ I walk on eggshells to avoid you, but I hide behind the vineyard just to touch you
- ¶ I'm a creep, but not a normal creep, I'm a creep just for you
- ¶ I'm a creep, but I'm not violent, I'm just a creep, a creep afraid of you
- ¶ Sweetheart, you don't have a clue, but I'm a creep and I'm drawn to you

- ¶ I'm psychotic
- ¶ If I don't see you I go crazy, if I don't see you I go insane
- ¶ I'm a psychopath and if I'm mad, please get out of my way
- ¶ I'm a psycho, I'm a psycho, I'm a psycho just for you
- ¶ Buttercup, you don't have a clue, but I'm a psycho and I'm drawn to you

¶ I am shy
¶ I don't know why but I always have been, it's just the way I am
¶ I'm shy, but I fantasize, I dream of the night we first make love
¶ I'm shy if I like you, but never shy if I love you
¶ I'm shy, so what, one of these days I'm going to talk to you
¶ Oh, Romeo, oh, Romeo, you don't have a clue, but I'm shy and I'm drawn to you

¶ I am a black butterfly
¶ I watch you in the dark so I can't be seen
¶ I'm weird like a dancing lady in a feverish dream
¶ I stalk like a little lion who is hungry for lean
¶ I creep like a shadow as if from a horror scene
¶ I'm psychotic like a psycholady small and mean
¶ I'm shy like a child but don't treat me like I'm green
¶ There you are, I see you, come to me now
¶ I'm obsessed with you, but I can't move, I'm frozen, I won't let you get away
¶ So I will create time to grow the things that I will kill
¶ A praying mantis, a moth, larksided and doused in shrill
¶ I am attracted to flowers, bill and bill and bill!
¶ Haha! It worked! I'm catching up to you now and I will suck out your soul!
¶ I will press my lips against yours and breathe in your spirit and swallow it whole!
¶ Wait, what's this?!? Noo! Where did you go??? Come back to me!! Come back to your Juliet!
¶
¶ And then I looked behind me, and I saw you, caught in a web of your dreamy eyes, paralyzed by the poison of your eternal love
¶ Oh, my prince, you were the catch that I was after
¶ But I looked up and I was in your arms, and I knew that it was I who was captured
¶ How could I let this happen, I laid down so many traps, and yet so, the hunter has been captured by the game!
¶ Oh my dearest one, you don't have any idea, you don't even have a clue, but I am so, so many things, and I'm so desperately and dearly drawn to you!

¶ 9/15 - I leaf again and again through those miserable memories, and keep asking myself, was it then, in the wind of that remote autumn, that the rift in my life began; or was my excessive desire for life and love only the first evidence of an energetic but tired heart?

¶ Why didn't you come for me? Why didn't you come and save me? I waited for you. Why couldn't you see that it was you that I loved, not him. Not anyone else, only you.

¶ Isn't it funny? I tried so hard to catch him, but at the end of the day he was the one who caught me, and I couldn't escape from him. I thought about him everyday; I was caught in the web of his majesty.

¶ The first time I ever saw him, I was immediately drawn to him. I was nervous and couldn't stop laughing, I'm sure he noticed. I could tell right away, almost like a yin and yang, that he was the complete opposite of me; calmer, taller, a man, wore black, strong, handsome, and just like a yin and yang, I felt connected as if we were puzzle pieces that were meant to go together, meant to interlock with each other. There is always an ember inside of me, on the tips of my fingers, on the surface of my lips, on the points of my breasts and in the tunnel of my vagina, that always wants to touch him like that puzzle piece, to hold his hand, to spoon him in bed, to jump on his back, to make love.

¶ Olya told me she's lived in seven cities in seven years, and she's still not sure if she has ever climaxed. I think part of the climax is in the commitment. Now I'm not saying that I'm the expert on commitment, but I'm sure that a lack of commitment is why marriages fail and why friendships end. No one knows what commitment is. I'm not even sure I truly do. What does it mean to be committed to a person or an ideal?

¶ I don't have a college degree and I barely made it through high school, but I'll tell you what I think: He's seen my stump, he's seen my scar, he's seen me at my worse, he's been inside me, and even though he's never chased me, he's only turned me away once. He is a reserved person, but he tells me things. He opens up to me, he shares things with me, I've seen every inch of his flesh, and whenever he wants, he knows he can snuggle with me, lay on me, he knows I'll hold him, make everything all right. I think for a while this was a tough thing for him to do, and something tells me I'm not the first woman he's had this problem with. Either way, the point is, commitment comes in the flavor of the person. I don't commit to him the same way he commits to me. Some people say I love you outloud, others never say it but instead show it in other ways. I feel most connected and committed to him after the climax. I have to touch things. For me, touching leads to feeling, a feeling of warmth, peace of mind. Ah, I think my thoughts are becoming unorganized. I always get like this when I'm trying to communicate something but I feel it more than I can explain it.

¶ Last night he fell asleep inbetween my legs and on my chest. It was unexpected, but I loved it. I loved the feeling. I don't know how to walk around this, so I'll just say it directly... My nipples became erect. It happens every time, and there's nothing I can do about it. My body can't help the way it feels! I just needed to get that off my chest.

¶ We talked for a while, and I told him I was employee of the month at work, to which he told me, probably for the tenth time, that I work too much and I'm doing too much. That I need to take a break. Maybe I should. I was so out of it last week that I locked my keys inside my car and had to call him to come with the spare.

¶ In the morning when I woke up, he was still laying on my abdomen, sound asleep. I

didn't move because I kind of wanted to stay that way forever, but soon after he woke up with a large, pulsating and throbbing headache that was probably my fault... After he got up I followed him to the door and kissed him on the lips before he left, and he kissed me back. I'd like to say he did it for himself, but he probably just did it for me, to make me happy. I couldn't tell him that I loved him, like so many other couples do every day, but I wish to hell I could of. The last time I told him that, he made me cry, and its not really anything I'm trying to feel again anytime soon.

¶ There's this young girl who lives in our apartment building. I think she lives on the third floor. I was sitting in my garden one morning and she came out. When she saw me, she came up to me and thanked me for making the building look so pretty. It kind of caught me off guard. After she left, for school I think, I thought about when I first moved here, and how my zinnias died. She has no idea of the death and sadness that was here before. There's a black butterfly in every garden, whether you see it or not. They mostly come in the darkness, when there is no hour, no minute, when everything is still, because death has created time to grow the things that it would kill...

¶ *"What does anyone gain from all their labors at which they toil under the sun?"*

¶ *"I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards."*

¶ *"Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor. If either of them falls down, one can help the other up."*

¶ *"A dream comes when there are many cares, and many words mark the speech of a fool."*

¶ *"Again I looked and saw all the oppression that was taking place under the sun: I saw the tears of the oppressed, and they have no comforter; power was on the side of their oppressors."*

Riding down Eden avenue on her vintage classic bicycle, in Dottie, her brown and cream colored polka-dotted ankle-length dress, Lynnette made plans to visit a nearby mall. Riding in a long dress proved to be difficult, but she discovered a workaround which allowed this.

She locked her classic inside a parking garage, in lot 5A; her chain combination number is 1-299-73-111, just incase you ever needed to borrow it. She walked into several stores, hearing Michael Jackson's *Heal The World*, and then Travis Bickle's *III*, both songs she loved, over the intercom, and then went on to examine expensive perfumes, dresses, and jewelry, et cetera, none of which, though, she intended to buy.

Now this is not to indicate that Lynnette is poor, and that she can only afford such items from a second-hand store or from a yard sale, but much moreso to forebode a future event.

Eventually she left the mall, purchasing a pair of rose gloves, and proceeded to her lover's parents' home, where she then tended a garden which needed to be weeded. Along the way, near the home, she found a random blonde wig with red highlights, which she

put in her bicycle's basket.

Afterwards, she used her gray key on the silver doorknob to enter her lover's parents' home, hearing the sound chimes as she entered the residence. She then removed a piece of head-scarf cloth, which was wrapped and knotted into a bow around her hair to keep her hair in place, and then tried on the wig. "Ooh lala," she said, raising an eyebrow, and she admired herself in the reflective mirror.

Bradley Chipper, along with a fan, stood in a studio room as Chipper waited for the interviewer to return. "No, no, that was 79 post 47," he corrected the fan. They had been discussing the famous controversial play that occurred in the seventh week of the regular season, a game that improved the home team to 4-3, and which many still argue was a game that needed an asterisk next to it. It was the first time in nine seasons that they were able to achieve a winning record within seven games.

"Leadership is the most important thing in football. In anything really. You have to show commitment to your teammates and be able to inspire others," said Reggie, "I don't care how good you are, if you don't have that you won't win."

The strangest game of the season would be played in week seven, in a game which would come down to the very last play.

Chipper had been sidelined early in the fourth quarter due to a concussion and would not return, Sammy Nordstrom taking over at the quarterback position. The home team, by then, was already leading the opponent 37 to 33, and required them to at least score a touchdown to extend the game.

"Kevin was getting burned all game," said Reggie, "and a part of me was glad because he was such a cocky *****. Someone needed to humble his ***. He was making bad decisions, jumping routes, everything he shouldn't have been doing. What was worst was the fact that he would blame his mistakes on the cornerbacks, or anyone he could find really. With commitment, you don't magnify the faults in others, you help them to improve, you know? He had none of that."

Kevin Faulkner was let off the hook in the final play of the game; the opponent had been driving down the field and was now on the nine-yard line with seventeen seconds left in the game, no timeouts, fourth down. On the fourth down, a pass was thrown towards the middle of the endzone and was briefly caught by a player from the opposing team, though, going down to the ground, the ball seemed to bobble and was called incomplete.

The play was, of course, reviewed, and eventually stood to end the game, however, later reviewings of the play would be deemed a completed catch by the league's office of officiating.

"He got burned on that last play, too," said Reggie, "but we were lucky enough to

walk away with a win.”

“We had a late bye that year, I think it was week twelve or thirteen. It was the one week I didn't have to hear Kevin's mouth out on the field during a game,” laughed Chipper.

On the television now was an old photograph of Henry Clayton, accompanied by a staffmate, David Croft, and in the background played an old audiotape with his voice, which was filled with static and white noise, “...If you are truly committed to something, I think... I think if you are truly committed, you will let it drive you into the ground...”

“What do you want?” “Excuse me?” “I said why are you calling me, idiot?” “How did you know it was me?” “It says your name now.” “Oh...” “Why are you calling? You live twenty feet away.” “I'm not at home, idiot.” “I'm at the lake... Just drove here from your house...” “Kids are with Emily?” “Yes.” “Watching the waves roll in under the stars and the night sky as I hear the sound of your voice... It's real romantic at night...” “That sounds lovely...” “It is, idiot.” “Alright, well, I'll let you watch your pearl stars and sapphire waves then.” “No...” “No what?” “...No.” “Yes, I know no, but no what?” “I missed you today.” “I wish you were here with me, so I could show you this beautiful lake...” “There's absolutely no one else here tonight.” “That's because most people aren't crazy.” “Shut up.” “I act like I'm not shy but I am. Just not with you... Because I...” “...Because you understand me, and know who I am, and I don't have to explain myself all the time, and you know everything about me, and you don't judge me, and I don't think I could have a connection like this with anyone else... I want you to know that I am committed to you, and I will always be loyal and faithful to you...” “You turned my dream for life and love into a reality that I could touch...”

PAGE 6 OF 8, "THE EIGHT DREAMS"

2:1:2:18

“AND the chief priests and the scribes heard it and were seeking a way to destroy him, for they feared him, because all the crowd was astonished at his teaching.” This was an epigraph written on a tombstone found in over a hundred and fifty dreams. Every once in a while I'll browse through the graveyard looking for some kind of memory.

“Where's your telephone?,” asked Tao. “It's under the couch,” answered Jack. Tao, a bit confused, found the telephone and made the call, and soon after Jack met him in the living room. Before they left the apartment, Jack grabbed a small brown-paper bag of garbage to throw away on their way out.

In the hallway of the second floor, Jack stopped Tao and said, “Hey, do me a favor will yah, throw out my garbage for me.” Tao paused for a moment, again confused, and then responded with a laugh and began to walk way.

“Come on, it's just down the hall,” Jack insisted. Tao looked back, and then walked back, saying “Give me two bucks, I'll do it for two bucks.” “I'll give you fifty cents,” Jack negotiated, though Tao persistently refused.

Seeing no deal would ever be met, Jack placed the bag of garbage in front of the narrator's door, knocking twice, and soon after he quickly exited through the back door of the apartment building with Tao.

I bet you wouldn't believe me if I told you I was afraid of the dark when I was a child. This is true, I couldn't sleep without the lights being on. Something about the darkness is unappealing to the natural human mind, perhaps because in the dark one cannot see, this being a metaphor in the sense that people fear what they cannot understand or lack knowledge of. It's also funny, because today I am most comfortable in the darkness. I cannot sleep with the lights being on, not because I am afraid of wisdom and knowledge, I am no longer speaking metaphorically; it's just that a light can be very distracting at times.

I hear someone knock on my door and prepare to answer it. When I look through the peephole I see no one, so I open the door to find a bag sitting on the ground. I look around, and after seeing no one, I take the bag that had been secretly left for me by an unknown and mysterious person.

When I go through the contents of the bag, I find empty containers that perhaps once housed different types of foods, but I cannot comprehend the meaning behind it all. Regardless, I place the bag in a safe location to examine later.

Sixth year, September 5th, I had this dream. Her name was Calu. Simply put, she had received one of Roach's notes and it changed her life dramatically.

Roach was gone now, though, and I sat in her apartment and told her all about him. What he was like and why he was the way that he was. Somehow, we began to talk about all the institutions of the world and their role on both society and the development of the human mind.

There is a theory, or hypothesis, rather, that life exists throughout the universe and can be distributed by meteoroids, asteroids, comets, and planetoids. Someone speculated that all life on Earth had actually come in this way; a form of life that could survive the effects of space occupied a spacebody and eventually crash landed onto Earth where after much time, it would evolve.

LUCA, which is an acronym for “last universal common ancestor,” is “the most recent organism from which all organisms now living on Earth have a common descent.” That is to say, all life on Earth, Lynne's flowers, her children, me, you, the stupid dog who is always chasing the stupid cat, we are all derived from this one single-celled organism that perhaps lived billions of years ago and evolved into many different routes.

Each species developed accordingly, based on its environment. This same concept can be found in sociology and many different types of institutions.

Prostitutes, drug dealers, politicians, rapists, murderers, we often label them as bad people, but often times it is the society or institution that they inherit that produces their “bad” actions and/or behavior, and the way they develop, the same way Earth's atmosphere played a role in how those first cells would develop. Human weaknesses like corruption and greed are always part of the chain, too.

You combine a group of educated people, and you versus it with a group of uneducated people, and the people within their respective groups will often have the same background. This is common sense. It's no wonder politicians must behave the way they behave; their system governs them, and allows them only to proceed in one way. We are all no more or less a product of our environment.

Roach's notes had now caused a rift in the local town, and people were breaking away from that notion. In a way, they were also corrupting his message. Destroying his message, and at the same time destroying him, what he stood for.

The church and the state were attacked by citizens and were bombed. Outside of the buildings that weren't bombed, people stood with picket signs. These signs are what the notes were turning into, small pieces of paper into large poster card. “Sic semper evellō mortem tyrannīs,” one of them read in red.

This was one of the dreams that I woke up gasping for air, because it was so intense. Seeing the bodies blown up alive, the hate that ran in the streets. Nightmares. Killings. Strange faces. I don't really believe a word anyone tells me anymore; I have become a skeptic because I saw how easy it was to turn a truth into a lie. Something silver into

carbon. These people, they wanted to set fire to everything and watch it all burn.

“One more, last one,” I said to Dave, and he responded with a disappointed face. He had stolen once again from Publiks and I was giving out disciplinary action. I watched and timed him as he ran to the end of the block and then back to me within an allotted amount of time. He barely made it, and gasping for air, sweat pouring down his face, he declared, “I will never steal again, please.”

Looking above him and in the distance I first saw Sara, riding her bike, and soon after followed Lynne, riding her bicycle, traveling towards us. As they came closer, I saw Lynne begin to wave at a nearby pedestrian, who I eventually could see was the woman that Jack had previously attempted romancing. The lady smiled and waved back.

Lynne was wearing Rare Candy, the mostly yellow and partially green dress that cut just above her knees and was sleeveless, showing a bit of her shoulders. Sara, on the same hand, too bore dual colors; her new shirt was white and contained several red butterflies, and it was just like her mother to return the butterfly-favor.

They both came to a slow stop in front of us, and Lynne, after seeing the sadistic torture I put her son through, commented to her son, “I told you he's crazy...”

Time passed, and after I made fun of Lynne for riding that bike around, she got off her bicycle and kicked the stand, then took off her backpack and removed a blonde wig from it. She walked up to me and placed it on my head, adjusting it accordingly, and soon after, all three began to laugh.

“What are you laughing at? You want to run some more?,” I threatened, and he went silent. I was somewhat frustrated from the laughter, which caused me to flick the blonde hair on my shoulders backwards, and this sent Lynnette into convulsive laughter. “Man, I will give you...,” she searched into her pockets, “...fifty-cents if you ride my bike around the block in that wig.” I thought for a moment. “I'll do it for two bucks.” She couldn't find any more money, so instead she bargained that if I took on the task, she would cook whatever I insisted for dinner for a complete straight week.”

I looked at her bicycle, then asked if there was a way I could remove the front basket, which she replied to, “You have to ride it as is, with that wig.” Sara cut in, “And you can't ride it too fast, either.” When Dave also tried to say something, I turned around and immediately told him to shut up.

As I took the bike from her, I noticed the fading circlly blotches of ice blue nail polish on her fingertips. I put my leg over the seat and footed the pedaled, then began to ride as they all laughed.

It really wasn't that embarrassing, seeing as there were no pedestrians and very few cars driving by. I turned at the corner of the block and proceeded coolly, until in the distance I recognized a tenant from my apartment building walking down the sidewalk I

was riding on. It was the Filipino mother of the Korean son who stole my headphones months earlier.

Normally I wouldn't care if she'd seen me, but I already gave her the bad impression that I liked kids and wanted to do nasty things to them. My current appearance would not rectify the impression.

I ditched the bike and hid in a nearby bush and watched as she walked towards me. Once near me, she let out a horrifying and abrupt sneeze, which led to the aftermath of her having a little bit of snot coming out of her nose, which she quickly wiped away with her bare hands.

Once she was gone, I got back on the bike and rode as fast as I could around the block and soon I was back on the sidewalk that led me back to the three idiots in my life. Returning, I watched them as they all laughed, and though I was still far away, their laughs were very audible. "She won't be laughing after I slash her tires," I thought to myself.

I stopped in front of Lynne and demanded her to give me my money, and she handed over the fifty-cents with a perplexed gaiety.

The four of us entered the building, Dave and Sara going upstairs, Lynne and I going downstairs into the basement with the bicycles.

She chained together her bicycle with Sara's and Dave's, and as we walked back towards the basement door she jumped onto my back. Eventually the attack turned into a piggyback ride, and feeling her warm thighs press against my cold forearms, she whispered something into my ear, "I have a surprise for you next week." After these words, she pressed the side of her head onto the side of mine and began to rub the sides of our faces together. It was kind of weird, like an animal rubbing against you and disregarding any sociological norms established by society.

I piggybacked her up the first flight of stairs, then the second, and finally she got off. She walked in front of me and told me it was my turn. I laughed, but she insisted. "Are you sure you can carry me? If you fall..."

I got on her back and as she walked towards her apartment door we wobbled the whole way there. Fearing for my life I got off just before the door, surprised that I didn't completely crush her.

After being in her house for ten minutes, I noticed that in the kitchen she had popped a few pills. I remarked to her that I had never seen her take any medicine, and she confided to me that she sometimes still feels pain in her affected leg. It comes and goes.

"Are you sleeping here tonight?," she asked me in an innocent and lovely fashion. I later found myself in her bedroom, staring at her mirror. She had taken off her dress and her appearance was that simply of a dark green camisole and light green boyshorts.

She came up behind me, wrapped her arms around me, hugging me from behind as we both stared at our reflection in the mirror. “Luca,” I said outloud. She looked at me in the mirror and asked, “What?” I looked at her in the mirror as well, but didn't reply immediately. I simply smiled at her. She had no idea what I was talking about, but she smiled back.

For the first time, I think, I took her hand and interlocked it into mine, which surprised her. I also saw the smile on her face disappear, because things were getting serious between us. “Luca better not be some other woman,” she said. I laughed, which made her laugh.

I turned around to face her, letting go of her hand but her arms still around me. She looked up at me with anticipation in her eyes, and at once I placed my arms around her rubbing her back. Still looking up at me, I leaned forward to kiss her on her nose. I pulled back and looked at her once more, she was caught in a web and paralyzed.

At this point I grabbed the back of her head and slammed it into my chest and speaking in a quick and sinister voice I said “Lynnette where had you been all of my life? You traveled from deep outerspace on a comet and crash landed into my life my soul my heart. You survived in harsh dangerous deadly bad environments and grew into a beautiful rose. A delicately beautiful rose for only my eyes to see!” I soon after heard Dave yell from across the apartment, telling me to shut up. I was only trying to romance his lovely mother.

She forced her head from my firm grip to look at me, somewhat in neck pain, then said, “What have you been smoking, and why didn't you give me any?”

“...Former city homicide detective Mya Jackson was wounded yesterday night during a large drug seizure. Jackson, who now serves the narcotics department, was shot twice on the side of the abdomen and was in critical condition, but she is now expected to survive her injuries...”

Pulling into the parking lot of South Kennedy Elementary School, Karuna turned off her radio and entered the public city school.

Dave and Sara gave their permission slips and the required eight dollars per entry to the zoo to their teacher, Karuna, who asked them if they were excited for the field trip they would be going on today.

The three teachers, along with six chaperones, monitored the dual classroom as they explored the large local zoo. There was much to discover, many genus of animals and plants, all possessing a different numerator but yet sharing a common denominator.

Karuna, wearing a red bindi for tradition, was walking with Dave and exploring several insect charts when she asked him what his favorite bug was. He replied, saying it was the praying mantis.

A few yards away was Sara and Pattie, who were discussing parenthood. “I have two dads,” Sara told Pattie, “but my dads don't live with me.” Pattie, confused, then asked, “Do you have two moms, too?” “No, only one.” “How many dads do you have?,” Sara asked. “I don't have any,” Pattie replied with sadness, “Can I have one of your dads?” Sara thought for a moment, and replied, “Sure, but I have to ask him first.”

Soon after they both walked past a set of caterpillars, which reminded them of the caterpillar they had in their own classroom. They began to read documentation which discussed metamorphosis, and the wonderful world of biology and terrestrial life was at their fingertips.

On the whiteboard, Mr. Paxton writes in red marker the word “purity,” and then underlines this word and underneath it writes the word “love.” He turns around and begins to speak to his class, “When you see these two words, which character do they remind you of?” “...Lynne,” the class says in unison with uncertainty.

“Now you see how a couple of words brought to mind the same character for all of you? That's called symbolism. Attaching an idea or meaning, et cetera, to an object to give it a higher sense, this will give said object greater depth, especially when you take the time to analyze the object itself and stop looking at it literally. Objects in a story can also have greater representation, or I mean, they are interchangeable with other objects or ideals in the story. I think almost every character in *Anthology Complex* is a symbol or metaphor for something else, so today, we will be learning about identifying symbols by using Lynne as our case study,” Paxton concluded.

Elliot, who was somewhat not paying attention, was alarmed when Paxton called on him to answer a question. “Elliot, based on what we've read, which object is best associated with Lynne?” Elliot thought for a moment, then answered, “Her yellow dress?”

“That's a good answer, but there's a better one,” Paxton suggested. Elliot continued to think, and after about ten seconds, Paxton made answering the question available to the entire class. “What do we know about her?,” he asked the class, “She's a gardener, right?”

“A flower,” a student said hesitantly. Scanning the room, Paxton saw that it was Chris who had answered, and thereupon told Chris that this was the answer he was looking for.

“An author will sometimes use subtle adjectives or hints and give you clues as to what they are trying to convey, so I want you guys to give me some examples that support Chris's claim that Lynne is supposed to symbolize a flower.”

When Paxton saw that no one had any examples, he decided to give them a freebie to get things started. “Okay, I'll help you guys out,” Paxton said, then began to draw a limp flower on the whiteboard with a green marker.

“She be limp!,” cried out a student in the back. He turned around and pointed the

marker at the student, and saw that it was Karen, “That is exactly right. Like her zinnias, dying flowers limp. Anyone got any others?”

A momentarily silence, and then a student said outloud, “She smile too damn much.” All of the class as well as Paxton broke out into short laughter. When he saw that it was Latasha who was speaking, he smiled and said that there was actually some truth to that answer, but wanted to hear Latasha's explanation.

“Flowers suppose to make people happy and shit. Like make 'em feel better because they look pretty,” Latasha answered. “Of course. Do you guys remember what Sarah gave to Lynne on Mother's Day? It was a drawing of a smiling flower that she named 'Happy Flower,' and in chapter nine, the narrator says a smile 'grows' onto Lynne's face, as if a smile was growing like a flower on her face, and of course, what is Lynne doing at the time?” “Gardening,” the whole class quickly answers once again in unison, this time without uncertainty.

“Yo Mr. P, if Lynne is a flower, you think her missing a foot could mean like a flower missing a petal?,” asked Carson. Paxton's eyes squinted, this was something he had never thought of before. “Definitely, but do you have any references to back that claim up?” Carson shook his head. “Well, you have your book in front of you, read through it and maybe you'll find something.”

Becca raises her hand and Paxton points to her. “He compares her to a green rose,” she finishes. Paxton asks Becca to explain what she means. “Well, I mean, he calls her a 'beautiful sight,' and then he says how she told him that green roses are a beautiful thing to see. And then he says that she was pretty to look at and nice to smell, like she is a rose. And I don't know about this one, but green roses are supposed to be rare, so maybe he wants to say that she is a rare flower?,” Becca concluded.

Paxton looked at Becca, telling her that her interpretation of the green rose passage was excellent, and then asked the class, “Show of hands, how many have actually smelled a rose?” No one raised their hand.

“To be honest I haven't either, however not all roses smell nice and not all roses look pretty,” he suggested, “like her zinnias, some roses die off. This gives Lynne depth, and is an image of the fact that throughout the book, she is sometimes happy, and she is sometimes sad, she is sometimes pretty, and she is sometimes ugly. This gives us the impression that like a flower in the real world, she can die. She can-” Paxton was cut off.

“Yo P I found it!,” Carson yelled. Paxton looked at Carson as he began to recite text, “I'm leaving my apartment building and I notice the flowers. They are growing but they look funny now, as if they are missing something. I wonder if Lynne planted them right,” Carson read.

Paxton thought about it then shook his head, then was surprised by a student who sat

in the corner of the room who had not said a single word all year, “I think he's right... My mom had breast cancer and they cut off both of them. But even though she is missing parts of her body, he still likes her, and he still thinks that she is beautiful. I can relate to that because my mom has been so strong since her surgery and she is even more beautiful to me for that. Just because she's missing something that everyone else has doesn't make her ugly, it just makes her different. Like unique... I think that's why he likes her.”

For some time, the class went on like this. Students talked about the insecurities that either they themselves had or insecurities in the people that they knew. These insecurities ranged from mental to physical, body and mind, and like many important issues, followed some of the students into their homes where they discussed these matters with their family.

After the bell, Mr. Paxton cleaned his classroom, and while doing this, saw that something had been carved into a desk. “fuck critical thinking,” it wrote. Despite this, Paxton was satisfied, for he knew his students were learning and was astonished at their progress.

Chapter 19

LONELYLILLIES

2:1:2:19

LOVELY, lovely, lovely Lynnette; life, love, la little lady looked laced like le lonely lily leafing launderette.

These were the words that passed through my mind after opening the door to see her standing there, la madame en ivoire, or, the lady in ivory. Beautified, smiling, wearing her dress and smelling like a flower; a modest amount of make-up and heels that made her tower.

“Why aren't you dressed?” “I am dressed.” “You're not wearing that.” I looked down at my clothes and couldn't see the issue. “You're wearing the suit I found in your house,” she demanded. I walked away, muttering under my breath, “Yeah well, you're gonna have to dress me then.”

I sat down on my couch as she walked into my bedroom, searching for the suit and tie she gave me earlier. She later came out with it, holding a gray tie she had specifically bought for me.

“Why are you wearing make-up?” “I'm wearing it for you!” “Well I'm not wearing any make-up.” She laughed. She walked towards me, set the suit and tie on the couch beside me, then removed her heels and kneeled down in front of me. She then began tugging at one of my socks, and in surprise I asked, “What the hell are you doing?”

The sock came off completely and she set it aside, then began tugging at my other foot. I realized she had taken my joke seriously, and had plans to undress me and then dress me into the proper attire.

“Raise and extend your legs, please,” she demanded, and as I raised them, I laughed, telling her she was pathetic. She pulled away, eventually removing my pants. “Raise your arms,” and she quickly took off my shirt. Now half naked, I asked her if she was going to be taking me to Lovers' Lane. “Do you want me to get another book?” she asked.

She now began putting on the dress shirt, and as she buttoned it for me, I asked her to move her head so I could get a glass of nearby milk. She moved her head and I grabbed the glass and began to take thirst-quenching sips. She laughed softly at every sip, knowing that what was going on right now must have been the strangest thing ever to happen in this town.

She now began putting on the dress pants. “Stand up,” she demanded when they were nearly fully on, and I stood up as she raised them to their maximum. The both of us laughing, she began to tuck in my shirt.

She pushed me backwards and I fell back onto the couch, sitting as I had been before, and she found a pair of socks and once again was kneeling in front of me. “I don't want

those socks, I want the other ones,” I said. She got back up and went to get the other socks and finally placed them on me. “Thank you,” I said. “You’re welcome,” she responded.

I stood up and she began to tie my tie. “It’s been a while,” she said, which is why it took her an extended period of time to finish tying it. As she moved me around slightly, I examined her face. “I like the way you do your make-up,” I said. She smiled.

Her make-up was a mask, or maybe a secret. It was painted on by an artist, perhaps to mimic nature. Her make-up fitted her, the same way she fitted into dresses; it was done simply but it told me everything I needed to know about her. I realized then that women wore dresses and perfume and make-up to mimic a flower, the same way our lives mimic the repetition of the Sun, causing day and night.

Personally, and I’ll be honest, I hate seeing people happy, but there are some people who have been through so much that they deserve to be happy, if even for a day, I guess.

I continued to look down at her as she tied my tie, and suddenly a smile formed onto her face. She smiled because she knew I was staring at her, which is why it was one of her simile smiles. “I really like when you do that,” this is what she said after I kissed her on her nose. “I love all the things about us that are just between us,” she finished.

Before we left the apartment to go to her car, she turned her back to me and as I fixed a silver leather belt around her waistline.

“Where are you taking me?,” I asked her as we drove down a night street. “I told you, it’s a super secret surprise,” she stated.

My thumb twitched. Stopped at a red light, I whiffed in a large amount of air through my nose and smelled the sweet aroma that came from her body; soft butterfly perfume. Her pale dress made her pale ember; she was the corniest person I’ve ever known, but she was my corn. That sounds nasty.

She was lovely in lavender; charming in crimson; joyful in jade; amazing in azure; distinguished in daffodil; gracious in grapefruit. She was pretty in pink.

Suddenly she began to laugh softly, she glanced at me still laughing then returned her eyes to the road before her, and then began to speak in the same accent she used way back during the Lynnewalk, “Yu knoe, beck en my 'ome coontree,” she laughed outloud, “dey caul me 'Duckter Seilverhstein,' because I keek-eh dey bawl to maek goal.” Her speech sped up, “Yu know dat gaem, I tink here it is caul'd teh 'sucker', yess?”

“What?,” I laughed. “It deis dey gaem yu play, yu knoe, dey sucker, with yu feet, end yu keek-eh dey bawl, yu knoe?” I laughed again, “Do you mean soccer?” “Yess! Teh socker, yu knoe wat I tulk 'bout. Beck en my 'ome coontree, dat eis why dey caul me 'Duckter Seilverhstein,' 'cause I keek-eh dey bawl to maek dey goal.” I began laughing harder because she was being such an idiot, “Oh, that is pretty cool, when did you move

to America?" She thought for a moment, "Weil, my famulie, yu knoe dat word, 'famulie?'" "Yes, I know the word family." "Weil my famulie," she let out a small laugh, "dey cum for meny reeson, we hav litel beybeh..." She paused, and then began laughing to the point that she couldn't speak and the joke was over, "Okay, I'm done, I can't think of anything else," she said. I laughed with her, not because it was funny but because it was entirely silly.

A minute or two after, I told her something about her personality, "You laugh for no reason sometimes. I don't think you notice it because they seem like nervous laughs." She didn't answer, but I continued. "You laugh before and after your own jokes, and actually the very first time I met you, you laughed consistently." She looked at me with a straight face now, and said, "Maybe I'm deranged..."

And finally, in the darkness of the night, we arrived to our destination. When I looked outside, I saw my parents' home, and wondered why we were here of all places.

As I exited the vehicle, I looked into the backyard and could see the towering tree house. The entryway into it was covered with a type of cloth and faintly I could see an ember glow in it, and in the yard, I saw a mysty gnid dew.

She rounded the vehicle and walking past me, she grabbed my hand and led me through the dark yard. Halfway through the mist, our arms extended but connected, she looked back at me and dimpled, cheeked; we were now right in front of the tree.

She let go of my hand and stood there, thinking, a confused look on what seemed to be a childish face. "Wait, let's go back," she insisted.

When we got back to the area of the car, she began to speak. "I think if you carry me across the yard it would be more romantic," she proposed. "Why?," I asked. She gave me a straight face, and begrudgingly, I sighed and waved her in.

Sliding my left arm down the backside of her body and placing it under her legs, I swept her into the air and began to carry her through the dark yard as she locked one arm around my neck and placed the other on my shoulder. "Yes, this must be the place," she smiled, and gently placed her forehead on the side of my neck.

We were again in front of the tree, and I let her down. She climbed up first and I followed, and the moment she lifted up the soft fabric in the entryway I could hear the soft piano music being played in the treehouse, but it wasn't until I entered after her that I saw just exactly what she had planned.

The inside was furnished with all different types of flowers around the perimeter and romantically lit by several candles. The soft music made well for the vision.

Eventually, she told me that the flowers were collected from her various gardens, this house's garden, the apartment's garden, her work's garden, and perhaps, she may have insinuated that she stole some from other places as well. Fucking garden thief.

Looking at the ground, I saw a dinner of the rich disguised for the poor. In between the cups and plates and silverware, there stood two lonely peace lilies who occupied the same vase.

“Will you marry me?,” she asked, and when I looked to her I see that she is on one knee. I told her to shut up, and she went on to declare that it was at least worth a shot.

“I had to clean up the whole thing before I did this, because our kids made a mess in here,” she said. I looked at her again, and saw the type of delusion you see in people who have an unobtainable dream. “It’s wonderful,” I told her, “very pretty, just like you.” She smiled.

We both sat down after taking off our heels and dress shoes, Indian style, on circle-cloths and I noted that the glassless window in the wall was also covered by a soft curtain fabric, as if to conceal and obscure whatever was going on in here.

I grabbed my plastic cup to see what was inside, and saw something purple. I take a sip to find it is grape juice. Excellent.

“I take it these two lilies are a symbolic metaphor of our relationship,” I asked her. “Yes,” she replied, “I am a loner lily, you are a loner lily, and together we are loner lilies, and will be together forever (and ever). Pure of heart, break the bread,” she finished confidently.

We stopped talking for about a minute which gave us time to eat and drink, but she started up again. “...Almost exactly one year ago, David asked me if we would ever have to leave you the same way we left Silvio. It was a few days before our trip, right after I told them about it.” I chewed, and she continued. “...I thought about the question all night, and it made me realize that I was in a relationship with you, and that the four of us were a family, albeit a strange one.” After a moment she continued. “...So, I guess what I’m trying to say is, I did all of this, the flowers, the dinner, the curtains, because I see this as our anniversary. I’m not sure when we became involved, but I thought maybe around this time of the year, in fall, while it’s windy and the leaves are changing colors, we could say we became partners.”

Here inside this quiet and avowal room, there was direction. I stared at Lynne, she stared at me, and finally I said simply and directly, “...I need you, and I’m not ashamed to admit it.”

I said this because, one, it was how I truly felt, and two, because they were words she needed to hear, especially tonight. Telling her that I needed her must have opened up something inside of her, knowing that she was not just wanted but needed, because immediately she replied, leaning forward and putting her hand on the top of mine.

“I know you’re troubled, I am too, but the important thing is that we survived, and now we have a life together. I wouldn’t have gotten here without you,” she said.

I told her that I wouldn't have been where I am now without her either, and that I was happy, that she made me happy. She smiled at this. I knew now that there were only three words she wanted to say right then and there, and I knew there were only three words she wanted to hear back from me. That if this exchange had been made, there would be fireworks in the air and she could die happily. But I didn't tell her, and the exchange was not made. "You're so good to me, so nice to me," this is all that was said and was from her.

I thought about the two of us celebrating our anniversary in fall, and the simple fact that the fall was when nature began to die.

"I tried to think of the most romantic place I could think of, and I figured this was the best place considering what we experienced here earlier in the year. This treehouse is basically our spot."

I looked to my left after she said that and noticed an airbed, and eventually asked her what it was for. "I want to sleep with you here tonight and talk about everything." At some point, romanticism has to be considered a disease, or at least some type of condition.

The tune on the radio changed, still a soft melodic song. Another silent eating session that would last this time five minutes, and breaking the silence I decided to play a game with her. Not because these moments with her were dull, because they weren't, but rather it seemed to me that she may have thought the long pause in speech was an implication of me being bored.

"Je voudrais vous emmener a la Lune," I said in a frenched accent. She looked up from her plate with a confused but interested face, "You know French?," she asked. "I know as much as the next person." "Oh, what does that mean?" "I said I would like to take you to the Moon." She smiled, paused, thought for a moment, then replied, "Oui oui," in a laughing frenched accent, and I now knew she wanted to play.

I continued in the accent, but spoke mostly in English, "Virst, I would like to get to know you... Vat is your name, belle fille?" She replied in her normal voice, "My name is Lynnette, but you can call me Lynne," she said, then stuck out her hand, "pleased to meet you."

I took her hand and raised it up to my mouth, kissing it once, "This is a very prettie name," and as I pulled her in closer to me, I kissed her up and down her arm, "Mademoiselle, mon cherie," I looked up at her in the corner of my eye, "Telle me, my ladie, is eit okay to rub yo' feete?" She giggled, like a little girl, saying "We only just met, but okay."

As I moved the dinnerware out of the way she asked me what "belle fille" meant, "beautiful girl." Finished, she laid her legs out and placed one of them onto my lap,

which was her non-silver side. First I tickled her foot, but she warned me to stop as I was supposed to be giving her a massage.

And so like the past, I slid my hand down her foot and began the massage with both of my hands. “Ooh lala,” I remarked, as I went further towards her knee, and at some non-silver hour I raised her leg to kiss it, “Tout bon,” I suggested. She looked at me as if I were a maniac. “What is 'mon cherie,'?”, she asked, “My sweetheart.”

Just then an evil wind intruded into the treehouse, blew out all the candles, and then escaped through the curtained window. Fortunately for Lynne, she had matches and re-lit the room.

I took off my suit jacket, and when she sat back down, she looked at me smiling, “Do you remember our first date?” I thought about it. “When we watched that terrible movie in my apartment?,” I asked.

She shook her head, grinning almost like a villain. “It was that day we gardened together and got to know each other,” she said. She admitted to me that she wasn't exactly the type of person who asked another person to go out on a date, that she was more a label-less person who slowly transitioned into relationships. I had never thought about it that way, but I was exactly the same.

“To me, atleast, that was our first date. Do you remember our second?,” she asked. I thought about it longer this time. Using her logic, I answered, “When we went to the library?”

She shook her head again, “After the storm, when we rode around town looking at fallen trees during a blackout.” “But it's not like we agreed, so how can those be dates?” “It doesn't matter... If you were a woman you would understand.” “So you're saying anytime we are together, it's a date?” “If the circumstances are correct, yes. For example, while the library wasn't our second date, it was indeed a date, because of the heavy snowfall.” I tried to speak but she cut me off, “Another example,” she continued, “The gardening was a date because flowers were involved.”

“The moments after the storm were a date because we were adventuring to music in a dark town. Our roadtrip was an obvious extended date because we held hands looking at the Sun. The night you kicked me out of your apartment was a date nonetheless because we danced and I saw the Moon. The night at your home was a date because we both fell asleep watching old sitcoms. Do you understand now, the circumstances create the date.”

“...You remember when we finally beat Streets of Rage?,” I asked. “That was one of my favorite dates,” she replied.

A jazz song began to play on the radio, and she spoke. “I hope thirty years from now you will remember this as our first truly romantic date.” “This is not a romantic date, I don't go on romantic dates.” She rolled her eyes at me, and again began taking in that

pearly romantic tone.

“This is the first time I have ever actually felt truly beautiful out on a date.” “Stop saying that word.” “What word.” “You know which one.” “There's a whole world inside me that I want to show you. An entire universe, living and breathing with vibrant energy. I'm going to be saying things like this all night so get used to it.” I shrugged.

“Tell me, my dear, have you ever been truly in love?” she asked, “I think I have, because this is the first time I have ever truly beautified myself for another person,” she finished. This was going to be a long night, and yet the night got even longer when she got up, went to her secret garden, and from the back removed a red rose, then a black rose.

“Two years ago I gave you a purple rose, because you mean so much to me. The next year, you gave me a painted yellow rose, because I meant something to you, this year I am going to continue the tradition with these two roses, because I believe we have both ended previous lives to start new lives, and ended previous romances to start a new romance. I know it's late, but here you go,” and she handed me the roses.

As she handed me the roses, I noticed her nail polish; silver in color because she now embraced her identity.

The moment she sat back down, she placed her legs on my lap once more and immediately proceeded to ask me a question, and her tone suggested she was waiting to ask me this all night. “So which number am I? Number twenty?” “Twenty?” “I mean how many girls have come before me?” I laughed and told her she was only number two.

“So Maria was your only other relationship?” “Yes, that's what I said didn't I?” Though she tried to hide it, I could tell this pleased her, as I was also number two for her. There is something about being someone's first and last, someone's only, but there is also something about starting life over with a second.

“Did you go to prom?” she blurted. I laughed, “What the fuck do you think?” “Sorry, stupid question. I went with Silvio, and the more I think about it, dancing to that music, I so badly wished it could have been you instead.” As she was speaking a mosquito came and bit me. I slapped it away. “Sorry, I didn't think about bugs,” she said.

A moment of silence came into the room, and maybe after three minutes, I tilted my head back onto the wall, rubbing her feet, looking at her and smiling and she smiling back. “You know,” I said, “When I first met you, I felt I had strange feelings for you, but on the contrary, it's you who has stranger feelings for me.” “What kind of feelings?” “I knew I liked you, I just didn't know why...”

She paused. “...Back in school they told me that I have emotional issues,” she laughed. “They told me I have those too, what kind do you have?” We both erupted into laughter, “I think it's just something with my brain, it races I guess,” she told me. “But

I'm emotional now and I feel good. I feel happy, because I know you don't normally do things like this, so thank you for doing it with me. It really makes me happy." I knew she was happy because she didn't hide behind a fake smile anymore. No longer a limping flower, but standing up strong and beautiful, soft but sometimes tough, pretty but sometimes gross.

She stood up and looked at me. "What?" "You're supposed to stand up if I stand up." "Why would I stand up, I'm not going anywhere." She rubbed her hand on the top of my head as she walked past me and left the treehouse to go use the bathroom inside the home.

Alone, I had time to think. I stood up to stretch my legs and walked a bit around the treehouse. Candles and flowers that illustrated a timeless romance. Blowing curtains that turned touchy feely nights into dreams. We were the beautiful and the damned, and I contemplated getting out of this treehouse and running far away because she's fucking crazy.

I went up to an orange flower to smell it, and I have to say it smelled a bit like death. This was somewhat a metaphor for our relationship; we are both, overall, pathetic people. She doesn't have an education, I don't remember the last time I had a job. She's willing to forgo a normal healthy relationship with someone else for an unconventional relationship with me, and even though I know I can't give her every thing she needs, there's the selfish part of me that won't let her go. Most likely, if I told her how pathetic we were, her reply would probably be something along the lines "but we are pathetic together," which would make us even more pathetic.

The curtains were raised and she was back into my life, holding a small container. She told me it was dessert, and we sat down to eat it. At one point a drop of it landed on her dress, so she wiped it off with her finger and licked it. Nasty.

The next event this night was the singing of some of her newly written poetry. This may have been now the third time she's sang to me, and the third time truly was a charm, probably because she was more comfortable with it.

The poem, despite the circumstances, was a very sad love song about an inevitable break-up. She at first decided to call it "Faded Memories," but then changed the name to "A Link To The Past," saying it suited the mood of the words much better.

I told her that her singing was lovely, but she knew I was only being polite. After this, she got up and went around to the secret garden again, and this time she did not take out roses but instead took a hidden gift wrapped in brown paper, brought it to me, and told me to open it.

I immediately knew that it was a painting of some sort, and once it was fully opened, I saw that it was a painting of King Solomon, wearing a red and white robe and

wandering through a desert. It was signed by her, so I didn't have to ask her if she painted it herself, and I noticed that it was in a different style than her other paintings. It was entirely in shades of red and white. Above her name were the words "What has been will be again."

"I remember you told me Solomon had a big influence on your life," she said, "I wanted to pay you back for Rosa." "You remember that?," I asked, because honestly I didn't. "I am a woman, I remember everything."

I must have been lost in it, I stared at it for at least ten minutes, completely forgetting she was even there, which was why I didn't realize she had moved directly to my side to see what it was I was so fascinated by. Once I was out of it, I looked at her, silently, eventually leaning towards her to hug her and to kiss her forehead.

This was the moment I learned that her forehead was a sensitive spot, sensitive meaning it changed her biochemically. She raised one leg over my lap and onto the otherside, then sat on my lap facing me, putting her arms around my neck and resting her elbows on my shoulders. She literally just sat there, staring at me, it may have been one of the weirdest moments in my life.

"Have you ever experimented with drugs?," she asked me. "...No," I replied wondering, "unless you're talking about prescription drugs. I've taken things for headaches, insomnia, depression, things of that nature. Why?" "I've never done drugs," she replied, "no one ever asked me to. Maybe I wasn't cool enough. Have you ever smoked?" We both found out neither of us had ever smoked either, and that in the past, we drank on social occasions but haven't had a drop in years.

"Well, you're boring," she suggested. I was confused and replied, "But if I'm boring, that means you're boring, too." "Yeah but I know I'm boring, I thought maybe you had a little excitement in your past." "So basically neither of us had a teenhood and we spent our twenties as funless people," I said. "We are having fun now, aren't we?," she replied. "I am having a little bit of fun," I admitted.

She shifted a little, then asked me if I was honestly having fun, if I didn't think tonight was the least bit boring, which would mean she herself was boring as well. I had to shift a little myself, and answered, telling her that I was normally interested in things like philosophy, the stars, Solomon, the physics behind waterfalls, and then she came along and added to that list. She did not understand completely what I was hinting at, because she still had yet to see the world the way I did.

"...It means you fascinate me, more than any other person I've ever known; you fascinate me the same way thinking about the meaning of life fascinates a philosopher."

She stared at me computing what I had just said to her, and then a moment later she closed her eyes. "What I am about to tell you, I have never told anyone, and you must

never speak of it to another soul for as long as you live” she said. “...I've masturbated in public before... Not for everyone to see, that's disgusting, but I mean it was in secret, during class, I was bored, and I was young.”

I was silent as I didn't know how to react to this, and I could tell that my pause made her regret saying what she had just said. “I knew I shouldn't have told you that,” she said in a soft manner. I laughed, and told her that I hoped she knew that this would be something I brought up and made fun of her for for the rest of her life. “Hey,” she began, “if that's the small price I have to pay to have you be part of the rest of my life, I'll gladly pay it.”

“Alright, since sharing is caring, I'll tell you a secret as well.” She clapped joyfully, like a child, after I said this. “A few months after I met you, I had a dream about you, but it wasn't you. I mean, the woman was a prostitute, but even though it wasn't you I was thinking of you. Anyway, I had sex with her and afterwards I severed her left foot and put it in my freezer. Of course I was simply trying to recreate you and turn her into you, because at that time I was a little obsessed with you and was fascinated by your amputation.”

Her facial expression went blank, but unlike her I wasn't embarrassed. “I guess I should be flattered?,” she asked. If you want to be.

Her expression stayed blank, but she began speaking, “I don't know if you know this, but you tend to stare. Like sometimes you stare at me, right through me. I mean, I like it, I've gotten used to it, but I think it might unsettle others.” Once she stopped talking, I stared at her aimlessly, “Like this?” “Yes, and it's kinda strange, like you might be dangerous...”

And suddenly, a new song came on the radio. The beginning was familiar, but the moment I saw her face light up, I knew exactly which song it was. Her smile turned into something sneaky, an evil playful look, and it came to my attention that she was the one who specifically chose all of these songs, and she knew that the song we first danced to way back in that winter two or some years ago would pop up.

“I was waiting for this song,” she told me. I knew exactly what she wanted, and of course dancing is inevitable in an environment like this. I rose up with her reddishly with her still on my lap, and once up fullright I heard her feet hit the ground, her arms still around my neck.

“May I have this dance?,” I asked. “Yes, yes you may,” she replied, “because tonight, we dance!” And dance we did dance. We swayed a little, here and there, then and now, and at one moment she left my body to raise the curtains at the window to see if the Moon was out; she was saddened that it was not.

Regardless, when she came back to me, she pressed her body close to mine and we

continued the slowdance and had the sight of ghostly trees through the window which had an assortment of different colored leaves; red, yellow, green, brown. Orange.

Again, like some kind of animal or uncivilized and unsocialized human being, she rubbed her face on my neck in different directions, sometimes toughly, other times softly. As the song began to end, I could tell she wanted it to go on forever, and maybe trying to hold on to the mood and the moment, she stood on her tippy-toes, placed her chin on my shoulder, took my hand and placed it on her chest, wrapped both of her arms around me tightly and squeezed up against me, and everything was quiet except the feeling of her heartbeat next to mine.

For the following hour, different types of songs came on and we adventured through several types of dance styles. A song with a high tempo came on and we danced wildly, I spun her over and over, picked her up again and again, and I saw how fast she could move with her silver shoe, displaying such improvement.

We did a ballroom dance, then a jazz dance, and I swear I couldn't keep up with her. I remember telling her that I was supposed to lead, but she paid no attention.

After this, I sat down because she wanted to show me how she could tap dance. At home, she practiced walking and balance, and outside she practiced running. At first there was an air of shyness during the tap dance, but it went away as the silver shoe became a part of her. At the end, she grabbed her crotch, a bit Michael Jackson style, and I told her that she had developed quite the silver foot.

We were very tired once all the songs stopped playing and the radio came to an end, and this is when she told me that she had a few more things planned for the night. After the dinner, after the gift, after the dancing, we were to roam the city. She gave me the option of choosing whether we would drive or walk. "You're so very thoughtful, Lynnette." "Only for you," she put her hands together and gave me a humongous smile. I chose to drive. Or I should say I chose to drive but she was the one driving.

We got in her car at around midnight, and began our drive towards the city. I asked the belle of the ball where we were going, and she said she had no idea, that we would go where life took us. I told her to stop saying stupid shit like that and to speak literally.

Under a bright street light she made a right turn and traversed us onto an abandoned superhighway, and what was one streetlight turned into many. At first, we drove through a place that had many dark trees on either side and heard sounds of owls, but after a while we made it out of that place and could see the skyline of the now colorful city.

Staring at an oddly shaped skyscraper in the distance, Lynne asked me a question. "If I planned another night like this, would you do it with me again? I'll think of new things we can do." "No," I replied. She turned her head to look at me in confusion. "I'm kidding," I told her. She gave me a saddened "Oh..."

I slowly placed my hand on one of her driving arms and cautiously took it away from the steering wheel, putting it down onto one of her thighs, and holding her hand I told her that I loved doing these things with her, doing anything with her, really, and that it was disheartening, sometimes even a bit annoying, knowing that she may have felt insecure about such trivial things.

She smiled, took her hand away from mine to place it back on the wheel, and firmly said, "Don't hold my hand while I'm driving."

We continued our midnight drive down the highway speeding through winds, and resting the back of my head on the chair I asked her a question, "Tell me, Lynne, what are you thinking about right now. What's going on in that creative, introspective and beautiful mind of yours?" "Honestly? I'm thinking about philosophy, the stars, Solomon, the physics behind waterfalls, and you."

She continued, "It kind of makes sense to me now. I am the right brain, and you are left brain. I'm the wannabe energetic artist and you're the wannabe brooding philosopher, and together we create the entire brain. Does that make any sense?" "We aren't one person Lynne, I don't care how many ways you put it, there are no such things as soulmates."

We drove on, exiting the highway and entering a well lit town. She parked the car in a handicap location and we sat there, thinking and talking. "Do you think botanists can design flowers from scratch?" I asked her. She said yes.

"If I was one I think I'd do that, and I'd name it after you. A lynn timer. How would I design it you ask? I don't know. It would come in many colors but it would be known primarily for being yellow. Because, you know, yellow makes people happy. I would design it in a way that gave it the quality of appearing to resemble a kind and wonderful lady, you know, because you're both pretty and beautiful. Do you understand what I mean when I say that? It means you're pretty, in the sense that you are very pleasing to look at, superficially, and beautiful in the sense that you have a very attractive personality, deeply. When people say they wish they had a friend to lean on," I leaned on her, "they're talking about you. You say I'm gentle but I'm not generally gentle. I'm gentle when I'm with you, because you're gentle. So I'm gentle because you make me gentle. That would probably be the trademark of the lynn timer, it would be very gentle."

"Oh God," she said, "That's very sweet, but now you're just trying to romanticize me." She got out of the car and waited for me to exit as well.

We began walking around the block, turning randomly on random sidewalks and passing buildings that housed unincorporated stores. Near a park, we saw a showcase of lightning bugs, lighting on and off in a magical way for our amusement.

As we passed under a street light, I looked at her and saw her dress turn glitzy; under

the light it made it appear as in a ray of clear crystals and diamonds, glittering on and exhibiting the anthology of her love.

“I'm cold,” she remarked right in front of the Harvest Moon hotel. The oldest damn trick in the book, created by some woman in the sixteenth century.

I took off my suit jacket, but as I went to put it around her, I realized that it wasn't a trick and that it was indeed very cold. “Jesus, it is cold,” I said, and put the jacket back on myself. “Ugh!” she sighed, “so inconsiderate!”

Feeling sorry, I took it off and finally placed it around her. “Thank you,” she said this, but it was inaudible as only her mouth moved to make the words. I didn't mind it, I actually liked the date. It wasn't as bad as I thought it'd be.

Walking back to the car, she had put my arm around her neck and held my hanging hand with her raised hand, telling me how pretty all the leaves on the ground looked.

We eventually found the car after searching and took the abandoned superhighway back to the tree house. This time I didn't have to carry her across the dark yard, as she went into my parents' home to wash off her make-up.

I climbed into the treehouse, sat there for a while, waiting to see her again. I don't remember the last time I felt this way.

I went up to another flower, this time being yellow in color, and pushed it. As I went by pushing plants, she entered the chamber and went directly to the radio, making it say sounds of ocean waves washing up onto the shore.

“Yay,” she said, I'm really not sure why. “We aren't going outside again, right?” I asked, she replied saying no, so I took off my socks, my pants and my dress shirt, left only my shorts and my t-shirt and crawled onto the airbed, “Then I'm going to sleep.” I later learned that this was exactly why she put on the sounds of the ocean, as she took off her dress and left only her basketball shorts and a spaghetti top and practically jumped on top of me.

Slowly, she slid off to the side of me and put her arm on my stomach and her head on my chest. She slid her silver leg onto mine, but I told her that this hurted me. “Sorry,” she replied, and re-positioned her leg as she pulled the covers over us.

Blanketed, I felt her head slowly and slightly rise and slowly and slightly fall as I breathed in and out, and I just knew she was searching for my heartbeat, because all this time had passed and I still had not uttered those three simple words.

As the sounds of the oceans persisted, she asked me a question. “Have you ever played the association game?,” she asked me. I thought about the question, then replied, “autumn,” she looked up at me and said “anniversary.”

I started to say the next word but before I could she sat up and told me that if we were going to play, I had to be completely honest with her, and that she would be completely

honest with me. I said okay, and she placed her head back on my chest.

romance. love. two. marriage. prison. gangster. godfather. movie. 2001. millennium. 1000. dollars. lincoln. history. war. peace. harmony. joy. happiness. yellow. sun. moon. venus. goddess. sataness. mistress. seductive. evil. sin. hell. heaven. you. me? yes. no. negative. positive. constructive. hardhat. blue. sadness. silvio. past. future. electricity. energy. inspire. art. crazy. asylums. madness. insanity. serial-killer. prostitute. naked. sex. penis. vagina. insertion. babies. family. marriage. prison. cellmates. soulmates. eternity. ...connection. "You paused, why did you pause?" "I didn't pause." "Fine, us." them. enemies. allies. friends. friendship. true. lie. promises. broken. mended. healed. bruise. violence. hate. love. red. heart. beat. hit. hurt. pain. pleasure. satisfaction. bloom. lavish. lavender. purple. roses. flowers. plants. trees. nature. indifferent. chaos. theory. science. school. boring. you. me? yes. funny. clowns. scary. darkness. light. sky. clouds. shapes. sizes. polygons. games. sega. nintendo. mario. sonic. animals. cute. dresses. purdy. pudding. chocolate. vanilla. ice-cream. dessert. lick. tongue. french-kiss. france. paris. city. lights. view. lake. water. waves. ocean. beautiful. lipstick. kiss. music. classics. zeppelin. stairway. staircase. fall. autumn. love. one. anniversary...

Before I could say my next thought a wind blew into the treehouse and once again took out all the lit candles. Neither of us got up and just simply laid in the darkness. "I like you," she said, and the other three words again rose into my mind.

In the darkness we heard sounds of the oceans, and we were like two sailors who mission it was to discover the deep waters. We were quantumly entangled, far but near, distanced but together.

"What would you rate this romantic date out of ten?," her head moved as she talked. "Eleven." She was silent. She stayed silent for a while then began to tell me that her restraining order against Silvio had expired. "To a year without bruises," she finished.

She mentioning her past reminded me of my own. "You know I would never do anything like this with anyone else? I hope you realize that, and it's important that you understand that," I told her this. She slid her arm all the way around me to hug my body, but didn't say a word. She was probably too tired.

The both of us, getting drowsy but still unable to sleep, shifted for much of the early night, and I realized just like me, she moved around a lot, which was why at some point I found myself spooning her, we both facing west and my arm around her side, her hand interlocked with mine.

For some reason she began adjusting her shirt. I'm not sure why, but this was followed by two quick and successive farts. "What the fuck?," I nearly shouted. She laughed, saying, "Excuse me," and I could tell she didn't really care. I had to shake the blanket a few times to get the smell out of the vicinity.

Far enough into the night we stopped moving. We found our cuddly place. Like the creep that I am, I watched her fall asleep. I felt that if I asked her if she was asleep, she would say no, because tonight she was already in a dream. That dream that women so desire. To make a plan and execute it perfectly, a plan that unravels itself like clockwork. A plan that leaves you tired, but not the bad tired, the good tired. And so from this tiredness, she finally fell asleep, and I too finally fell asleep, though I felt as if, like Lynnette, that I was already in a dream.

Chapter 20

TOO RARE TO DIE

2:1:2:20

AN abandoned superhighway, its residents dark trees on either side
At night owls could be heard, but never seen as they would hide
But it was not the night, for today was in day and the Sun's rays were divers
And the highway was not abandoned, for it was packed with many drivers

One of whom was Lynnette, in red and purple dreams she came racing down the fateful road,
Leaves of different colors blowing from the winds that came from different cars,
This was imagery worth painting, she thought, because soon it would be getting cold
And with the painter's mind she had already begun, imagining the scars and stars

After a while her mind grew tired, as it had done so before
And her eyes would every now and again slightly close, and open, as if in a long war
And in an accidental spare, she slightly swerved, veering off the road and into detour
Waking up she panicked, drove into an orange construction car, which caught eyes into gore

Her car flipped and flipped, finally, it was fully driven into the ground to land on its top
Another car slamming into hers, and other cars barely dodging the way
And from this, from her, came a black darkness of unconsciousness
And when her eyes were opened, she found herself upside-down hanging in her car

Her vision was at first blurry, and she saw the broken glass from her window
And she heard cries for help, shouting, from the others on the road
Finally her vision came back to her, though it came partially stained in red bode
For a drop of blood had teared into her eye which seemed to come from limbo

In the distance outside the broken window of lead, she saw the sight of her golden rosehead
Though what was gold was now red in graph, and the once complete rose was now broken in half
And while upside-down, restrained by her seat, she reached out for her love as it ceased to beat
But she could not move, for she was trapped, and her reaching arm futile in a positioned tracted

She did not know it, but the accident had left her concussed
She was under delusion, but knew what she was reaching for, knew what was discussed
She lived and loved; an indestructible and unbreakable human spirit of spry
She was too weird to live, and yet too rare to die

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(2:1 / 4 / IV)

Part 3

Chapter 21

SOLITAIRE

2:1:3:21

INJURY report; the following players are inactive this week: Cameron Bersin (calf), De'Anthony Charles (knee), Leonard Harris (hip), Kyle Thompson (hamstring), Shareece Powers (finger), Garrison Vanette (illness), Bradley Chipper (concussion), Darius Leary (back), Joe Rogers (shoulder), Austin Ross (achilles), Jonathon Spikes (foot), Paul Webb (ankle) Parker Thomas (toe), Terron Reed (quadriceps), Lynn Naws (groin)...

“My father knew exactly what he was doing,” said Clayton's son, “it was a psychological thing and it seemed to work.”

Week eight saw Chipper in street clothes walking up and down the field, sidelined, but helping with play calling as his team struggled throughout the divisional match-up.

Clayton's son continued, “He ignored him that week because he wanted him to know he was expendable, but at the same time he knew what he was dealing with in Chipper. He knew Chipper would fight for his job and that it would light a fire up under his ***.”

Sammy Nordstrom would start at the quarterback position in week eight and would be contesting Chipper for the throne, but even plays like Clayton's famous “Double Petal” couldn't help him to win the contest.

Clayton's son, once again, continued, “The entire week, Clayton basically ignored Chip. Not because he was useless, because he wasn't, but mostly because he had to focus on Sam and winning that week without his starting quarterback. There was more to it, though. Part of the ignoring was to pit Chip against Sam, make Sam the enemy, so when he was cleared to play, he would come back better. He knew it was working when he saw how invested Chip was even on the sidelines of week eight. Some people might say that was very manipulative, maybe even unfair to Sam, but Henry had already lost a championship game before, and trust me, he wasn't interested in losing another. He wanted everything he could get out of his players. He needed Chip to stay hungry and that's exactly what happened.”

After the week eight loss to a divisional opponent, the home team dropped to 4-4, their first lost in five games.

While week eight stopped the home team's momentum, week eight is known for being a tragic week in which a star player, Peter Sellers, died in a car crash the following Monday after football Sunday.

Peter Sellers was hospitalized for several hours but eventually succumbed to his injuries, leaving behind a wife and four children. Peter Sellers was known for his work both on and off the field, as he helped to fund charities and schools.

Schools were in session now, and the final bell for the regular day rang inside Clinton

Community High School to begin the ninth period.

As the students rolled into Paxton's class, he called each of their names to see who was currently present. Afterwards, he noted who was not present the day before, and gave each of these five students; Sandeep, Briana, Cedric, Elliot and Monica, a chance to receive extra credit as the other students in the class had already received theirs the day prior.

Paxton called the names of these five students and then pointed to the board, where there was one number, "21," followed by four possible choices, "The City of Angels," "Deep Shades," "Restless Nights," "Black & White."

This was a memory challenge, and when Cedric quickly rose his hand and declared that the answer was option B, Paxton was a bit surprised by his speedy answer, asking him how he was so able to answer so quickly.

"You did this with the class yesterday, right?," Cedric asked. "Well, B got the circle around it," he finished. Paxton looked at the board and noticed the very faint black circle around "Deep Shades," a circle he thought he had completely erased. He laughed to himself, enough for the class to hear, and told the five students they would also be awarded the extra credit.

The next activity saw the students reading passages from "Deep Shades" and attempting to explain what a particular passage may be implying. The following was read by Latasha:

I am in deep thought and she is trying to ask me a question but I'm not responding. She looks at me and gives me a shove and I snap out of it, and I ask her what she was saying. Apparently she was telling me about a dream she had last night, and then she asked me what things I dream about? I ask her what she means, because people don't really have a certain theme to their dreams.

Then she says of course people do, she starts to talk about how she always has this dream where she is in a field of apple trees and she is looking for an apple to eat, but the ones she comes across always have dirt on them, so she never ends up eating any of the apples and throughout the dream she becomes hungrier and hungrier until she wakes up.

She tells me that she is always having dreams like that, where what she's looking for is right in front of her but it is wrong in some way.

Mr. Paxton asked Latasha what she thought those paragraphs might mean, and Latasha, after thinking, began speaking again.

"There ain't no right or wrong answer right, that's what y'all be saying." "Right." "Okay then... I look at her dream as, like, she tryin' to say something by sayin' something else. Like. The field of apple trees, there's probably a lot of trees and a lot of apples, but she still can't find a clean apple to eat. And if P say red objects can mean love, then

maybe what she trying to say is she can't find clean love. So it's like she's starving for love, or hungry for love, or something like that, I don't know," she finished.

Paxton confirmed her notions, telling her that this was how he interpreted the text as well, that Lynne, at least psychologically, had a fear of never finding an honest love and a healthy, blooming marriage.

Before Paxton could finish and move on to the next passage, Latasha interrupted him. "Mr. P, why people even get married?," she asked him very curiously.

Paxton was silent at first, but eventually replied, "That's a good question, Latasha." After another moment's pause, he started up again, saying, "Everyone has their own reasons for getting married, some are simple reasons, others are more complicated reasons." Once Paxton realized he was giving relationship advice to seventeen year-olds and eighteen year-olds, he became quite embarrassed, but continued nonetheless.

"If you love someone, and want to spend your life with them, you can prove this commitment to them with marriage, because marriage is a sort of test for love, I think. And if-" Paxton is cut off by Monica, who was a student which consistently added to the chatter of the classroom but never added to the discourse, "What happens if you don't ever get married?" "How do you mean?," Paxton responded. "Do I have to get married?," she replied.

As James went to answer her question, the class was interrupted by an employee of the school, who came with him a new student of Native American ancestry. They found the new student a new desk, where he sat, and the class resumed its studies.

Paxton continued to discuss the twenty-first chapter, speaking of black roses and commenting on the fact that Lynne and the narrator could be found in darkness throughout the novel, sometimes in the darkness together, but usually separated, in the darkness of their own solitude.

After the ball had rung, Paxton went to the whiteboard and erased all of its contents, removing all and any black circles, then went around to clean his classroom, and what stuck in his mind was Monica's question, on whether or not she would have to marry some day.

The question was strange and bizarre to him, for a young person to see the world in such a concrete way; to believe that at every corner of life, there were stone tablets with words on them.

Paxton mused. And then thought. One did not need to know how to paint well to be an artist, nor did one need to take a course in physics or chemistry to become a scientist. One did not need to speak philosophically to be a philosopher. For, if one observed the world and dissected it, one was already a scientist. If one painted pretty pictures of blooming flowers truthfully, one was already an artist. If one spoke on things of wisdom,

one was already a philosopher. Paxton continued and finished. If ever you guided another person in instruction, then you were a teacher.

There is something to be said about solitude... To me, it is like staring at a distant star in the night sky, though the problem is after a few hours it becomes day and the Sun brightens the sky, making that distant star invisible and the Sun's light blinding. Too much of the Sun's light and you are left blinded, but going blind and regaining your sight in the night again may teach you what it means to have vision, the same way solitude may teach you what it means to have wisdom.

Where is she? She tells me to buy a copy of *Sleepless*, and somehow I manage to find this old ass movie and she's not even here. She was supposed to be here an hour ago.

The phone begins to ring. I get up off the couch and read the caller identification; "HARRY S. TRUMAN UNIVERSITY HOS..." After picking up the phone a woman on the other end confirms who I am, then begins to tell me that Lynne Parker has been hospitalized.

The first image that sacked my mind was a stargazer. I then found myself dialoging with the woman in something of a hazy dream, but I knew I wasn't dreaming, I knew I was just shocked at what I just heard. A moment later she handed me off to Lynne's hospital room and I soon heard her sedated and broken voice through the receiver. "I'm fine... My arm is broken, but I'm fine."

Later, I arrived at the hospital and a nurse told me that she was currently located in room thirteen. Once I'd found her door, a doctor intercepted me to pull me aside.

"Hi, I'm doctor Sylvenstein," he told me, and a laugh tried to escape but I withheld it. "First I want to tell you your wife is completely fine aside from a broken arm which I believe will heal correctly. Second, she is mildly concussed, so she may appear to be a bit confused, but you can talk to her and I'm sure she will be happy to see you." I gave him my thanks and then entered the room.

She was watching television, some football program, when she turned-over and saw me. She put out her uninjured arm and when I got to her she took my hand, and I saw the arm sleeve on the other side.

"Nice dress," I amused her. They gave her a bluish colored hospital gown. She looked down and laughed, then joked that she found it in the hospital's thrift shop.

I sat down beside her letting go of her hand, but as she recounted the vehicle crash to me, she went back and forth rubbing the inside of my forearm, almost like she didn't want me to get hurt from the crash as she relived it.

"I was coming home this morning on the eighty-eight, and I don't know what happened. I must have closed my eyes and fell asleep for a second because that's the last thing I remember. Like something forcing the car to the right very slowly, and then a very

faint red.”

I sighed. “You fell asleep?” I asked her. “I’m not sure,” she replied. I got up, and I tried to refrain, but I said the three words that will offend anyone, “I told you.”

I looked back at her, “I told you to slow down. I told you to stop working so hard, to stop doing so much. I told you to take a break.”

She stayed silent, not because she had nothing to say but because she wanted me to know that what I had just said to her offended her, left her insulted.

I went to go sit back down next to her and the entire time she looked opposite my direction. I think ten minutes of silence passed by until she finally said something. Still looking away from me, something in between a nervous smile and a broken laugh plagued her face, “I’m weak...”

The saddest thing I’ve ever heard her say gave way to minutes of awkward silence. It made me sad myself to have heard it; in her current state of mind she had no idea how untrue that statement was.

“I mean, I don’t want to hurt your feelings Lynne, but you try to do too many things at once. I saw it when I first met you, and I saw it last year. I’m not asking you to change, I don’t want to see you change, I love that you are passionate about life, but what good is it going to do you if that passion gets you killed. You probably drove Silvio off the walls.”

I could see something dark and unknown settle within her after I said his name, a couple of nodded sideways. “I would never say something like that to you,” she said, “I would never use Maria to hurt you.”

A moment after, with one blink, I saw a single tear roll down her cheek and disappear at the bottom of her chin. A bullet to her chest.

“What if you had died? What am I supposed to do? You can’t expect me to take care of Sarah and David. And Silvio, I’m sure you wouldn’t want them in his hands. I want you to work less hours.”

Her attitude towards me grew legs, “What are you?... If you’re not their father, then what are you? A friend? What? An uncle? Is that all you can be for them? So I guess Olya was right. You’re not their biological father, so you can never be real to them.”

I got up, “You’re naive and delusional.” “And you’re no better than Silvio,” she replied. “I really know how to pick ‘em,” she laughed, the trail of her tear now dried.

“It makes sense to me now why he was always frustrated with you. God forbid David and Sarah were in the car with you. You fucking string me along to be part of your lifeplan and go and almost get yourself killed. Fuck off.”

“And it makes perfect sense to me now why Maria left your ass. I fuck up one time and you’re already overreacting.” I began to walk away but she continued a bit louder, “Yeah, fuck off. I thought you were different. You’re not even thankful I’m still alive. You

didn't even ask me if I was okay.”

I turned around and optioned to slam my palm against the wall, seeing Mr. Nosleep, and causing her to quickly react to my action.

She then got up off the hospital bed and stood there, as if she was preparing to fist fight me with one arm. “Is that supposed to scare me? Are you going to hit me now?” She walked over to me and just stood there, like some half-crazy half-wounded strange woman.

I stood there, now with my palm against my face as she went on and on about something I couldn't clearly hear because I wasn't focused on her. Her speaking brought a ringing to my ears, like the terrible ringing of a telephone, and at once I found myself shouting at her for the first time, “You risked the lives of the other drivers!” My sudden burst caused her to flinch and jerk heavily and put up her arms in a defensive play which brought her broken arm more pain. The shock of it all harmed her mentally, and after her widened eyes returned to normal, she quickly removed herself from the room.

After she'd left, I sat back down to rest from all the commotion. My eyes were blinking uncontrollably. I must have looked like a madman. I must have looked like a madman. I probably looked like a madman. A madman. I must have probably looked like a madman.

I got up and began pacing back and forth, various thoughts running back and forth in my mind, trading picks of what will occur next, and this is when the hospital room door opened again and she walked back in. I couldn't be certain of the amount of time she was gone for, but when I saw her face, I saw that the one dried trail had turned into twenty-one.

She went over to the corner to do something in secret, saying, “What you said, you can't fix this.” I walked up behind her and she quickly turned around, again in defense.

“Why did you leave the room? Did you think I was going to hit you?” “I've been hit before.” “Not by me.”

We were both in eachother's faces. Well, not really, it was more face to chest than face to face, but she looked up at me offensively and wouldn't budge.

“There's something wrong with you. You're life—” “Life doesn't give a fuck about you. God doesn't give a fuck about you. Ask God about your fucked up past, ask God about your foot.” She suddenly slapped me across the face, and the momentum of her slap shifted the mood between us. I simply stared at her, and when I didn't respond, when I didn't strike her back, she began yelling at me and began beating my chest, as if she wanted me to hit her back.

Once my chest began hurting I grabbed her arm and felt Hell come over me. I became angry with her. An anger I had never felt ever in my entire life. It was not just anger, but

complete and total wrath.

What did it matter if I was a father to them or not? If I would continue to raise them after her death? A family member, a close friend, they can just as easily become estranged to you, to become a stranger in any given year. Blood, no blood, those who carry the same genes are not bound by anything except the illusion of such abstract. What did it matter if I loved her or not? If I missed her when she was gone or just the same thoughts of her never crossing my mind when she was absent. Why would I mean so much to her that these things mattered? Love once blinded her and she paid dearly for it, therefore love cannot be pure, it cannot only have good intention. Those in love are not bound by anything except the mirage of hope.

I had been shouting so much that I'd lost my breath. I felt like a shotgun and felt I had released a resentment towards her I had been harboring for the last year. I felt relieved, and at the same time all of the shouting made me feel restless.

And just then, two employees of the hospital rushed in and started trying to release Lynne from my grip. One of them made as if to strike me. When I looked back at Lynne, I could see tears in her eyes.

They took hold of me and quieted me down, restraining me from possibly hurting her, and when they saw that I was relaxed, they let go of the hold and stood in the midway of me and Lynne. A moment of silence that was not true silence, as the three of us could hear Lynne crying loudly. She looked back at me with dark eyes, fresh trails, and she shouted, "Why are you still here!" And I left the room, I left the hospital, knowing the damage that had been done between the two of us was beyond repair.

I was somewhat escorted out of the hospital, and for the first time in a long time, I felt alone. Something of it all made me feel as if I had gotten my corner back. And I felt, too, that what I had done to her, that it would put her in the darkest place that she had ever seen, that it would reveal to her the depth of the deepest shade she had ever tended.

Chapter 22

A FLOWER BENDING IN THE BREEZE

2:1:3:22

¶ IT'S been three days. I haven't written anything in ten. I couldn't write anything yesterday and I'm not sure how I'm writing now, I've just been drained and have had no energy to do anything except lie down or sleep, and some days I can't even sleep well.

¶ I don't understand why he got so mad at me. It's all I can think about. I know it could have been worse, but it wasn't and he can't see that. He's not even thankful that I'm still breathing. He would rather offend me then be here with me now holding me and telling me everything will be okay.

¶ I spent forever waiting for a second chance on love and magic and purpose, but I guess when you give someone a flower, that flower has to eventually die. He told me he would never love me, I thought I could change him, more and more these days I see that I was wrong.

¶ I honestly thought he was going to hit me. I think part of me wishes he did so I could at least see some emotion. I know he's not a liar, but when someone is as cool and distant as he is, it gets you thinking... Thinking about what they could really be hiding, something worse than the common lie.

¶ I didn't think it could ever happen, but those moments were more terrifying than anything Silvio has ever done to me, the worst moments of my life. He has the potential to be worst than Silvio, because at least Silvio had never stirred up so many emotions inside me. Silvio never made me feel the way he makes me feel, so when he breaks my heart, it shatters into a million pieces. I can take the physical pain, but I can't take the psychological pain from someone I truly love. Someone I love with all of my heart. Someone who I will never give up on no matter how dark the days get.

¶ The kids visited yesterday with Emily and brought me my things. Sara was crying the whole time and David was just sad. Like always, they calmed down after some time. Silvio sent his regards with them, and asked if he could visit, but he understood when I told him I didn't want to see him.

¶ Sara came with some of her school supplies and I thought it would be a good idea to let her draw on my foot to get her to stop thinking about my arm. She ended up finishing a purple river that went from the top of my foot down the side and to the bottom just before they left to go home. It had a bunch of colorful caterpillars, and I see now that she is a really good drawer... Just like her mama...

¶ Olya also came, but at a later time, with Jazmin. They gave me support, which I really needed. I didn't tell them about what happened before.

¶ Olya left before Jazmin to go to work, and I guess it was sort of strange because I barely know Jazmin, but she seems really nice. She told me she didn't have a life, so she had

all day to ruin mine. That made me laugh so much, and it was something I really needed. I think that was the beginning of a beautiful friendship.

¶ Last night I had a dream that woke me up in the middle of the night, and since I couldn't really go back to sleep, I sort of just got up and looked out my window for a while. I like to do that sometimes, it helps me clear my head, gives me time to think about things.

¶ In the night I saw some interesting things. Yellow leaves on the ground, some kind of blue flower bending slightly from the October wind, and after I opened the window to let some cool air in, a ladybird flew in. Seeing as how I'm in room thirteen, everything is even now and is balanced out.

¶ In the morning, just before I took a shower, they gave me a new gown. It was different from the one I had on, it was white with yellow pattern designs, and apparently was the only one they had left and was very old, so now when I leave my room for anything everyone else is in blue or green and I'm in yellow.

¶ I still have something lingering in my head, I think it's the concussion. i remembered a day or two after that my ankle bracelet is gone. it's probably been run over repeatedly by now and is stuck buried somewhere in that road. that's fine, since I'm alone again anyway and don't know how to fucking calm down. ive ruined a relationship because i dont know how to be normal,

¶ the lights in this room are strange. either they are all on, or none of them are on. i cant light one side of the room even though there are two halves and two light switches. it kind of reminds me of the meaning for the diamond rose that love is all or nothing.

¶ how am i suppose to compete with other women who are better than me? he doesnt understand that thats why i try so hard. at everything at loving him, making him happy, and at working so hard. im just a waitress and i'm insecure. why doesn't he go for someone who isn't disabled? Someone who actually has a career and doesn't have the burden of children? someone who actually has an education i'm just a dragonfly surrounded by honey bees, and even grasshoppers can hop ten yards

¶ i was shocked to hear yesterday that after they looked at my results, they found a benign tumor in my other foot they said it wasnt anything to get excited over but wanted to keep me here to run a few more tests and observe me even if its no concern, doesnt that mean that at any time in the future, another tumor can start to grow that can be harmful like my other one? im sad i'm trying to stay strong, but im broken all of this is too much. please someone just hug me

*Chapter 23***CAVE MYTHOLOGY: FORGERY!**

2:1:3:23

THERE was music from my neighbor's apartment through the autumn nights. Unable to sleep, I often found myself behind the wheel of my old car, an old car that a mechanic previously told me might be difficult to drive.

I had many late night driving thoughts as I drifted here and there, trying to forget the sad thing that happened to her.

I remember I drove through a part of the city that seemed as if it never slept; there were always people about, faint music being played, glaring lights from everywhere. I remember, at one point or another, driving through a dirty tunnel which had illustrated drawings on its walls.

The sight reminded me of a dream I had many years ago. I am in some type of ruin, or some type of cave, and on selected walls there are drawings, or rather I should say, stories.

One of the stories was about the myth of an "Iceman," who in anthologic mythology were men who could turn rocks into gems. Because this was thought to be impossible, this gave icemen an air of mystique about them, which may or may not have been an advantage.

On the wall, sitting behind the iceman, was some type of game, and before him stood a wooly man without a face, and a beast without a name.

To the sides of these three men were river banks, two rivers that would eventually run into each other. In the background, a forest that echoed in laughter, a songbird which sung from a tree by the brook, and in the air, a dame who shined white light and turned things into gold.

The story goes as this; the iceman taught the wooly man, the beast and the dame how to turn simple rocks into precious gems, but also warned them of dentraud, which is "the loss of identity," by explaining to them that they should never forget that, though they are gems now, they were once rocks before. He instructs them that the rich cannot exist without the poor and the poor without the rich, nor the pretty without the ugly, and the ugly without the pretty; both sides gave the other a definition.

After a year of honing their skills, each of the three met their conclusion:

The dame used her new found ability to adorn herself with various colors of gems, seeking both beauty and fame, though she was soon found out, after much inspection of the gems by the socialites, to be a fraud. In her search to be beautiful, she had done things that made her soul ugly.

The wooly man used his new found ability to gain riches, seeking fortune and fame,

though he too was soon found out, after much inspection of the gems by the appraisers, to be a fraud. In his search for wealth, he did things that made him poor in ethics.

The beast, unlike the others, took heed of the warning the iceman told him. He spent his year not turning rocks into gems, but gems into rocks. When he felt his skill was polished, he returned to his village which had been in war for two years. The conflict had been over possession of many beautiful ancient gems left behind by important historical figures. The beast, turning these ancient gems into rocks, ended this conflict and restored peace to his village, as the inhabitants could no longer fight over fortune nor beauty nor fame.

It must be past midnight by now. The car clock says 2:47 A.M., but I was always too lazy to fix it. Making a right turn, I enter onto a street that has one streetlight that is flickering on and off.

I have seen many people lose their identities over the years. I've seen people guided by strings, and when the strings are cut off I've seen them fall down. Each one so certain that they were unique, that they were different, but when the time came for them to stand up for their individuality, they buckled and became like the rest.

I know Tao will lose his if he stays with May-ling. I'm not sure if he can see that she is a liar and a manipulator. People like her, they don't show you what they're really made up of until it's too late.

The same thing happened to Jose. He'd hire people, sometimes strangers, and they would rip him off. It's not that he was too nice, or too level-headed, he just felt that if he did his part for his community, that regardless of the actions of others, he knew his own actions were polished in good intention.

I feel my index finger twitch as I leave the flickering street, and for some reason I begin to think of her. A raindrop hitting my windshield would eventually bring a cool and calm November rain, and this didn't help me to block out thoughts of her.

This probably won't surprise you, but I have never given another person a traditional gift of traditional affection, such as a card for a friend, a gift for a family member, or a ring for a lover. Most of the times these traditional efforts had an unauthentic air about them to me; a friend throws away your card, a family member returns your gift, a lover divorces you. I think if your gesture is truly important to you, truly authentic, you won't turn rocks into gems, but gems into rocks, and when you make that untraditional gesture the recipient will know that it is true and everlasting. But that's just me, I could be wrong... I used to think about it more, but for the most part, I've lost interest in "traditional" things.

How does one identify true love? Real love? It can be so evasive and transient and deceptive. It can be one thing today and another thing tomorrow. Some people know how

to sell it well, others know how to use it to fit in. Seldom is honest love used without the self in mind. Every relationship I have had with another human being, it has always been mostly motivated by self-interest by the other party, but not with her, with her it's different, which is what makes this so frustrating.

This time I began driving down a street where one of the streetlights had a higher glow than the rest. What's wrong with these lights, somebody oughta fix them. The rain has stopped, it didn't come to stay. We played with gold marbles, then looked for the man in the white mask. What's that up there in the sky? That's the Moon. Licking pennies.

Spontaneous creation. It is the proposed concept that anything that can be perceived was created spontaneously with every thing else by every thing else, i.e.; the ceiling created the floor as the floor created the ceiling; beauty created ugliness as ugliness created beauty; morality created immorality as immorality created morality; the rich created the poor as the poor created the rich; chaos created peace as peace created chaos; salvation created damnation as damnation created salvation.

Stopped on the side of an empty street, I sat and thought as a single light was turned on in an apartment building in the distance and a shadow walked across the room.

Would time work the same way? Is time under the same law of spontaneous creation? What I mean is, does the past affect the future as the future affects the past? Then what is the present?

I believe we must begin by commenting "time" as an illusion. A Monday in 1948 is identical to today, the only difference being the fact that matter has moved around; we take time simply as the movement of matter.

Illusion. Dreams are not weightless, they do not only exist in abstraction. We know this because of the brain activity produced while we sleep. The same could be true for illusions; someone suffering from psychosis might see a phantom of their dead sibling, and while it's not "real," it does exist to some degree on the physical level.

Illusion harboring physicality would promote the idea of time as an illusion to be a physical thing, and with all physical things, there can be manipulation. If we assume time can be physical, and it carries a value, then we can also assume we can manipulate it, the manipulation of values is constant and all around us. You move a glass cup from spot A to spot B, you have manipulated space, what might happen if you manipulate time by adding or removing energy to it? If you add energy to it, will time speed up? If you remove energy from it, will it slow down? Is time proportional to something else, such as wealth is to poverty? If I add energy to time, will something else decrease? I have thought long and hard on what component would decrease, but I never come up with anything.

Another thought I have had on time pertains to the notions of both Issac Newton and Albert Einstein.

Einstein suggested that space and time were one fabric, woven into each other to create spacetime, as in space and time are mutual to each other, one always affects the other. Newton suggested a law that tells us anything in motion will remain in motion unless acted upon by an external force.

“Motion” is usually an attribute of space, and not of time, but if space and time are dependent of one another, as stated by Albert, then I believe we can apply Newton's first law of motion to the concept of Einstein's space-time; that is to say, if time is in motion, it will remain in motion, if time is at rest, then it will remain at rest.

It gets interesting when you also include the final part of the first law of motion, “unless acted upon by an external force.” This would mean time will stay in motion unless a force affects it, perhaps a force such as friction, which could decrease its energy and slow it down. Imagine if something slowed down time to a complete halt.

The shadow comes across the window again and the lights are turned off. I looked out my driver window and heard the gentle sweet singing of leaves in the wind and a whisper that calls after you in the night... These strange man's laws.

I closed my eyes. I must have been asleep for a long time. Maybe for days. Moving lips to breathe her pretty name. After a while I opened my eyes, and found myself alone again. Alone at the edge opening of a cave cliff, above a raging sea.

Chapter 24

THE COMEBACK KID

2:1:3:24

MR. Paxton made his way out of the preschool building and into his car to drive to work. Eight periods later he found himself standing before his Critical Thinking class.

Additionally attending the class was an area supervisor. Everyone in the classroom was watching “The Book of Five Rings,” a documentary concerning the philosophy of various subjects.

Twenty minutes into the class, the area supervisor spoke quietly with Paxton in a corner of the class and then left. Once gone, Paxton turned on the lights and shut off the television, rolling it into the corner and at the same time the entire class took out *Anthology Complex*, quickly turning to page 97 to continue their studies.

“We only have about twenty-five minutes left so let's not waste anytime,” Paxton said eagerly. “Mr. P,” Latasha shouted, “what do he mean in the beginning of chapter twenty-four? Like what he mean by knowledge ain't got no limits and wise men sayin' they fools?”

Paxton, who immediately recalls the beginning of chapter twenty-four, begins to speak, “The narrator makes a clear distinction between knowledge, intelligence and wisdom. For instance,” Paxton pauses for a moment, “you might have knowledge of a friend and 'know' them, but intelligence tells us that identity is deeper, it goes down to a genetic level, and wisdom is knowing the difference between these two. Having the wisdom to know you are not as knowledgeable of your friend as you think you are. Intelligence allows us to think critically of a piece of knowledge, and also allows us to use our imagination to solve problems.”

“But how can knowledge not have a limit?,” asked Becca. Before Paxton could reply, Chris blurted, “The same way your stupidity has no limit.” Half of the class began to laugh, which eventually prompted Becca to grab her ballpoint pen and throw it at Chris's face. The entire class heard the sound of a click as the pen collided with his teeth, which of course, led to two minutes of Chris's complaining of pain.

Audrey Cheng, who sat in the center of the classroom, wondered how she had scored so highly on the recent quiz despite her lack of study. Unbeknown to her, this was because Paxton had manipulated the scores and graded the entire class on a curve.

Though this was a class of students who would be left behind, Paxton felt he needed to do everything in his power to give them the best chance to succeed in life and the proper motivation to learn. Paxton now saw that, even if the students failed to apply themselves on the actual coursework, they were atleast participating and driving discussions, which was to him a huge improvement in contrast to the beginning of the

school-year. The desire to learn was, to Paxton, as important, if not more important, than knowledge itself.

The bell rings, indicating the end of the regular schoolday. The students spill out of Paxton's classroom, and in the hallway is Latasha, who is waiting for the rest of her peers to disappear completely. During the wait, Andre passes by her, and though he vies for her attention, she ignores him.

Once she sees that they are all gone, she walks back into Paxton's class to find him erasing the whiteboard.

"Give me one minute," he tells her. Latasha sits down patiently at his desk, and after he has cleaned the board he laves the room and returns with a lunch from the school's cafeteria.

He gives the lunch to Latasha and at the same time sits down across from her. After a while, Latasha asks him something that has been bugging her, "Mr. P... How come you know how to speak Spanish? I'm only askin' 'cause you white..."

Mr. Paxton laughed at the question. "I studied it in high school and in college. On top of that, a lot of my clients spoke Spanish." "Oh...", she took a bite of her pizza. "My mom Mexican, my dad black, so that's why I know it."

As she finished her lunch and as Paxton was searching through his desk, Latasha decided to swap roles. "Hey P, you know the Mexican flag?" "Yeah, with the eagle on it?" "Yeah, you know the colors have meanings right?" "Really? What do they mean?" "Green is for hope, white is for unity and red is for the blood of the heroes." "Well, you learn something new everyday."

Once finished, they both said their endearing goodbyes and walked out of the classroom and parted ways.

"THE SUSPECT IS SAID TO BE ONE TERRELL 'ROCK' BELL WHO WAS A KNOWN ASSOCIATE OF THE ROBINSON ORGANIZATION. BELL IS CURRENTLY ARMED AND DANGEROUS, AND IS LARGELY SPECULATED TO BE CARRYING A POLICE FORCE ISSUED RIOT SHOTGUN AND A POLICE FORCE ISSUED BULLETPROOF VEST. BELL IS ALSO WANTED IN CONNECTION TO THE ROBBING AND MURDERING OF ASSOCIATES OF LOW-LEVEL DRUG OPERATIONS, MOSTLY TIED TO THE JOHNSON ORGANIZATION."

Ms. Chopra was twenty minutes late to class, crossing the elementary school's parking lot and noticing a car which had a bumper sticker on it. It read, "District 54 Teacher Working Without A Contract."

"Pass me da rock," one sixth grader said to another on a basketball court. Karuna drove by this park and eventually made it to class. Today, the children were learning

about outer space and space travel, which is why they were watching the animated film titled 'The Kobo of Ieif Snirg' on a big screen. After class, after school, Karuna ventured over to the school library where she had the task of picking out the class's next reading assignment.

As she browsed, a distant memory lingered in her mind. Eventually, though, she selected a children's science-adventure book named 'Mooneater'.

Emily walked through South Kennedy Elementary School's hallway where she found Sara and Dave who were preparing to end the school day's regular period. As she packed them into her car, she thought of her daughter's near-death experience.

The three had begun their drive home, and the late fall sky fell unusually early. In the backseat, Emily had a case of water bottles, one of which Dave would ask if he could drink. "Only take one," she warned him.

Taking a test sip, Dave found that the water was particularly delicious, and soon after finished half of the bottle with several gulps. "Damn grandma, this is some good shit." Emily, normally strict, said nothing in return.

Under the clouded horizon of the city skyline drove away the three to their destination. In the city that surrounded all around, there was the grandly designed backdrop of a fading sunned landscape. Ernest Gate's faceless woman stood still as they egressed from its erection. The triple Umbrella towers, which were among the most unique of remnant displays, could only be contested by the haunting that came from the White Lane bride. The red structure of the Free Radical Design created imagery through its rotating cycle, and Kincaid continued to spin opposite its direction to contrast its themes. As while, Stoner's wide block-hogging posture and Dreamer's triangular-like design sit directly across from the bridge that would take the three into their town. Yelowe-Art bridge, who connected city life to town life, and made possible the distinctions between the busy and the tired.

The three eventually passed by Leavenworth Community College, and neighboring it a mural which depicted an angel battling a demon. "Unlock rear doors," Emily said aloud to the car, and after the doors were unlocked, Dave and Sara exited the vehicle to enter their grandmother's residence.

"Replay that," Clayton requested. David Croft rewound and the entire team re-watched the play. Early into the second half of the week nine game, an interesting play had occurred. The opponent was at their own goal line, prone to a safety. The first snap yielded no progress, and the second snap found the opponent's quarterback scrambling around the line of scrimmage, to which he would eventually be sacked right on top of said line. This resulted in a safety, awarding the home team two points and possession.

"Pause it," Okadigbo requested, "Look, right there... He was not in the endzone."

Faulkner asked Croft to play it again, and upon review, Faulkner agreed that it was not actually a safety.

At the time, the game was completely one-sided, the opponents leading 28 to 3, however, it would be debated whether this false call was to blame for the home team's eventual comeback and ultimately winning the contest.

"That's the play," argued Reggie, "That decision is what turned the game around." They were now reviewing footage that was advanced by ten minutes, where Clayton decided on a surprise on-side kick which was easily recovered by the home team.

Prior, the opponents suffered a safety which led to a punt to the home team, which led to a returned touchdown by Warren Stacy, now bringing the score from 28-5 to 28-12. This was succeeded by a successful on-side kick, which gave possession right back to the home team.

"You have to step up in the pocket when it's open," Clayton said to Chip while watching a sack play. "Don't try to bounce outside when you can move straight up, this will allow you to also keep your eyes down the field to monitor potential receivers."

The next play, Chip threw an interception which slowed down the momentum of the comeback. "I think that sack before is what forced you to throw that ball too early," Clayton suggested. Chipper could see that Clayton was annoyed with the play, seeing that a mistake like this was preventable, and in his expression, Chipper saw that Clayton was fumbling with some irrecoverable football game.

After the pick, hope was again lost. Fans of the home team were already leaving, but the football Gods had it in their hearts to punish them.

"Moving corners and safeties," McCormack pointed out at a play. He was referring to Chip's ability of pump faking and looking off defenders, calling it a "Snake's Eye." It was more noticeable in this historic comeback game than it was in the preceding games because it was something he had only recently been practicing.

Entering the fourth quarter and slowly building onto the once-lost momentum, the score was 28 to 20, the opponents stalling on drives and not scoring a single point in the entire second half, in part due to Reggie's leadership on defense.

"Thank God Baxter got injured," said Boe Tamana. The injury to Baxter, who was the outside linebacker of the opposing team, allowed for exploitation after a rookie backup entered the game.

The home team was now at the segment where Chipper, again, threw an interception. Fortunately for them, on the returning of the interception, a hard blow from a teammate caused the ball to pop out and allowed Chip to land on it, recovering the ball. It was eight plays later that he ran in for a touchdown to tie the game with 1:27 remaining.

The entirety of the remaining one minute and twenty-seven seconds would go down

in sports history, and would earn this game the nickname of “The Theory Game.”

Football enthusiast everywhere, and to this day, still debate over the outcome of the game. “If this was done, or if that was avoided, things would have been different.” “That second two-point conversion shouldn't have counted.” Fans would study it and dissect it and would string up theories on football and this regular season game itself.

Tie game, kickoff, 1:27 left; the opposing team catches the ball in the field of play and return it for a whopping sixty-three yards, already nearing field goal position. They easily drive down the field and reach the home team's goaline, 0:29 remaining in the game. Third and goal, they need to punch it in, otherwise they will be forced to kick a field goal.

The opposing team walk up to the line of scrimmage, having just had time to think due to the home's team decision to burn their final timeout. Attention was high as the players re-watched their favorite moment of the game on the screen.

After calling an audible, the opposing team's quarterback snapped the ball, dropped back, and hoped to connect on a slant route, but was picked off by Kevin Faulkner, who went the distance and returned the interception for an eventual game-winning touchdown; it is one of the rarer moments Clayton could be seen on film jumping up and down as he tried to keep up with Kevin.

This play is highly discussed because of the circumstances that surround it. The home team decided on an unusual formation of the Mantis scheme, which was a deceptively passive formation on defense. This was, perhaps, what influenced the call for an audible, and fans wonder if the audible had not been called, if the ball would have been ran instead of thrown, running being the obvious choice under the circumstances.

There perhaps may have also been confusion on the offense after they noticed the Mantis scheme, and this is when, enthusiasts say, they should have used their final timeout instead of calling an audible.

Others suggested kicking a field goal right then and there, to lead by three, giving the home team only twenty-nine seconds for an unlikely score. Of course, hindsight is 20/20.

The “Claymen,” as they were called from then on, went on to a record of 5-4. Clayton got up to turn the television off and began grading the players for the week-in review. Seeing as they played to win, he disregarded any practice failures and graded on a curve.

“The student must learn how to learn better, though this may prove difficult if the teacher has not already gone through the same process.”

Chapter 25

THE CITY THAT NEVER SLEEPS

2:1:3:25

¶ I was always a night-owl before Sara. I would stay up after midnight watching late-night TV, periodically looking out of my window into the sky, or I would walk around the apartment gathering my thoughts. Sometimes I would go to bed and lie awake thinking, thinking about either everything or nothing. Blank spaces or my near to distant future, I would never fall in the middle; either I was on or I was off. Yeah, the after hours are always a good time for thinking, like a flower that closes up in the night.

¶ Last night, I had a mazed seam... I haven't really been able to get much sleep lately, so I walked around the hospital with a restless mind. I took an elevator up to the fifth floor where they had an indoor display of a waterfall. In the elevator was a pretty painting of a white flower with gray petals blowing away into the wind. Named, "Mortalus Gradius."

¶ The waterfall fell very softly and I loved watching it, but it also reminded me that mostly everything in life is fleeting. Love, hate, joy, sorrow. No mother or father will ever tell you that their child brought them pain and gloom. They brought happiness as well, but there's a reason why we only hang the happy photos. I guess it's sometimes a lie.

¶ "One more year and I'll be happy." "Just need to get the job." "If I had someone to love." "When we finally have enough to buy that house." "The end goal is children and a family."

¶ I'm tired of lying to myself, and I'm tired of trusting people who tell me they have the wisdom to show me the light. I'm sorry to say this, but I feel like no one really has the true answer to life. Maybe because there isn't one.

¶ After the waterfall, at around one a.m., I found myself walking around in the children's ward. I had been there before and talked with some of the women who worked there. Melissa isn't working there anymore, but she is the reason why Twin Souls hangs on the right wall of the hallway that leads into the ward. I decided to pair White Lights with Rosalynnette, and together they made the illusion of fated lovers.

¶ Lookin g into one of the play r ooms, I saw this singl e plastic foot from som e pri n cess d oll lay i ng on th e floor. The girl playing with it must have been a total sicko. Jesus.

¶ Just east of the playroom was a large window that looked out into the hospital's parking garage. I stared out and saw a few cars come and go at around two a.m., but what was more was that I noticed the same blue flower that could be seen from my room was visible here as well. I thought that until I found myself at another window on the west wing showed the same thing, and I realized that these blue flowers surrounded the entire hospital.

¶ I of course watched it, and at some time a wind began to take over the town. The blue flower bowed from the breeze, but finally it bent, hung there, and snapped.

¶ A rose carved out of onyx was used to symbolize defeat by an evil force. The first time

I read about that, it made me think about how all life has to end, even flowers. It almost seems absurd to give someone something that will eventually die, but I will say this; a lady would rather have a flower that will one day die but is real, then a flower that can live forever but is fake.

¶ I found the elevator again and went down to the second floor, which is where most of the elderly people stay. As soon as the door to the elevator opened, I could tell something was wrong with one of the lights. Walking down that hallway, I realized it was because one of them was messed up and kept flicking on and off.

¶ On a table in one of the kitchens on that floor, there was a deck of cards. At the top of the deck was a two of hearts, and just beside it a Purple Heart medal... The other car in my accident had a child in it, but they are okay... Everyone is still alive and I'm the only one with any injuries. I am thankful for that.

¶ On the other side of this floor, which is ironically dominated by newborns, as you walk through the center and leave the old for the new, hangs another copy of *Mortalus Gradius*, and now that I think about it, as I'm writing this, I realize there was a painting on every floor that I visited.

¶ As I was walking through, I ran into a tired doctor. "You like that painting?," he asked me. I said yes (then again I love all paintings, especially the ones with flowers). He commented on the fact that he walks past it every day yet has no idea what it means, or what it's trying to say. He told me that after a year of working there, he thought it might be a symbol of all the patients who died. I guess that could work, but I'm not sure.

¶ Later, I took the stairs back down to my floor. After I opened the door into the lobby, I sat down and stared into the small body of water that the waterfall poured into. Many coins, countless wishes. Desire and ignorance...

¶ It reminded me of my lake, Cellardoor. Walking across the shoreline; beaches, sand in my feet. Hadean dragonflies. Heating Sun. I always felt there was something wrong with him. I just didn't know what it was. A dark past. Mental illness. Last year during the winter, he scared me. He still scares me. What good is love if it's accompanied by fear?

¶ At around four a.m. my adventures and explorations ceased. A security guard came up to me and told me that I needed to go back to my room to rest. She was polite about it, I guess, and I suppose I'm the one who started it, but soon into her request I yelled at her and we started arguing. I felt bitchy. I think I needed to yell at someone. Before it got out of hand I calmed down and she walked me to my room.

¶ I went in and laid down on my bed. The walking didn't tire me, it only made me more restless, and sometime into the night I found myself crying. I couldn't figure out why. It wasn't because of him. It wasn't because the state of my life or because of a bad day. It was one of those feelings you couldn't pinpoint, like an answer lost in a dream at the back of mind. So she wept, and her lucky star flickered until it went out, and in the darkness, her

flowers closed.

Three years ago, I had a daydream. I am on the top of a roof, looking into the distance that has a sign which reads “R U BY TEL.” Looking down, over the edge, I realize that I am grasping the arm of a woman who will fall if I let go.

“Kidkiller.” That's what they called her, because that's exactly what she was. The strange fascination with the children she would kidnap and torture and murder. A strange watermark on her forehead.

I question her over and over again about the location of the dark man, but she reveals nothing but deranged babbling and incoherent word-salad.

On the process of writing dreams, it starts with a bunch of scribbling in the middle of the night, and sometimes you can't even read what you wrote down. I think for most of us, if you don't ponder your dream within about half a minute of waking, you'll forget it, or at least forget most of it, which is why when I first started I had the word “dream” written on a piece of paper on my ceiling.

It was prudent that I remembered quickly as to not put any falseness in my recount of the dream, because as we all know, it is very easy to orchestrate something that didn't really happen and to add false elements into a dream.

The ugly villainette drabbled, “Tip the first domino and watch them all fall down—You agree that you are nothing but dust and ash, yet you wear high hats and long robes—Solomon prayed for wisdom instead of riches—Even though I'll probably end up killing myself, I wouldn't trade my life or who I am for anything—I love looking out of the window like a crazy person—That's how life passes you by, you stop thinking about it—There's a difference between being careless and caring less—And there's nothing manly about a gun—Life seems to come down to one thing, how you handle it—The pride that people tell you you should have, it does more harm than good—My hate is general, I detest all men; some because they are wicked and do evil, others because they tolerate the wicked, refusing them the active vigorous scorn which vice should stimulate in virtuous minds.”

I asked her if she was done, and she began at the end again. Hearing her voice made something rage inside me. A dark cloud brewing just above me. But as she spoke on, my attention shifted to two masked men in suits running out of a bank. I lost grip of her arm and gravity took her away.

At first, I panicked, but as she fell, screaming, I felt nothing. Not remorse, not sadness, but a feeling of the dark cloud of emptiness, and flashes of the man cloaked in darkness consumed my thoughts. I thought backwards, way back, to the time I was given a black book and a white book by two childlike figures. The land of freedom is a terrible thing; God and Satan do battle there; the prize is man's will.

I awoke to incoherent babbling coming from up above. I think the father in the household above is a drunkard. I can hear every one of his words; I believe he is on the phone; nothing he says makes any sense though. A twitch came over my pinky finger. I thought about her...

I walk over to my bedroom and continue working on combining my two bookshelves. I will be able to better categorize my dreams this way.

During the span of working I periodically look out of my window into the sky; and with each passing moment the Moon takes the place of the Sun until the night completely falls.

By now I'm sure I've weeded out all the chione, simple-minded people who've come across these pages, so I am sure I will not offend you when I say this... Anyone who has never had an existential crisis is a simple-minded fool living a simply foolish life. If you don't think about death, your own and those around you, then when it comes you'll be shocked, and that's what you get for believing that life isn't sold by death. You want to live your life to the fullest and forget that you will die, that's your problem when you fucking die and it's too fucking late.

What's her fucking problem. It's past midnight and she has me up all night pissed off at her and I can't fucking sleep. Why is it so hard to just fucking relax. Did something just fly past the Moon? Maybe that was an airplane. Man, fuck her.

A plank falls at an angle onto another on the bookshelf. Several composition notebooks fall down the angle, some even falling off the case and onto the floor. The anthologist looks back at the noise.

Go to the closet, pull out a box that contains constellation dreams. Pause. Stare at metal baseball bat. Ruby anger. The anthologist kicks the box ripping open its side. The anthologist removes foot and stomps the top of the box. The third stomp rips open a corner of the box. Each successive stomp brings more and more damage and ripping to the failed dreams, and finally, a hidden piece of glass lacerates and gradually mortifies the anthololitic foot.

Chapter 26

ALTAMIRA'S DYNASTY

2:1:3:26

AFTER taking attendance, Mr. Paxton's ninth period class walked four and a half blocks to the Altamira Cultural Museum. On the way, Malcolm and Cedric held an interesting conversation. "Y'all drink goat milk?," Malcolm asked. "Hell yeah, that shit helps your skin stay healthy. Why you think my skin always be feeling smooth nigga." "That's disgusting..." "Nigga, my family's entire nutritional foundation is based on goats," Cedric replied, then began to count on his fingers, one by one, "...goat sausage, goat cheese, goat..." "Cedric shut the fuck up about goats," Chris yelled. Becca laughed. Paxton wondered what was going on way behind him as he led the class.

Inside Altamira is a sign that reads "Today Is Free For All Students!," Just beyond the sign are Ms. Chopra, Mrs. Gonzalez and Mrs. Anderson, who have been exploring the museum with their dual classroom.

"He cheated on her," Mrs. Gonzalez told the other two teachers. "Who?," Anderson replied. "Valentina was cheated on by Jeff, he slept with Viktoriah." "Hmm... I see," Anderson replied. The three could not wait for next week's episode.

Just around the corner were Pattie, Christina and Sara, who had recently discovered the Altamira cave paintings section. "I like those pretty things on her head," remarked Christina. "My mom has a bracelet like that," continued Sara as she adjusted her silver glasses. "I don't think that's a bracelet, it looks like a chain," finished Pattie.

Just then, Paxton and his class entered the museum. The entire class immediately split up, mostly in groups of fours and fives, and Paxton found himself exploring with Latasha and Arimatla, the new student of Native American ancestry.

They first appeared in sports history, where Paxton saw that Arimatla was interested in football, and explained to him that the man on the poster was Henry Clayton during a week ten win against a conference rival. The contest was a blowout and no one knew how the home team won by so much.

There were a gallery of photos in the area; of Okadigbo handing a ball to a child, which he did after all of his touchdowns, in remembering his premature son who died a day after being born, of Chipper diving into an endzone and being challenged by two defenders, of Clayton being carried by his players as he held the championship trophy.

Just east of Paxton were Javier, Vyncente and David, who were currently perplexed by a puzzle on the wall. "That's impossible!," exclaimed David. Javier and Vyncente stared at the painting with suspecting eyes. Mrs. Anderson snuck up behind them, "You have to think outside the box," she emphasized the word "outside." "What do you

mean?," Javier asked. "...Don't be afraid to break the rules," Anderson replied.

"Do you love me?" asked Monica. Andre hesitated, partially because of the uncomfortableness that came from hiding in the museum's children's playground's rubber tunnel apparatus. "I don't know if I want to ever get married," she continued once she saw he was not going to answer.

A child named Chandler from Dave's class began crawling through the tunnel, and when he approached Andre and Monica, Andre yelled at him, "Get out of here!" "Eww!," Chandler scurried away.

Chris and Becca passed into the independent musicians section and began looking through music, one of them being Cloud Hemingway's newest single, "4.0.6.58.0.0."

"I don't know," Chris replied, "Paxi is cool but he's not like any of my other teachers. Like I know, I can just tell, there is something just off about him. Do you think any other teacher would do the shit he does. Remember how he said he used to scam people? I don't know... Mr. Howard calls him 'So Crates' because he thinks he's weird."

Becca replied, "But wouldn't you rather have him as a teacher than anyone else in the school? You know you would."

Chris replied, "I ain't gonna lie, at first I was planning on ditching it so I could go home early, but I guess he's aight... I'm glad Ms. Kowalski told me to take it."

Sandeep joined the others who were staring at a painting on a wall. "Tales of the African Booty Scratcher?," he laughed. Audrey and Elliot replied in chuckles.

The painting on the wall told the story of Prometheus, who was chiefly known for giving fire to mankind. In this painting, he was also noted as giving knowledge to the youth, though this action did not fare well with the elders as he was eventually punished for corrupting the minds of the young.

As Latasha passed by Monica and Andre, she thought about how she had not talked to Andre in almost an entire week. Andre was a bit alarmed at her disposition, seeing that she was more straight-faced than angry-faced, and also noted of her wandering around in the museum's Dress & Gown shop ten minutes before, as Latasha was not one for feminine things.

"Yo, P-trunk," Latasha said, "what is that?" James looked in the direction that Latasha was pointing in and saw the three dimensional display of the garden of Eden. James immediately recognized that the hologram was based off of a ninth-century piece of art.

Satan, as serpent, slithered sideways quickly atop the stream. On the other side, inside a garden, he saw Adam and Eve whom were cloaked in innocence.

Satan, silently, waited for Eve to abandon Adam. A moment or two later, he swiftly followed her through the slippery forest and to the tree of knowledge.

“Sssss,” he whispered to Eve, and when she saw who it was, she replied, “Silly snake! Go away!” A piece of red fruit fell from the tree, and this is when Satan began to speak, “Your father, in the Heavens, he doth deceive you into believing that all darkness is evil, but I will say to you, Eve, though darkness doth not guide, it also doth not blind; for, it is better that one be lost with knowledge, than for one to be will-less and so blinded by the guiding light.”

Chapter 27

THE ANGRY GOD

2:1:3:27

BALTIMORE, 1661. Midnight. I am on a train, filled with passengers, arriving to Baltimore momentarily. Outside my window I see a small town, many lights as we pass through.

I am reading the Torah, its footnotes. I had been reading about Noah and his ark, or if you want an honest account of the story, about an angry God.

In their early years, Child Satan and Child God created a universe without rules. They codenamed it “HADEA,” and it was known to them as an anti-predetermined world. As opposed to our universe, or, our world, which they considered predetermined, an anti-predetermined creation was one which was governed by no laws, no logic, no explanation, and especially, was unpredictable and things could not be predetermined. Here, physics is defied; an object could gain momentum without any force being acted upon it.

During his years as an older man, God, who was now working alone on the project, went through many phases as he tried to solve the issues of the anti-predetermined world. As he tried to create a world that was predetermined and would work accordingly to a set of rules. He needed to allow the implementation of “patterns,” to create “predictability,” and finally he would have his “predetermined” universe.

This, by his standards, would be an amazing feat, but to get his foot in the door, he had to first start off as a humble God.

The humble God created his project, but saw that it would not grow; he then became the greedy God. The greedy God created his project but saw that it grew wildly and out of control; he then became the wise God. The wise God created his project but saw that it was melancholic; he then became the joyful God. The joyful God created his project but saw that it was imprudent; he then became the careless God. The careless God created his project but saw that it was without order; he then became the diligent God. The diligent God created his project but saw that it was erroneous; he then became the angry God.

The angry God, after many, many years, created the universe as we know it in anger. He had been frustrated for many a millennia now, and had begun to make random adjustments to his creation until finally it landed on a certain degree of predictability. “This is good enough,” he decided and declared angrily, and at once; he put his creation in motion.

The train arrived at the Baltimore station and made its stop. I pick up my briefcase, put on my suit jacket and hat, and then start to get up. As I enter in the midnight town, the lights graze my eyes and cause me to wake up.

I awoke from sleeping and limped into my living room. I turn on my computer to find that a detective Frank Mainor had been promoted to lieutenant, replacing a lieutenant Shane Stoddard, who I assume was moving on to captain.

I half-peel off the bandage on my foot to find that the glass had done more damage to me than I thought. I take my keys, limp to the first floor to check my mail, and then return to my apartment, noticing that the mailman had accidentally given me a piece of mail for Lynne.

I sat there, flat-footed, in my living room, tending my cut foot and wondering if I should open her mail or not. I decided to open it. I take out the letter and begin to read it:

Dear Mrs. Lynette,

*We are sending you this letter on behalf of the entire team at HOMENESS. Thank you for your kind donation! We normally don't send personal letters out to donators, but have found your case to be especially special considering the amount of effort you put into helping the homeless. Thank you for standing with us in **solidarity** and joining our fight to end homelessness!*

Sincerely, the HOMENESS team

I thought about the letter, and then went to my desk and took out the letter Lynne had given me two winters ago.

Dear friend,

I am writing you this letter at the risk of your disapproval, but I need you to know how I feel. I have strong feelings for you and get excited when I see you. I feel Heaven surround me when I'm with you, even though I have gone through a solitary Hell to find you. Without that road, I may have never been brought to your door. You stood up for me, even when you didn't have to, and even though it really didn't help, I want you to know that I will always be by your side. Now, and I hope... Forever.

Your friend, L.J.P.

I made a mental note of the “soli-” prefixes, but a long while after became sad and ashamed that I was more interested in finding a puzzle and connections than feeling remorse for yelling at her.

Thinking of the letters together, I noticed that the word “solidarity” was fonted in gold. Or maybe yellow; I couldn't tell. But for an even longer while, I remembered what she told me about a golden rose. I remembered that walk with her kids down Eden avenue, remembered her blood and gold dress and her stupid fucking attempts to hold my hand because she's so damn clingy.

I could see the reflection of a golden Moon on my window now. Life becomes very dull when it continually imitates art.

Lynnette stared out of her hospital's window into the night, gazing at a golden Moon in the sky. She turned around to see that a new patient was being added to her room; a large woman with small eyes.

Like two unusually friendly women, they struck a cord with each other immediately, and spoke into the night like vulnerable friends from their respective beds:

Chloe: Do you mind if I change this? I don't like football...

Lynnette: I don't mind.

[A nurse walks by the room with a patient, followed by a doctor]

[Chloe eventually lands on a news station, showing footage of Omar Robinson being released from prison]

[Commercials]

Chloe: ...So, what are you in for?...

Lynne: ...Vehicular manslaughter...

Chloe: Hahaha!

[Lynne returns the laugh as Chloe changes the channel]

Lynne: No, I got into a small accident and broke my arm.

Chloe: Your arm looks fine to me...

Lynne: I had the cast removed in the afternoon.

[Infomercials start; advertisement of a silver necklace with a single crystal tear, made of real crystal]

Chloe: Ah... Had a heart attack at my favorite lake...

Lynne: Really?

Chloe: ...No no, just messing with you. Well, I don't think it was a heart attack, but I needed an ambulance and it was embarrassing having all those people look at me.

Lynne: How do you feel now?

Chloe: Like executing a jailbreak...

[Lynne laughs]

Lynne: I won't be of any help, there's a guard here and I'm not great friends with her.

[A nurse knocks on their door and reveals herself, asks Chloe if her name is Joel,

becomes confused, then soon realizes she has the wrong room and excuses herself]

Lynne: What lake was it?

Chloe: Ivory Coast Lake, over by Foot-Loose Center.

Lynne: Never been...

Chloe: It's wonderful, you should.

Lynne: Yeah... Have you ever been to Cellardoor?

Chloe: ...Hmm, can't say that I have.

Lynne: It's beautiful. I got married there ages and ages ago.

Chloe: I thought married people wore rings.

[Lynne pauses]

Lynne: ...We're separated now.

Chloe: Details.

[Lynne laughs, then pauses]

Lynne: I don't know. We were fine, and then one night all of a sudden we just started yelling at each other. He started it though.

[Chloe laughs]

Lynne: "It's not funny," Lynne laughed.

Chloe: ...And then...

Lynne: I told him to leave, he wouldn't, and eventually the police came and got him. I mean, we started off on the right foot but I don't know what happened...

[Yelling can be heard from outside their window]

Chloe: You shouldn't have to stand for that. For a man who can't love you... God I hate men.

[Lynne laughs]

Lynne: He's not a bad person, I still love him. We're just in a bad place right now.

Chloe: Well, promise me, if he ever makes you feel worthless you make sure you leave him.

[Lynne laughs]

Chloe: "I'm not joking," Chloe laughs.

Chloe: You give them an inch, they take a foot.

Lynne: I think it's mile.

Chloe: What?

Lynne: You give them an inch they take a mile.

Chloe: Mile, whatever.

Lynne: "...He used to come over every Friday night. Well, it's Friday night and he's not here," Lynne lets out a nervous laugh.

Chloe: ...Aww, you miss him...

[Lynne's eyes become mildly watery]

Lynne: He hasn't come back to me... I'm starting to think he never will.

[Infomercial; an emerald rose is on sale, don't miss out on this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity!]

Chloe: There are plenty of fish in the sea, honey...

Lynne: I know, I know. The way we left it, things can never be the same, and I think I have to accept that while we were good together, we weren't meant for each other. I just don't know what to expect from him sometimes, he's a complete puzzle...

Chloe: The problem with us is that we love puzzles at first, but after a while they become frustrating.

[Lynne laughs]

Chloe: 'Never jump in with both feet, that's how you get cold feet,' that's what I always say.

[Lynne laughs again]

Lynne: 'But how can you not, when they sweep you off your feet?,' that's what I always ask.

[Chloe laughs]

[A servant comes into the room with their foods, they begin to eat]

Lynne: ...I think I'm going crazy...

Chloe: Why?

Lynne: My mind has just been off the rails lately, I've been thinking about every thing. Some of the things he said to me before he left.

Chloe: Like what?

Lynne: I don't know, like I've been talking to God... Why did the God they say is loving kill children? Does he actually care?

Chloe: Girl you askin' the wrong person about God.

[Lynne laughs]

Lynne: ...The things that make me right for my lifestyle, maybe they're the same things that make me wrong for everything else...

Chapter 28

ILIAD OF FIRE & ICE

2:1:3:28

hclayton_lost-speech.odt: “AND when I came to that town, I saw many of its residents wandering about the ruins picking up trash; for they knew that loss was the first step to shedding weakness and rebuilding something stronger.” Loss... What is it? A simple three letter word; one syllable; yet you can say it to a person and it may evoke deep memories of the past. It is the opposite of gain, which has a positive connotation; does that make loss bad? We know that loss can be good and gain can be bad. Loss can make one humble while gain can make one conceited. When something is lost, one finally sees what they had; when one gains, well, it's almost never as spectacular. After the bye week, we lost all three of our last three games. All three. We also lost Kevin, Reggie and Kelechi to injuries. We are losing momentum, losing games, and most of all, losing morale. I could give some grand speech about sport and it being your life's purpose, or about how we will prevail through all of this loss, but you all know me better than that and you would know I was lying if I did. So what I will say, with honesty, is that I understand we are still rebuilding as a team, and I understand now that I can come up with all the technical schemes in the world but that won't make up for the fact that I lack the words to truly encourage you all. I hate losing, I love winning, I can't change that, and one of the most important skills I have learned in my life is rebuilding. Rebounding from loss. This entire season so far has been an experiment of rebuilding and I do not believe we should stop now. There are still three games left in the regular season and we still have a chance at the playoffs. I'm going to ask you all to go a little crazy and lose some sleep this week. I'm going to ask you to become obsessed with winning. Let it consume you, and make the idea of losing repulse you. Do whatever you can do to help us continue rebuilding. If it means being away from your family, then so be it. You can go be with your family after we win.

“Raheim got all of eastside,” said 2Face, “I can't even go nowhere without getting punked. I try to sell on a corner and they run me off it,” he finished. Wallace had been speaking with Timothy Ryan at a restaurant deep within the inner city when news broke out about a double-building fire that was taking place somewhere in the United Kingdom. “How does a fire spread that fast?,” he asked 2Face, still looking at the television.

“We can't live like this if we want to start a family. Are you listening to me? We have to find a bigger apartment, we need more money.” May-ling was attempting to gain the attention of Tao but soon lost it after he became increasingly interested in the news. Two twenty-four storey tower-buildings who were very near to each other had been ablaze and were completely caught on fire, a dark cloud of smoke rising from the tops.

“Smaller buildings around the area have also been damaged,” Jack heard on the radio news as he drove into a parking spot with his daughter, Felicity, aged sixteen. “If a fire starts from the bottom and rises, how are the people at the top going to get out?,” she asked her father.

Claire Jones, more than three states over from where most of her family resides, had been resting in a motel room watching television when breaking news interrupted her program. The death toll of the burning buildings had rose to nineteen; the fire had completely engulfed the building and people were still being sought after through the wreckage.

The bell for the ending of period eight rings as Paxton is watching the news in his classroom. He had been following recent news of what was now being called the St. Albans fire. On the board was the lesson plan for the day: REAL LIFE, underlined by LINEAR, DREAM LIFE, underlined by NON-LINEAR, MEMORY LIFE, underlined by HYBRID OF NON-LINEAR AND REAL.

The first student to enter the class was Andre, followed by Monica, Carson. As more students entered they sat down and also screened the tragedy. “I’ve never seen anything like this,” Paxton said to his completed class.

“Turn on the news,” Karuna messaged Paxton. She was with Anderson and Gonzalez in the teacher’s area also viewing the event. By now the fire was out and what was left was the total ruin of two towers and smaller nearby buildings; it was suspected that at least seventy had been trapped inside.

After exchanging phone numbers, Chloe left the hospital for good and bade Lynne farewell. Not too long after a doctor came into her room to discuss her benign tumor. He confirmed again that it was nothing to worry about and further tests concluded that she would be ready to go back home soon.

After the doctor had left, Lynne turned on the television and switched through channels until she came across what appeared to be two burning buildings. She watched in shock as people were laying on the streets, being carried out in stretchers, some crying for their loved ones. She watched as firefighters refused to comment, as some of them laid at the side of building exhausted from their rescue efforts. She felt sad that there was nothing she could do to help.

Silvio, walking through the mall with his pregnant girlfriend, looked at his cellular device to find news about the double-fire. Eventually they stopped at a jewelry shop where Alexa commented on the fact that she was in love with a particularly sapphiric ring, and that it was imperative that she have it. She also made suggestions and hinted at the fact that she wanted to be asked her hand in marriage.

Kathleen, accompanied by Joe and his boyfriend, Ross, had been on a flight that was

over the state of Maine when they saw news reports of the disaster on the seat-screens. “There are so many things to fear living at the top of one of those buildings,” Joe said to Ross. Ross replied, “I know, right.” Kathleen removed her earphones and looked in the direction of her son, “What are you two talking about?”

Inside Emily's apartment, Sara and Dave could be found fighting over the remote. After Sara loses the battle, she runs over to Emily who is sewing and cries to her. Emily walks over to Dave and snatches the remote out of his hands, then tells the both of them that neither of them can watch television. She then sits down and decides that all three of them would be watching the news. When she finally lands on the news channel, she is shocked by the helicopter-view of two burning buildings. “Cool!,” Dave yells.

Gun Ho, who was part of the Filipino family of seven, and who was the lone Korean in the household, was privileged with having full command of the television as it was past midnight and everyone else was sleeping. Listening to anime music with the headphones he had stolen from the narrator, he flipped channels until he came across the fire. Like a child, he assumed it was like a climax to one of his Mushashi-based manga comics.

The Irish father, who lived above the narrator, had been paying attention to the news of the fire from the corner of his eye as he talked to a comrade over the phone about escaping from Ireland and from a dark past. When his wife passed by and saw the news, she covered her mouth with her hand and called for her daughter to come witness.

“Get out of here!,” the narrator cried, attempting to bat away a rat from Lynne's garden with his shoe. Catching breath, the rat retreated back into the sewers.

The narrator saw that her garden's eastern fence had been destroyed. Walking into the apartment building and down into the basement, the narrator combined the numbers 31, 17 and 16 to open up a storage section. There, there were tools to be used for the trade of carpentry.

Walking back out, the narrator realized that without Lynne, there was a void. I realized that without her, I had to wash my own clothes; buy my own groceries and toiletries; prepare my own food; I even had to clean my own bathroom for the first time in half of a year.

The narrator walked back outside into Lynne's mystic garden and began rebuilding the broken wooden fence. Taking it off completely, it became obvious to the narrator that the fence was no longer in any usable condition. It had to be replaced, entirely, or it would only suffer the same fate once more.

Chapter 29

MYSTIC GARDEN

2:1:3:29

¶ **HE** came to see me today. Honestly, I am a bit confused right now, and for the past hour I have been going back and forth on whether I should call him or not. So that we could at least talk.

¶ He called the hospital first, and after they transferred the call to my room I picked up the phone and said hello. After his voice came through I felt sick. I didn't know what to do. The sick feeling turned into anger and I hung up the phone.

¶ An hour later I left my room and went to go sit down on the bench near the waterfall and watched as it fell. I heard his voice in my head again and thought I was going crazy, until I looked to my right to see him standing there with flowers in his hand.

¶ I didn't look at him again. He tried talking to me but I ignored him. Lucky for him Emily showed up with Sara and David. When they saw him they got excited and ran up to him. I felt jealous, I admit. I felt anger. Confusion. Emily saw it on my face as I walked away back to my room and she knew that me and him were in a bad place.

¶ I don't know what to do. Should I call him?

The crowd clapped and cheered as the singer known as Lynnette finished her powerful and loud final song. I watched her as she walked off the stage, down the steps, holding her white dress; a white daisy in her hair. For a moment, if you caught it, she looked like a flowering city; a bright white light made of starmyst.

Star-based concepts, or starbased conception, is the idea that any given star in any given system may have any given unique ability.

For example, life on Earth is due in large part to our Sun. It helped to create the conditions for life and allowed both animal and plant life to be sustained. When the first forms of life emerged, they were completely unaware of a “Sun,” and were definitely unaware that this “Sun” was the reason they were alive. It is theorized that eventually, this simple form of life became aware of the ultraviolet Sun rays and evolved in such a way that it could interpret this light, it developed a sensor, and suddenly it attained the capacity to see through evolution and adaptation.

Now let's say that form of life never evolved, it would continue to be unaware of the Sun, therefore being unaware of how or why it is alive. The Sun would be, in essence, an “invisible” star. This has made me wonder, as human beings who are still evolving and developing sensors, what stars are invisible to us. We can see the Sun, and we know it's why we are here, but are there other “stars” out there that we cannot sense that are also responsible for certain phenomena in our universe?

Could one of these invisible stars be responsible for the force of gravity? Is it possible that these stars are everywhere, each one possessing a unique “power?”

As she towered past me gracefully with captionability, I felt the breeze wind from her flowering dress. After she passed me and after her dress danced away, I saw the slow falling of her white daisy. Landing on the ground it fell apart into two pieces, and as I walked over to pick it up, I called out to her telling her of what she had left behind.

One piece, the outer, was white and another, the inner, was yellow. I put it back together, and when she got me to me I stood up and fixed it back into her hair.

She thanked me, then killed me with a smile, and after this black and dark silence, I found that the two of us had left the jazz club and wandered outside.

We were in a city located up high in the clouds, and floating, we could look down from any edge and see the ocean down below. I glanced back a few times as we walked away from the jazz club and noticed that it was named “The Mystic Garden.”

We talked. Well, she did. And in her many words she repeatedly told me that she felt lost. That she felt that she was destined for something else, something greater, that she felt she had a power that was currently unknown to her.

She stopped me, grabbing my hand, and looked into me, still telling me she was full of desires. In her fury of words she suddenly spit on me; a spec landed on my lip and another in my eye. I did not wipe as to not offend.

But, I did notice something. I noticed her power to connect, her ability to revir. She couldn't see it, but I saw it; I felt at one with her, as if she were my soulmate. Most people are unaware of their own power when it first shows, but everyone around them can see it, perhaps not its full blossom, but at least in its early stages of flouring.

I dialed the number to her hospital and they put me on hold. I held for about twenty seconds until I finally heard her mystic voice. I said hello, but she suddenly hung up on me. I knew it wasn't a mistake, so I didn't call back. I went back and forth on whether I should just visit her or not and tell her I'm sorry for what I said. Look, at this tangle of thorns.

I drove to a nearby mall and bought the first bouquet of flowers I could find; they were daisies; the outer being yellow and the inner being green. I then drove to the hospital and made my way through it. When I got to her room, she wasn't there. Strangely, I had to walk for a while until I could find a doctor or a nurse or someone who knew the whereabouts of the patients.

That was when I saw her, sitting in front of a waterfall, gazing in front of herself like a madwoman. I waited there before I approached, and as soon as I went to say something, she suddenly began to talk to herself. I couldn't understand what she was saying exactly, but I could tell it was something sad.

“You look like me,” I eventually said. I didn't startle her, it was actually the very opposite of being startled. She recognized my voice, slowly turned her head to look at

me, and then turned back towards the waterfall, completely ignoring me.

“I’m sorry for what I did. What I said. Everything.” She didn’t budge. I stood there for five minutes, she never saying anything or even looking at me. It was one of our many long silences.

And the silence was broken when Emily arrived with Dave and Sara. After they saw me, Dave and Sara ran up to me and expressed how excited they were to see me, asking me if I was back from traveling.

As Sara wrapped her small arm around me, I see that she has a flower in her hair; a daisy; the outer being green and the inner being white. At some point Lynne got up and walked away, vanishing, I didn’t see her again. After I spoke with the three, I left the flowers with Emily, asking her to give them to her daughter; I could tell she knew something was wrong with the both of us. Seeing as she didn’t give me anything that resembled a dirty look, I knew then that Lynne hadn’t told anyone of what I had done to her.

When I got back home I felt I wanted the world to be at a sort of... Nevermind. I watched television, I listened to music, and finally I went to my computer to study. Sometime after midnight I received a message from someone.

Lynnette J. Parker (12:07 a.m.): i wore my heart on my sleeve for so long that i accepted love in any form it came in. whether he gave me flowers or hid my prosthetic so i couldn't leave the house, i saw it as love. love has always been the biggest part of my life, not just because i am a woman, but because its the way i understand the world. im not that smart, but i understand love, and everything about me comes down to love. in second grade there was a boy who i would always hold hands with. im not sure why we did it, but thinking about it today i think it was because we were the most shy in our classroom. i never saw any of the other kids doing that. in fifth grade i had a huge crush on a boy but couldnt tell him how i felt, because for one i didnt feel like he ever noticed me, and if i did tell him i wanted to be his girlfriend, he might reject me. i was too shy. im still too shy. in eighth grade i practically had a crush on any boy who talked to me, but by this age i was starting to see that my family was poor, and i felt like if i did start going out with someone i wouldnt be able to afford anything. how would i buy him gifts, how would i keep him happy. freshman year, i decided my goal was to have my first real boyfriend. it didnt happen, so i had the same goal for sohpmore year. i didnt get my first real boyfriend until junior year, so you can understand when i say i was a little bit behind all the other girls. i was in love with him, i made love to him, and his love eventually came out of me. all of my adult life was spent with him, and i learned more about love because of him, but in all those years spent loving him i had never once been truly intimate with him. i had

never been intimate with anyone, really, not with romances and not with family, no one... but then you came along, like a superhero with a heart that saved me. you came and fought off all my demons and you awakened a better version of me i had never seen. its like you were the only knight who could take excalibur, and when you did, my soul was released. my spirit rose. you were so nice to me. i opened up like a flower. i didnt even know what intimacy was until earlier this year when we talked all night and watched the sunrise together. sitting there in the treehouse together, no one had ever been inside my head the way you have. no one had ever seen me like that. no one else has ever seen the scar on my thigh. you are the one person im not afraid of. im more afraid of my own son than you. when i told you i felt like a virgin, i meant it. i know now, after all these years, that i never truly loved silvio. he is the father of my children, but the love i have for you is unparalleled. i dont want to fight. dont be mad at me. im lonely and i miss you. i want you to come back home.

You (12:24 a.m.): i miss you too

You (12:24 a.m.): and i want to see you

You (12:26 a.m.): can i come and see you, please

Lynnette J. Parker (12:26 a.m.): yes

Lynnette J. Parker (12:26 a.m.): tomorrow morning?

You (12:27 a.m.): if its okay with you

Lynnette J. Parker (12:27 a.m.): thats the best time

You (12:27 a.m.): okay, i will be there

You (12:29 a.m.): im sorry

Lynnette J. Parker (12:31 a.m.): you dont have to keep saying that lol

Lynnette J. Parker (12:31 a.m.): what did u do with my flowers?

You (12:32 a.m.): they're emily's now

Lynnette J. Parker (12:32 a.m.): :[

Lynnette J. Parker (12:32 a.m.): brb

Lynnette J. Parker (12:37 a.m.): back

Lynnette J. Parker (12:37 a.m.): :]

You (12:37 a.m.): 8]

Lynnette J. Parker (12:37 a.m.): :P

Lynnette J. Parker (12:38 a.m.): ur telephone is not working. thats why i had to message you on here

You (12:38 a.m.): weird

You (12:41 a.m.): its almost one, you should rest

Lynnette J. Parker (12:42 a.m.): k

Lynnette J. Parker (12:42 a.m.): you should too

Lynnette J. Parker (12:42 a.m.): i will see you tomorrow?

Lynnette J. Parker (12:42 a.m.): or i mean today

You (12:42 a.m.): yeah

Lynnette J. Parker (12:43 a.m.): :]

Lynnette J. Parker (12:44 a.m.): goodnight

Lynnette J. Parker (12:44 a.m.): *kiss*

You (12:44 a.m.): sleep well

Are you sure you want to end this session? (12:45 a.m.)

The session has been ended. (12:45 a.m.)

Tip: To create a new session with < Lynnette J. Parker >, close this window and reconnect to their local address.

Chapter 30

MYSTIC GARDEN II

2:1:3:30

AS she towed past me gracefully with capability, I felt the breeze wind from her flowing dress. I followed her to the end of the swimming iceberg and we looked out into the purple waters. Behind us was an entire city located on an iceberg about the size of Illinois. Up above were red skies; lightning could be seen, but no thunder could be heard. Most of the strikes were unseen, hiding behind carefully flashing clouds, but every once in a while a strike would connect the sky to the earth.

There are things in our universe that seem inseparable. I am not speaking physically but metaphysically. When one first hears the term “spacetime,” they may believe it to be “space” and “time” working together to form one unit, and while this is true to a certain degree, it also isn't.

I could be wrong, and maybe you don't agree with me, but I don't believe it is possible to split space from time. “Maybe you are wrong, but I don't know enough about it to disagree with you,” she said as she walked closer to the purple pool.

Space and time are interwoven. With the concept of matter having the ability to move through space, when it does, it creates the illusion of time; distance traveled, acceleration, et cetera. “Velocity,” she said as she began to sit down at the iceberg's edge. Right, right.

The same principle can be found in other things. “What is the principle again?” she asked as she took off her heels. “Basically, a simple concept such as movement creates one or more illusions, such as time. One object may have multiple dimensions.”

She dipped her feet into the purple pond. “Soooo, like, consciousness and life?” What do you mean 'consciousness and life'?

“Well,” she moved her feet around in the waters, “like, humans and robots right? Robots don't really do anything on their own, they just follow rules, right? Well then, what makes us so different from robots, then? Consciousness? I don't think so, I think something we describe as life only has the illusion of consciousness. If you give a robot a certain amount of options, based on the information it has, it can choose a decision. And, like, you can do the same thing with people, so who's to say that robot doesn't have as much consciousness as a person. So what I'm saying is we only have as much capability as any other 'life' that can choose between A, B, C or D.”

What she said was interesting. What about feelings and emotions, and knowing the difference between right and wrong? She laughed and said, “You can program robots to feel. Right and wrong may be as physical as it is metaphysical.”

When she took her feet out of the purple puddle, she had purple daisies in between

each toe gap. She twinkled her toes then twinkled a smile. After she got up she picked the daisies from her toes, and each one she plucked turned red right after being plucked. She smells them, then puts them out for me to smell as well. Smelling them, I noticed they were red due to the reflection from the sky.

With her hand full of red daises we walked back towards the iceberg city and back into The Mystic Garden. Before entering we saw the establishment's neon electric sign. It read "The Mystic Garden" and had that of a moth to a flame and a butterfly to a flower.

"In a darkened wood stood the daisied dame. The moth flies with lust, his desire is that of the flame. In a sunny forest alongside a falling shower. The butterfly rests in love, her lover seeing her beauty akin to that of a flower. In a mythical garden, the bloom shall meet the fire. But one does wonder, when is it love and not lust, when is it beauty and not simply desire?," she recited her favorite quote.

6 A.M., Friday

When I left home to visit the hospital in the morning, I was afraid for a moment that the sky was on fire. The clouds kept on flashing incessantly as lightning struck, but there was no sound of thunder.

During the quiet nightly morning lightning-filled drive, I turned on the radio and landed on a news station that spoke about the retirement of one Dan Wilson, by his partner, one Rod Rousseau, and the cold case he had left behind; thirteen people murdered and left to rot in an abandoned apartment building and no one to answer for the crime. Talk about being a free man.

All through the morning, there was lightning but never any thunder, and sometime later in the hour I finally arrived.

7 A.M., Friday

I walked through the doors to the hospital then through the door to Lynne's room. I see that she is sleeping so I grab a chair and sit down next to her, assuming she will awake soon enough.

Yes, I looked at her, stared at her, for a very long time like a man possessed. Right now she is very far away in a land of her own, yet I can touch her right now and she will feel so real to me. She has become so real to me, yet at times she can feel distant and far away... Like a dream. Reality from fiction. Being in two places at once. I never thought someone so far away could be this close, I never thought someone who isn't real could be

so alive. A dreamgirl.

All the billions of years and countless distances matter has traveled to create her; the Earth surviving the period of Hadean, LUCA evolving into current life. The arrangement of her face, her body. The developing of her personality. Maybe she isn't real. Maybe she's just the perfect illusion.

8 A.M., Friday

I turn on the television in her room and begin to watch, wondering when she will finally wake up. I think about how we will first look at each other, what our expressions will be like. First words. What am I going to say.

9 A.M., Friday

She can really sleep. I'm surprised I haven't heard her snore all morning. On the television is the residue of what they are now calling the St. Albans fire. The death toll had rose to sixty-one, there is nothing on what started the fire, though. Tired of the news I go to the window to watch the passing traffic at the entrance of a highway. Somewhere in that section of the room I found what seemed to be a diary; the cover was overly designed and the contents were secured by a lilac belt.

I grabbed it and tried to open it but it was securely locked. That didn't matter as the key wasn't too far from here. I picked up the cherry key and unlocked the diary, and as I opened the page, a fake moonstone ring falls out of a crescent place. I put it back in and pay it no nevermind. I started reading it.

¶ I went in and laid down on my bed. The walking didn't tire me, it only made me more restless, and sometime into the night I found myself crying. I couldn't figure out why. It wasn't because of him. It wasn't because the state of my life or because of a bad day. It was one of those feelings you couldn't pinpoint, like an answer lost in a dream at the back of mind. So she wept, and her lucky star flickered until it went out, and in the darkness, her flowers closed.

¶ Sometimes when this place gets kinda empty, there is a sound that it has. You can only hear it if you listen, and even then you have to know what you're listening for. It always makes me think of Celladoor when there are no waves. Just silence in the Milky Way. Just a faint sound of water moving. After you get tired of the stillness, a part of you wishes for a tsunami. Or something to remind you that the universe won't always give you peace... Wish I knew what you were looking for. Probably something shimmering and colorful. Am I pretty

enough? Or will I forever be a victim to the part that is missing from me?

¶ I only want to be with you. I love you. Why won't you let me tell you this? Even if you don't say it back I want you to know how I feel about you. I love you so much, from the bottom of my heart and with all of my heart. I want to spend the rest of my life with you. In sickness or in health, I will endure it all because we are meant to be together... I love you.

I heard her make a sound and shift onto her other side. I quickly put the diary and the key back where I found them and went around over back to the chair to sit beside her.

10 A.M., Friday

After ten minutes I had fallen asleep and began to daydream about insects. When I opened my eyes I was looking directly at a smiling woman. I could do nothing else but smile back.

I blinked from the still daydream and found that the iris of one of her eyes were purple and the other red, but blinking again they returned to normal.

“Sorry, I couldn't sleep. I was excited to see you. I tried to force myself to stay up but I fell asleep.” “What happened to your cast?” “It wasn't that much of an injury.” “So you can masturbate in public again I see.” She slapped my shoulder. “I told you. For the rest of your life.”

I got up from off the chair and went over to a small bag, pulling out the clothes she asked me to bring her for when it was time to check out. She thanked me after I handed it to her and I asked her if she knew that her doctor's name was Dr. Sylvenstein. “Yeah! I know! I almost laughed when I first talked to him.” Looking through the bag she kept laughing, and I think her persistent laughter hindered her from finding what she was looking for. As she went for the bathroom, she continued to laugh, saying, “because I keek-eh dey bawl to maek goal.”

When she was gone, I looked in the direction of her diary but didn't take the risk of reading more. Instead I waited, waited, waited, and eventually she came out in Mysterious Clouds, the red and purple clouded dream of a dress she showed me a while ago. Again, I blinked; the white part of her eyes, one was crimsonelle, the other lavendelle, and blinking again her eyes returned to normal.

She came back towards me with the bag and took her purse that was beside me, then swung it directly at my body and I felt a hard part bang my rib-cage. “Why????” “That's for yelling at me. Be happy I didn't aim for your face, punk.” She walked away.

Without any hesitation she put her diary and other belongings into the purse and then sat back down on the bed. Something told me she didn't even care if I read it, and yet, as I

got up and laid on the hospital bed beside her, a part of her slightly flinched, and again, I'm sure she didn't notice.

11 A.M., Friday

“Do you talk to yourself?” I asked her. “No,” she laughed. She couldn't lie for shit, and that laugh, it was that laugh that told me the truth. When I didn't say anything she looked at me and asked, “Do you?”

I told her that I did. That I had been for a long time now. She began, “I don't ramble, but sometimes I do say things outloud.” That was also a lie, I heard her rambling when I came to give her the flowers. I wonder, why did she have such a hard time admitting it?

She got up from off the bed and while doing so said something about mortal gradients. At the window she looked out and told me about the blue flowers that used to roam these areas and how they all died. Deep autumn.

I got up and stood beside her near the window. “Can you check on my flowers?” she asked. I told her that I had already been watering them. Down below we saw a man being wheel-chaired out of the hospital by a child and into a car.

12 P.M., Friday

At noon, while church bells rang along the street, time seemed to stand still as I thought about God. “I'm hungry,” she said, and of course I had to go to the cafeteria to find food. The second oldest trick in the book.

As we ate lunch in the room, she began telling me about how one night she was walking around and found a plastic foot in one of the children's rooms; it was off of a doll. She said it made her sad for some reason, and as she spoke about it I saw the gloom come over her face as it finally silenced her. I didn't know how to respond.

“Yu knoe, beck en my 'ome coontree,” I said. She started laughing and cut me off, “dey caul me 'Duckter Seilverhstein'.” “Because I keek-eh dey bawl to maek goal,” I finished.

She immediately asked me if I could speak in the frenched accent like I did many weeks before, and so for the rest of the hour, we went back and forth trying to communicate over broken French. I'm sure at one point Spanish also found its way in.

1 P.M., Friday

“What do you like better, 'a soul reaver on a high tide' or 'the soul reaver on the high tide'?” she asked me. “What is it for?” “A painting. Or, well, concept art for something.” “...The soul reaver on a high tide.” She laughed; and then she laughed again.

I ask her what the picture is going to look like and she told me it would be based off of some Cell Door Lake. It would be a tsunami storming onto a beach with something spooky at the top of the wave.

She eventually went off on a tangent about how she used to visit the lake all the time when she was younger and how it helped her get through difficult times. She surprised me when she started speaking about how we were not in an unconditional relationship. She surprised me even more when she said she believed that there was no such thing, and that we were no exception. We were just like everyone else, prone to failure and defeat.

For a while we talked about going back to just being friends. No obligations or anything of the sort. But we both knew that where we were at now, that was unlikely to work. Either we knew each other or we didn't, there was no middle ground.

After the discussion, she extended her hand out to me and I jokingly shook it, both of us knowing that if we ever met defeat, it would have to be a true sever, both of us out of each other's lives for good.

2 P.M., Friday

“Sleepless in Atlantis” is a movie about a city where the people never sleep. The city's location is unknown but one clue given in the movie is that it doesn't get dark there until one a.m., meaning it is always a white morning.

Lynne and I were watching the film in her hospital room when over the intercom we received a tornado warning. “We recommend all persons remain in the building until the strong winds recede.” We kept viewing the movie until we witnessed something whack the window nearby, and when we got up to verify the visitor, we saw a very visible and vivacious tree branch dancing violently and wildly in the wind; we watched as it eventually snapped and wandered into a parked vehicle.

The strength of the crash wasn't enough to do much damage, but soon after, we saw another branch break of another tree, and its target, the second floor window of a house, was completely shattered.

This went on for at least thirty minutes, branches snapping off of trees and causing property damage. Lynne told me that this was the exact time Olya went to work every

day. Again, from there, she went off on a tangent, talking about how her cellmate left and musings on last year's roadtrip through Greenville and the carnival.

3 P.M., Friday

At around three the winds died down and finished passing through our area. Sleepless had finished and, leaving her room, we somehow ended up in the hospital's courtyard. As we walked through it, we saw only three others; a man and his son, and then a tree branch.

Sometime later we both sat down on a bench. I believe by now she was getting tired and just wanted to rest as she said nothing to me. As she looked the other way, I looked over her clothed body, this work of art. Red clouds on a purple sky.

Something was bothering her. I couldn't tell because I'm some kind of psychic with a sixth or seventh sense, I could tell because a butterfly landed on her lap and she didn't notice. I harmed her mentally, in a way that she perhaps thought could never be possible. So much so that a butterfly split halfway in between red and purple would not make a new color but would become more or less one or the other; Mother of the Hymmoth.

4 P.M., Friday

“Why did you say God doesn't care about me?” She kept staring in the direction away from me, waiting for an answer. “Do you really want to know?” I asked “It's not something a lot of people like to hear...” She didn't answer, but I know she wanted the answer to her question.

“The need to procreate, find love, have a meaningful life, have families, it's all subjective, not objective. These are no universal objective goals for existence. You are socialized and taught that you need them, that that's the way life works. You find a lover and you have children, and you find a purpose to live. But that's an irrational way of thinking which is based almost purely on human instincts, to think that life, the way most humans live it, is the correct way of living and to insult anyone who says existence is ultimately futile. It might sound like a terrible way of thinking, but you'll be better for it at the end of the day. There isn't really any goal, having David and Sarah didn't inch you closer to the goal of humanity.” “But it inched me closer to my humanity,” she interrupted as if she was offended or annoyed. “...As a human being, you see that most people have children, so you think to yourself, 'I should be doing the same thing because I too am a human. We are socialized into believing that society and life works one way.’”

“So Sara and David mean nothing?,” she turned at me angrily. “I didn't say that,” I replied.

A cootishly loon pause flew by. “I don't look at the world the same way you do, Lynne.” “Obviously,” she turned away again.

After a long while of the silent treatment, she began speaking again, “I feel like you rescued me, or saved me, but at the same time sometimes I feel like you're the bad guy.” ... “I know I can be hard to be around, but I don't mean to. I know sometimes I wear you down and you get unhappy. But I... Are you still going to talk to me?”

She thought about it for a while, then finally looked in my direction, at me, saying “Maybe... Duh. I want to know you... If knowing about objectivity will make me a better person then I want to know about it. What you said sounds depressing though... I'll be the artist, you can be the thinker.” I couldn't tell if she was joking or not as she maintained a serious face.

“I'm not as depressed and angry as I used to be because of you, though. I remember when we were gardening, I remember thinking, you had a reason to be angry but you weren't. And I didn't have any real reason to be angry yet I was. I think a part of me wished I could be like you. I don't know, optimistic,” I admitted. “And look at what being optimistic got me,” she laughed.

5 P.M., Friday

As we walked back to her room, she told me that today was the day she volunteered to help a nurse with a bunch of kids who were going to be drawing things. This inevitably reminded me of the mail of hers I had opened before. When I told her that I had accidentally opened her mail, and told her of the contents inside, she joked, asking me if I was going to yell at her for that as well.

6 P.M., Friday

For most of five p.m. and fifty two minutes of six p.m. I stayed in her room doing random things. She took her bag with her, so I had no way of being nosy with her diary. By this time the Sun was beginning to set as we entered deeper into fall, and as the days got shorter so did her flowers.

I happened to be in the bathroom when she returned. I heard her call out my name, first slowly, then quickly. When I went back into the room I saw her at the window, and looking back, something calming settled into her face.

7 P.M., Friday

“Look,” she pointed at her silverside. The kids she visited drew all over her fake foot. The most distinguished piece of art was a red circle circled by a purple line-circle. When I asked her what it was, she told me it was a “power” button. “I don't get it.” Just then she began to walk rigidly about the room and finally I understood that the children thought she was partially a robot. She told me the entire time was spent obeying orders and doing demands demanded by the kids.

“I'm hungry again,” she said after a while, and after I came back with food from the cafeteria we ate dinner.

8 P.M., Friday

I think we got tired of each other by eight. Having to have seen each other's faces since about ten a.m., I decided to watch television on her bed as she sat in a chair near the window looking outside. There was complete silence until from the intercom we heard the message of visitors' hours being over. She turned around and gave me a look, it was like the one before, but the opposite of it.

9 P.M., Friday

I knew I was supposed to be leaving but I didn't. I don't think she would have let me anyway. This is why I was a little surprised when doctor Sylvenstein entered her room and began speaking. Once he noticed that I was there, he stopped and greeted me, remembering me, then telling me that unfortunately, I would have to leave soon.

“Is there anyway that he could stay?,” she asked the doctor, “My husband has been out of town and today is the first day he has been able to see me.” What a fucking liar.

She eventually got the doctor to play nice and he allowed me to stay, saying it would be best if I stayed inside the room. I wonder, what developed between them for her to receive special treatment.

10 P.M., Friday

“If your arm is healed, and you seem better, why did they let you stay? Usually I hear people getting kicked out of hospitals all the time, but you've been here for a while.” “I

stopped going to my check ups.” “What does that have to do with anything?” For some reason it seemed like she was afraid to answer me; it was either fear or perhaps guilt. She eventually finished by telling me that they found a tumor in her foot, her face accumulating to what was now definitely fear and anxiety.

“Is it benign?” I asked immediately. “They don't know, that's why they kept me. They wanted to keep an eye on me.” I could tell she was examining my emotion intensely, almost scrutinizing it.

“But you're leaving soon, aren't you?” “Yes.” “Maybe they don't think it's too bad.” “I don't want to talk about it right now.”

I went over to her near the window, taking a chair, and sat it down right beside her, sitting on it. I grabbed her fleshed foot and placed it on my lap, taking off her shoe then her sock, then slowly began to rub the topside of it.

11 P.M., Friday

About half way between the Yelowe-Art bridge and the Ernest Gate statue, the motor-road hastily joins the railroad and runs beside it for a quarter of a mile, so as to shrink away from a certain desolate area of land. This piece of land is the first to be commissioned for renewal, being followed ultimately by various sections of the city and its neighboring towns.

Her foot now completely naked, I saw that her toes were painted in ice blue midnight nail polish. “Is that what you like?” she asked me. “What do you mean?” I asked back. “Do you like feet?” this time asking innocently. “Yes,” I replied. I tickled the sole to relax the tension. Once she stopped laughing, I slowly rose, purplishly, up her leg until I reached the scar of her inner leg and began to rub it gently. She became even more relaxed, until I decided to move back and forth faster causing a tickling sensation; her inner thigh was a strange location that was sensitive and ticklish. Eventually she cried for me to stop, so I did, and I took her leg off my lap.

“I like certain things, too,” she said. “Like what?” I asked. “Afterwards... I like afterwards. I like having sperm in me, walking around knowing it's inside of me, going to sleep knowing I have it inside me. It's more a feeling than a sexual desire, though.” After I didn't answer, she continued, “Oh shut up,” she slapped me on my shoulder, “that's not half as bad as someone who likes feet and scars. Definitely not as bad as someone who has dreams of cutting women's feet off, either,” she winked.

After this we stayed quiet for a while, staring only in front of us, out of the window into a dark night accompanied by sadly dancing trees; under the Milky Way, the residue

of the winds that passed by here before were still here but in lower magnitude.

12 A.M., Saturday

“It's midnight, let's go to sleep now?” she asked. We got up, myself walking towards the bed and herself walking towards the bathroom. I laid down, waiting for her to finish with whatever she was doing in there, and when she came out she walked over to me and laid directly on top of me. Once I asked her what she was doing, she began singing. It got uncomfortable after a while, having someone sleep on top of you like that, so I sat up and push back up against the wall behind us, and she pushed back up against me and basically sat inbetween my legs, the back of her head resting on my chest. I put my arm around her stomach and could feel the vibration of her singing. As she sang, I cut in to tell her that she got better at it, that she wasn't so bad anymore. She took the compliment, if it was one, and continued to sing.

In her song, she sang about building a garden theater; singing for millions of people but only I could see her in the intimate way she desired.

“You have to write me a poem, then we will be squared,” she said this after the song. “Alright,” I said, “but don't expect much.”

She got out of me and laid beside me, then grabbed my arm as she turned away from me and placed my arm around her.

1 A.M., Saturday

Much time passed and I assumed she had fallen asleep, but I was proven wrong when something she said came out with a droopy speech. “I'm afraid of you... I'm afraid of doing something wrong...”

I didn't answer her right away, but after thinking about her crash, after it ran through my mind, the many possibilities, I finally said what I had planned to say since last night, “Lynne, you have to work less.” ... “You have to work less or I can't be with you,” I spoke into her back. It was non-negotiable, an ultimatum that I was well intent on keeping.

At least twenty minutes must have passed, but this time instead of being fooled I knew she was awake every second of that twenty based on the way she was breathing, and on the twenty first minute she broke the silence: Whatever happened to you, I can't fix it. She then fell asleep.

2 A.M., Saturday

I'm still not asleep. I'm certain by now that I will not fall asleep. I can still hear the sound of the wind outside because the window is still open. Should have closed it. Did something just crawl onto

3 A.M., Saturday

my leg? Better not be poisonous. Probably just the sheets moving. I probably actually shouldn't fall asleep. I don't want a nurse or doctor Silverstein to walk in here and see me... I really do like staring at the back of her head. I wonder what is going on inside of it right now. A far away dream? In a land of portals to countless possibilities...

4 A.M., Saturday

I get up out of bed and leave her there. I find my belongings with a plan to leave the hospital. Before I leave, I take out a twenty year old photo and leave it for her on the table next to her bed. Its imagery and symbolism would bring these words to your mind:

Bust, on the west side of a westward tree, a bright green burst of leaves are illuminated in a darkened night, one red leaf among the lush.

I kiss her nose and then exit the room. In the dark parking lot I saw the broken fragments of many tree branches.

5 A.M., Saturday

During the drive back home there were very few drivers and the sky was clear. I thought mostly about whether or not she would work less or decide to discontinue our relationship. Whether she would say no to me just to see if I would actually leave.

6 A.M., Saturday

Just after six, I arrived back home and stood in front of the lightly lit apartment building. I noticed they had re-brightened a nearby street light. The dark blue setting sky reminded me of the passage of time, and time itself's illusory linear progression in what seems to be a forward motion.

Pairing the notion of Newton's third law with the concept of time accompanied by

space, we would be left with the end result of time acting upon itself, meaning, as time moves “forward” it also moves “backward.”

Do the past and the future act on each other to create the present? Is it possible that forwards time and backwards time have equal magnitude, which would then cause a net outcome of zero, making what we know as the present a stable balancing act of pure equilibrium? This would mean time is not going forward, which is the way we as human beings perceive time, but is actually perfectly still, perfectly balanced, between the forward of the future and backward of the past. It is almost as if the future and the past are two atoms that have an equal amount of attracting and repelling, therefore causing motion to be in a state of rest; the product of these two atoms and their apparent motionless being the makings of time itself.

I walked into the building, passing her dying yet lively garden, and I think to myself, if one cannot move backward in time, then there is no merit in regretting what you are. One could only continue to move forward, fixing only that which one could.

Volume 2 - Composition 1
(2:1 / 4 / IV)

Part 4

Chapter 31

ELEMENT GAME

2:1:4:31

“KEVIN hated the snow. He despised it. I think he had a condition that makes his bones weaker during the winter time or something,” said Chipper. That year, winter came early for the home team, and though they hadn't known it yet, the playoffs came right alongside it.

Their week fifteen matchup was against their division rival who they had lost to during the first week of the season. During that game, David Croft had the task of taping the opponent's sideline and observing their actions, which, today, may or may not pose as an illegal action under the league's technical rules. The footage acquired by Croft, of course, was meticulously studied by Clayton and much of the team's staff and players.

“Red... Right... Eighty-eight!,” yelled the opposing team's quarterback. After Reggie Rice heard these words, he changed foot-stance and optioned for a delayed blitz. The ball is snapped, Rice moves in, circling around a teammate who was locked into a battle with an offensive lineman, cuts under another defender and leaps forward into the unaware quarterback and delivers a punishing blow. The football pops out of his hands and slides backwards into the icy snow, and after a rumble, is eventually recovered by the home team's Boe Tamana.

Croft introduced the idea of “Red Right 88” being a deep ball play, designed to give the quarterback more time for a long play. Rice took note of this and decided that he would listen and pay attention when the play-modifier was called.

“That play, I just knew,” Rice told the interviewer, “I knew it was time for me to blitz. I could feel it. I sensed the passing play and I went in for the hit and caused a fumble. I got really good at reading the count.”

The opposing team's quarterback makes a motion with his hand, one that resembles an “L” with his thumb and index finger, then snaps the ball to begin the play. Quickly, he releases the ball to his leftward side for a slant play but is picked off by the home team's Warren Stacy and returned for several yards.

“Stacy was something of a ballhawk. He could sniff out passes if he was on his game that day, and that day, he was on his game,” replied Rice.

Croft introduced the idea of the “L” signal being some type of quick passing play designed for a third-down conversion, perhaps a slant, toss or a shovel, and Stacy made a mental note of this and watched the quarterback heavily for this sign.

This device was elemental, if not errable, and irony came when the method worked against them. After Croft introduced the idea that the signal of patting one's head meant to reverse the play, Rice observed this during the game and at that moment opted to blitz.

The blitz came too late as the quarterback soon passed the ball for a short route which ended in a forty-seven yard run and eventually a touchdown, never knowing that the quarterback made a mistake in calling a play that would earn them seven.

On a slightly cold morning in early October, Javier and Vyncente wait on a sidewalk for their bus to arrive. “I will give you Skelosis for Soothsayer,” Javier said. “Skelosis doesn't even have a power-attack, why would I give you Sooth for him?” “Because this Skelosis is a rare Japanese first-edition.” Vyncente paused, then demanded to see the card. Upon inspection, the trade was confirmed. As Vyncente dug in his pockets to make the trade, Christina walked past both of them and met alongside Pattie.

After completing their secret handshake, Pattie asked Christina if Sara was going to be doing Halloween with them this year. Christina did not have an answer, and at this moment, the bus arrived.

Parking the car in the school's parking garage, Emily shouted at David who had forgotten his lunch in the vehicle. “Thank you G,” and he ran off after Sara.

Inside the somewhat cold school, the first activity of the day included science, where students in groups of five played an element game; simply spell out words using element symbols from the periodic table of elements. After creating a word, students would learn about the elements themselves.

The second activity included a guest speaker. Scott Merils, now a retired officer of the law and Director of Security and Safety at Harvest Moon Hotels, paid the little ones a visit to speak about treating others with kindness and respect, and how to be safe during a fire.

Three or four hours later, it was reading time as Karuna read to half of the class. She read in a lower voice than usual, in a slower speed than typical, and maybe perhaps at least one of the many students knew that she was sad.

After school is let out, and after a quick drive back home, Karuna stops in front of her apartment and thinks for a long while, periodically calling herself names, crying, and describing herself with adjectives meant to touch down deep into a person's insecurities. These are the unwanted thoughts and feelings that invade a person's mind when they are told that their employer can no longer employ them.

“Yo I'm at Cedric's crib, this nigga got a goat in his house. Nah for real, I ain't even playin'.” “We out,” Cedric said to Malcolm. The three left for the bus stop where other high school students were chatting about various subjects, the most interesting of them perhaps a discussion about Mrs. Shorts between Kenard and Elliot.

An uninteresting train ride to school provided free by a school train-pass bored Becca, and getting off at Thorndale she happened to meet roads with Latasha. The two looked at each other with familiarity until Latasha asked her if she was in Mr. P's class “at the end

of the day,” to which Becca confirmed. They walked together, not to talk, but most likely because they were headed the same way and had an unusually identical stride to their way of walking.

Hiding from them was Chris who normally met Becca just outside of the train station. Becca did not wonder where he was, as she knew their relationship was a secret and knew he wanted to keep it that way.

Andre was in the mood for ditching school, but his defiance was cut short as a van hired by the school district drove up and forced him inside. “You’re going to school today,” Steve Jefferson demanded more than he requested.

Andre appeared inside Mr. Paxton’s first period class, English, and Paxton told him that it was nice of him to show up.

Eight periods later found us in a slightly cold room where P. was teaching his Critical Thinking class. At the whiteboard was Latasha, who had agreed to teach the class one of the puns she had found for last night’s homework assignment.

“Please turn to chapter one,” she requested. As the class opened their books she told them the sentence in question was “This car is also parked, but running, as if it is ready to stop living such an idle life, but at the same time too reluctant to do so.”

She then wrote the word “idle” on the board and its definition: without purpose or effect; pointless; not working, active, or being used. She then explained that in this instance, an “idle” life was one without meaning or purpose, or, movement; afterwards, she explained that the car mentioned in the sentence was “idling,” representing a vehicle that was not functionally properly and was therefore not fulfilling its purpose of motion or transport.

“Ah, the student becomes the teacher,” Paxton joked as she finished. “I noticed something else, too, but I don’t know what it’s called.” “What is that?” “Lynne paints a flower, then she like, basically paints herself into a flower when she puts on makeup, and right after that the narrator basically calls her a flower. Is there a word for that?”

Paxton thinks for a moment, then tells her that the literary device being used is called “verb symbolism.” “There is also verb imagery, for example, when she compares gardening to painting, if you paint a flower from the stem, it literally grows onto the canvas. In a way she is both gardening and painting at the same time.”

As Latasha went to sit back down, someone shouted from the back of the room, “You ain’t no flower, you too ugly to be a flower.” When Paxton looked to see it was, he recognized it was Andre. “Shut up,” Latasha said calmly, sitting down.

“You too big to be wearing dresses,” Monica cut in. “And you need to stop throwing up after lunch,” Latasha fired back. Before Paxton could stop the insults Latasha and Monica were locked into each other, the whole class in a frenzy led by Andre.

Arimatla attempted to break them apart but was soon toppled after Monica pushed Latasha onto him. Eventually Paxton came to split them into division, and after catching his breath, yelled in the direction of Monica and told her to leave the classroom and visit her counselor; this was the first time anyone in the class had ever seen him lose his temper.

Monica, now passed the door, could hear Andre talking back to Paxton, and even she felt afraid once she heard Paxton raise his voice, even higher than he did to her, to Andre, telling him to leave the classroom and too visit his counselor.

With the two of them gone, regularity was quickly restored in the class after Paxton announced that that type of behavior was past them and was no longer allowed.

The rest of the period was somewhat quiet as the class dove more into science and math than literature. They learned about and played many games of luck, as opposed to games of skill, which Paxton noted was a common theme in *Anthology Complex*.

They played with dice, cards and coins, all objects which symbolized the abstract concept of probability. Paxton taught them that the flip of a coin could determine the fate of many things, leaving very few things to coincidence; that the revealing of a card could reveal how lucky some people can be even with a total cardinality of fifty-two; that the roll of a die could... Damn, there is no mathematically-based word that starts with die. If there actually is, please make contact.

After the bell had rung, Paxton told his class that the weekend's homework assignment was to remember the dream they had the night before and write three paragraphs imitating M.B. Julien's writing style in *Anthology Complex* about that dream, analyzing it and explaining what they learned from it about themselves.

"You know what we learned about today in CT," Sandeep asked E.J. "What you learn?," he asked. Sandeep looked at Karen, "Tell 'em." "Rollin' dice," she emphasized "dice." "Man that class is the shit," Sandeep finished.

During the second half of the snowmatch the two teams were tied at twenty-four a piece; a touchdown reception by Calvin Marshall, two running scores by Joseph Lee and Bradley Chipper and a field goal by Taylor Lawrence.

Clayton had played in a championship game before, though the head coach of another team, and the loss, as the people who knew him often say, "destroyed him irreparably." From this came his overwhelming desire to win.

At game's end, his team had won the divisional game by a score of three, sending them to 7-7. All-purpose kicker Taylor Lawrence gave the team a lead with a 46-yard field goal as the third quarter ended, and with only six seconds left on the gameclock in the fourth, eventually punted away the ball.

"He punted the ball from our endzone and when they caught it they started lateraling

the ball around,” said Okadigbo, “it almost worked too, and for a while everyone was on their toes.”

The opposing team got the ball up to the thirteen yard line until Lawrence finally landed a tough shot on the ball carrier, Chris Redfield himself.

“That shot was sweet revenge for Taylor, because earlier in the game Redfield took a cheap shot on him during a punt return as Taylor tried to defend the returner. The shot sidelined him for the entire first quarter. So when Taylor got him back at the end of the game and caused him to fumble the ball, I'm sure he was well-satisfied” ... “Yeah, they were our division rivals. We didn't care about hurting them and they didn't care about hurting us.”

As the ball slid on the snow after Taylor's crushing hit, there was a scramble for the ball until one of Taylor's teammates came and batted the ball towards the sideline, effectively ending the game. The referees came in, signaling the end of the game and awarding the home team the game, though this was done in error, as it was illegal for a player to bat the ball out of play.

“The refs blew the last call on that game. There should have been a penalty and they should have had a pretty decent shot at the endzone, but that's not what happened,” continued Okadigbo, “that's why in life, you have to do your own research. You have to learn to play the game for yourself, because sometimes even the people who are supposed to know the rules of the game don't know them.”

Chapter 32

VADEAN WATERFALL

2:1:4:32

ABOUT a week ago, sometime in the evening, I laid down to rest my eyes but eventually fell into a deep sleep.

In my dream I had been on my way to my log cabin hidden deep inside the snowed-in woods. I am walking until in the distance I see a pack of wolves; three of which were a mother, father and a child.

The father, I could tell, had been wounded, perhaps by a hunter or another wild animal, and was resting his eyes as his wife and child played nearby pawing at each other.

Moving to the right about twenty yards, I could now see the father-wolf's eyes as he stared into an oblivion lavafall, and the lone-stare of his eyes gave him the quality of an eternally pensive sadness.

“The most accepted theory is that pain and suffering are associated with the size and complexity of the animal's brain. Because mammals and birds are more advanced and have more complex brains, it's likely they all possess capacities to experience pain. The 'gray area,' as scientists call it, comes with animals such as fish and lower invertebrates.” Frankfurt Research Team, 1942.

I remember reading that, several years ago, and it made me think... Made me think about fear and pain, how they are almost mutual concepts; one was more likely to be fearful of something after that something caused it pain, and one was most likely to be in pain after the crippling effects of fear.

But where do fear and pain come from? Are they simply things that develop in an organism's brain? Perhaps so, as there are some humans whose brain do not develop the ability to feel either. But maybe it goes deeper than this, way back to the origins of life.

All life on Earth as we know it seeks to reproduce. A human and a virus have the same fundamental motivations; persistence. Replicate your existence. This tells us that at some degree, there is something fundamental in the concept of life. I say this because, unlike the human, a virus probably cannot feel fear or pain, two things that are probably reserved for organisms that are higher on the evolutionary scale. And yet, couldn't you say that both fear and pain stem from the need to persist. The need to survive to replicate one's existence? From this, there is at least one thing I can conclude: Persistence is the most basic attribute of life, and is the parent to fear, pain, love and anything else it has developed to help life persist.

I got up from my peeping location and went to walk away, though in doing so noticed a strange mutation concerning the baby wolf; it had several black spots along the side of its body, something not seen on any of the other wolves. The sight did not fail me

intellectually. Adaptation and evolution, too, must be children of persistence.

Finally leaving and tracking into the snowy mountains, I felt the faint fade of waking up back into reality.

My first night alone way back then, sitting alone in my parents' home's basement, completely unaware of the madness that was coming, it was difficult, but as the years rolled by, prison became home. Solitary confinement became peace. I didn't know it then, but darkness, hatred, anger, contempt, they were children of wisdom. They had as much a stake in peace, if not more, than light, love, happiness or kindness. There is something to be said about the solidim.

I rang the doorbell to Emily's apartment, a place I had never seen before, and very quickly Dave buzzed me in. I made my way to the fourth floor and found Emily waiting in the hall as Dave and Sara prepared to leave with me.

She greeted me and I greeted her back, there was no small talk, no chatter, just silence as we waited for the little ones. Once we could hear that they were almost ready, she finally broke the silence, saying, "I don't know what's going on between you and my daughter, but she is better now and I didn't see any markings on her." ... "We disagreed on something, that was all."

Taking the bridge back towards the city, neither Dave nor Sara said much until we passed by the Lone-star sign. "You are evil," Dave said. The words caught me off guard, though when I looked in the rear-view, I saw that he was reading something off of a playing card. "In your solitude, the days shall be dim. Sight will come to you in the darkness, and in the light, it will banish," he read aloud with a lisp. Looking long enough I noticed that he had a bruised lip, which I later found out he got from a fight at school with one Javier.

When we got to the hospital we went directly to Lynne's room to find that she was sleeping. Dave went to the bathroom and Sara walked around her bed to examine something that resembled a piece of cake.

Suddenly there was a loud exploding yell that came from Sara's direction, and being scared, I looked in her direction to find that Lynne was in fact not sleeping, only pretending, so that she could scare Sara as she approached the food.

With her arms in the air imitating a monster and her loud scream, Sara panicked and began walking backwards until she tripped over a bag and into a chair near the window. Her head hit it pretty hard, which is why she began to cry after being relieved of the shock.

Lynne saw that this did not go the way she had planned, and after we both went to see if she was okay, she felt the side of her head to show us a streak of blood.

"Dumbass, what the hell is wrong with you?," I asked her. "I didn't know" "Mom

why did you do that” Sara cut in gasping from crying. “Did someone just get shot?,” Dave asked as he walked out of the bathroom with only his underwear on.

Sara rose up violently saying words that were unintelligible, and taking off her glasses found that they had once again been broken. Lynne followed her, pleading, saying she would fix them, but Sara was still upset and the fear had not completely worn off.

Eventually Lynne went and got her a band-aid, but it was only partial in getting her daughter's forgiveness. Added on to the partiality was when she offered her the food that caused all of this, which was actually a piece of pie. Sara ate it, but her mood was only slightly affected.

Once Dave came out of the bathroom finished with his duty, he immediately went to set up the game console on the hospital's television. We all patiently waited for him to finish and eventually he asked “Who's playing?”

At first he put in a game that only he and Sara liked, and Sara, wanting nothing to do with her mother, joined him in playing. As they played, I went to Lynne and asked her how she was feeling. “I'm okay, just a little tired.”

She was wearing “Vadean Waterfall,” the blue and white dress that won the contest many a time ago. It was still the same dress, and yet there was something different about it, though I think this mirage came from the dress-wearer rather than the dress itself.

The average person has one color to their aura, but it seems to me that she has every color in hers, as if she wore a Chameleon Pearl. Emerald, ruby, sapphire, diamond, any thing and any color she is dressed in compliments her aura and her aura compliments any thing and any color she is dressed in, her appearance becomes something you've never seen before, which I think is the reason why she is never the same thing twice to two different people. There is no way that you and I see her in the same light.

In a philosophy book I once read that when a person does not have inner beauty, their outer beauty means nothing, though, if a person has inner beauty, they could still shine despite the lack of an outer beauty. I took this to mean that outer beauty is actually a product of inner beauty. I took it to mean that a person who wears thrift store dresses, fake jewelry and a stolen purse could be priceless in comparison to a person with a three-thousand dollar outfit, real diamonds, real leather, et cetera.

The Chameleon Pearl gave her this power, to be vadean rich, and to not need to use the trick of the dame. She must have spent years to acquire it, going through every experience known to man, and surprisingly, black was one of her strongest colors.

NE 13-2; MIA 10-5; BUF 7-8; NYD 4-11 /// PIT 10-5; BAL 8-7; CIN 5-9-1; CLA 1-14 /// HOU 9-6; TEN 8-7; INT 7-8; JAX 3-12 /// KC 11-4; OAK 12-3; CHI 8-7; LAC 5-10 /// DAI 13-2; NYG 10-5; WAS 8-6-1; PHI 6-9 /// GB 9-6; DEL 9-6; MIN 7-8; DEN 3-12 /// ATL 10-5; TBH 8-7; NO 7-8; CAR 6-9 /// SEA 9-5-1; ARI 6-8-1; LA 4-11; SF 2-13

“Fuck yeah!” Dave exclaimed, then turned to me, saying, “Nigga, you just got rocked!” For the first time, in I think a year and a half, he finally beat me at Tetris, and I have no idea how. For the next five minutes I had to watch him dance around the room until Lynne, who was reading a fashion magazine, finally told him to shut up, stop using profanity and offensive words, and sit down.

“Since I finally beat you, can we have cable now?” “No.” “If we do good in school and Dave stops being bad then can we have it?” “Maybe.” The two of them stare at Lynne until she returns the look, and she then says, “...Maybe.” Sara was again dissatisfied with her.

A bit later I watched as Lynne watched Dave watch Sara feel the side of her head. Me still watching her, I saw her pick up a bag and walk into the bathroom, passing in front of Dave as he played NBA Street and causing him to miss a crucial shot as she nearly tripped on a cord.

It must have been about five minutes until she finally came back out wearing a blonde wig that had red highlights. Grabbing a nearby remote, she posed herself as she sang into the remote, “Saraaaaa, you are my sunshiiiiine, my only sunshiiiiine. You make me haaaaappy, when skies are graaaaay.”

Dave and I found it, at most, barely funny, but Sara didn't share the same feeling as she didn't react at all. Defeated, Lynne crawled back into bed with an air of hopelessness. “This place was more interesting when you weren't all here,” she said under her breath.

Around noon, with all of her belongings packed, we exited what was both a prison and a home to her for a small lifetime. I noticed her watching a waterfall as we walked by it, looking back as if to say goodbye. I noticed her watching a painting as we walked by it, looking back as if to say farewell. The final parting came when we walked past a dead garden of what used to be blue flowers just outside the hospital. The temperature had increased sharply.

Dave and Sara jumped into the back of the car and I went to the passenger side to open the door for Lynne. “What are you doing?,” she asked. I told her I was opening the door for her, but she became irritated with me and told me that she could open her own door. I have no idea where her irritation came from, but it came quick and was in full blossom.

She didn't say a word during the drive home. I thought it was a joke at first, but it

wasn't. When we finally arrived to building 8038, we walked up the stairs to the second floor but could not enter the apartment. Something was jammed inside the keyhole.

I gave Dave the keys and told him to go around back and try the backdoor, and of course, Sara, wanting nothing to do with her mother, left with him leaving us there.

We didn't say anything to each other, and after a while I noticed that my cut thumb had completely healed.

Just standing there in silence, we could hear Sara and Dave entering the house and walking towards us. A moment before, the buzzer sounded, and after asking who it was, Dave let the person into the building and opened the door for us. Sara came out and told us it was her friend, Pattie, who Lynne confirmed yesterday was allowed to visit.

As Sara went to meet Pattie at the top of the stairs, Lynne and I watched as they completed something that looked like a secret handshake. Walking back to us to enter the apartment, Pattie said hello to Lynne as Sara completely ignored her.

I followed Lynne into her bedroom and put her bags on the ground beside the bed, and almost immediately she said, "Someone stole my headphones."

She stormed into the living room searching here and there for them, under piles of papers, corners of clothes, and finally I said, "I think that little kid stole my headphones, too." She looked back, confused, "Who?" "That Korean kid on the first floor." "You mean Gun Ho?" "You know him?" "David and him trade toys sometimes." Sara cut in, "You don't know Gun Ho? And his brother, Dam Son?" Dave walked out of his room lifting up his pants, "Gun Ho is here?"

Just then there was a knock on the door and Lynne went to go answer it. It was Jasmin, who was now living with Jack, who came by to welcome Lynne back. Lynne eventually stepped out into the hallway to talk to her, and I eventually left the children to go into Lynne's room.

I sat at the edge of the bed and took off my shoes, then one sock, noticing that the cut on it had healed unusually quickly. I then begin to look around her room and take note of all the items in it.

As I turned to see what was behind me, I felt something move under my leg, or, under the sheets, and getting up, a blue ball fell from under the sheets and directly onto the ground. I picked it up and saw the word "Altamira" wrapping around it. It seemed to be that of a small icy planet.

My mind in rewind, I thought about how the ball fell straight down, literally, and this led me to wonder why magnetism worked this way. Why when magnetism attracts or repels an item, it doesn't go in many wild and random directions but in a very trained motion, the trained motion usually being a straight line or an orbit.

There's a theory which suggests that as the blue ball fell from location A, the bed, to

location B, the floor, it took every route possible (note anti-predetermination). However, any route which had an equal opposite would be canceled out (note $[1]+[-1]=0$) (also note “+” is not addition, it is representory of both 1s existing in the same field). This is to say 1 and -1 cannot co-exist and are computed to 0. The end result would be the route that is not canceled out, or the route which does not have an equalized opposite (note $[1]+[0]=1$). The route in question would always appear to us as a trained motion, usually a straight line, as in which the ball fell, or an orbit.

Is this how magnetism works? A compliment theory also suggests that the universe is more inclined to results that require the least amount of work. You could call our universe lazy, so to speak. The simplest way for the ball to get to the ground from the bed is in a straight line, rather than going this way and that way. It seems like magnetism is a great way to cancel out unnecessary information, almost akin to a compression algorithm. I wonder, was gravity, magnetism, electromagnetism, were those all designed or evolved to make physical objects travel in a straight line? Is what we know as gravity the result of the universe's “compression” algorithm?

I lift up the bed sheets and underneath I find more of Dave's toys. Two astronauts and a spaceship with the word “Eden” on its side.

“Sorry I took so long,” Lynne crept up behind me, scaring me. “Deana and Mike also stopped to say hello and welcomed me back.” “You're very popular,” I responded. “Not with you,” she said sharply.

“I'll see you tomorrow,” I went for the door. “You're not sleeping here tonight?” she asked. “Obviously you're mad at me so I was going to go home.” “I'm not mad... Sorry... I'm going to work less,” she finished hesitantly. I now saw why she was in a mood.

“I appreciate that,” said I, “I will come by more often.” She looked at me with confused and calculating eyes. “Why?,” she asked. “You don't want me to come over more?” “No, I do, but why would you offer that?” ... “I'm not stupid, I'm aware that you like to be alone, and I also know that you keep your word, so I want to know how you will make that work...”

I thought about the question, then began looking about the room, then finally answered while gesturing, “I think I will section off this room, or perhaps build a new room, maybe a study, so I can be here yet still be alone and away from you and your children.”

She looked back down at the clothes she was laying out on the bed. She didn't laugh at first, but after a few seconds a smile cracked. “So you gonna come up in my house and straight up redesign it?,” she asked. I laughed and moved closer to her, making every possible motion that I desired, wotioned even, to stay inside the chamber of secrets.

“Well, I'm responsible for you now. You know, the Chinese say that once you've

saved a person's life, you're responsible for it forever. So, I'm committed. I have to know," I told her.

She looked into my eyes then turned her head towards the window, saying, "There's so little that I know... It's as though I... I were walking down a long corridor that once was mirrored. And fragments of that mirror still hang there. And when I come to the end of the corridor, there's nothing but darkness... And I know that when I walk into the darkness... That I'll die..."

The last of the light that was left in today's Friday vanished as Lynne and I laid together in her bed. At first she asked more on the subject of objectivity, but somehow we ultimately landed on the reality of echoes.

"If the concept of echoes can appear in our universe for us to experience it, it may also exist on a much bigger scale." "So the idea is each life and each universe is basically repeated?" "Yes." "That sounds more like a ripple..." "I guess..." "Does that mean I can exist in more than one place at more than one time?" "It's debatable whether you can exist concurrently, but it is probable. Each ripple can exist independently but none of them are exactly the same. Ripple A, which is further from the source than Ripple B, will have different measurements." "So what you're saying is because each one has a different waveprint, or soundprint, no alternate life can ever be repeated?" "Did you just make that word up? Soundprint?" "Yeah?..." "Interesting... If you can measure B the moment it moves into a position A used to be, and if B does indeed equal the measurements A had at that position, then that would mean it is repeated. If the measurements are off even slightly, then it is not repeated, and therefore we can never repeat our lives."

She looked at the ceiling with incredible curiosity. "Um, I like this conversation," she looked at me. "I like you..." I replied, and then leaned towards her to try to kiss her but she put her hand to my face and pushed me away. "What's the matter with you?," she asked. In a deep voice I replied, "I used to have conversations like that with myself, but maybe now I can have them with you."

She cracked a smile and, looking at my chest, she commented on that fact that I always wore black. "Why is that?," she asked. I had no answer, and because of this she called me a spooky individual.

She turned over away from me to go to sleep saying nothing afterwards. I tried to hug her from behind but she pushed me away then too, basically telling me that while she wanted me here, I should stay there.

Maybe a minute after she got up out of bed with a plan to pee. As she opened the door I could see the darkness in the living room. As soon as I heard her open the door to the bathroom, I heard a loud scream that sounded a lot like Sara. There was somewhat of a commotion as I heard someone, probably Lynne, fall backwards into something.

When I got into a position to see, I saw Lynne lying across the rug trying to catch her breath, and I could tell she had been literally scared almost to death.

“That’s what you get,” Sara revenged. She knew that her mother had a habit of using the bathroom at around midnight.

Once Lynne actually caught her breath and realized she was still alive, she began to laugh, understanding this was something she deserved. I laughed as she crawled, and once close enough, stood up to embrace Sara as she began to laugh even louder. It was the sort of embrace that came from atonement.

Chapter 33

THE CITY OF BROTHERLY LOVE

2:1:4:33

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"I take it you're here because of the black paint," the white shade said. "I am," the black shade responded, "How did he find the room?" "You'll have to ask him when he gets here." "I don't have to ask. You brought him here. Still trying to prove me wrong, aren't you?" "You are wrong." "Am I? They come, fight, they destroy, they corrupt. It always ends the same." "It only ends once, brother. Anything that happens before that is just progress."

The black shade sat at a table opposite the white shade to play him in a complicated dice game called "Hazard." They each rolled black and white dice as they discussed various items.

"They will choose goodwill, brother, you shall see it." ... "And you will be a hypocrite. You will give will to your creation but will have no will of your own."

Just then, the black dice made his final roll and was awarded the victor of the game with a score of 25.0.0.71.0.0 and the white shade having a score of 4.0.6.58.0.0. A second afterward, the door to the room clicked, signifying the door had finally been unlocked.

The black shade stood up, looked at the white shade, then proceeded towards the door. "I wish you had agreed with me, brother," the white shade said to his back, but he did not respond. The black shade had left the room.

In the city of brotherly love, I searched all around for the man covered in darkness. He continued his slew of bizarre murders, leaving me to nickname him "Dice." The world was getting darker, colder, and my obsession with Dice were the only thoughts that grew from my mind.

I woke up in the morning, in Lynne's bed, to overhear Dave talking about a dreamcast. When I walked into the living room I saw them both sitting on the couch watching Saturday morning cartoons.

"Where's your mom?," I asked them. "At your house," Sara replied. I walked slowly to the door but panicked in my mind. I opened the door to my apartment and called for her. Her answer came from the bathroom, and as I walked past the composition room I checked to see if the door was closed. It was, and I was terribly relieved. How did I forget to lock the goddamn door, what the fuck is she doing in here without me or my permission.

Still energized, I accidentally yelled her name once more as I finally saw her, scaring her. "What are you doing in my apartment?" I noticed my keys right beside her and figured she had taken them sometime in the morning. "Your bathroom is filthy," she told me. I then noticed that she was cleaning.

I wanted to tell her never to come here with out me, but that alone would give the

implication that I had something to hide. Instead, I calmed myself, walked up to her, grabbed her arm gently yet forcing her upwards, and said to her that it was her first day back and she was already working again.

I'm not sure how we got here, but the next thing I know I'm forcing her to take a hot shower in her apartment. She doesn't give me much resistance as she enters the tub.

About a minute into it, she realized I was still in there and asked me what I was still doing in there. "If I leave you'll probably start cleaning this bathroom, too." She laughed.

I sat down on something. Something very small, and waited for her to finish. Within ten minutes the steam began to take over the room and I told her that she should sit down. Again, no resistance as I saw the shadow move downwards. Not one single noise came from her and I knew she was completely relaxed as she was being watered.

"Hey Spook," she woke me up. "Is that me?" "I saw something in your apartment." "What did you see?" I saw that notebook I bought you on your bed. And I read some of what you wrote... Was that about me?"

I had just started a new one, but it didn't have any dreams in it yet. What it did have, though, were the first words to a stupid poem I had to write for her.

She turned the shower off, grabbed the towel and I watched her as she walked out and began to brush her teeth. Playing around, I began tugging at the towel, and she kept calling for me to stop. Once she was done and after she had washed her mouth out, I completely pulled the towel away from her and exposed her naked body. She panicked, covering her breasts and her vagina, and turning towards me shocked.

I didn't say anything but I stared at her all over from her foot until I finally got to her eyes. And finally, she slowly removed her right arm from her breasts and her left arm from her vagina, peacefully and gracefully sliding both hands into a position on her hips. And even more leisurely, she slid her hands a little more to the backside of her hips so she could enter into a very feminine pose; so I could see all of her. The legacy scar will never heal, but she was clean and had the scent of Eve.

"What was it like being the first referee to ever eject a coach from a game?," the interviewer asked as he laughed. "Terrifying," Austin responded, "especially when you consider it was the mad scientist himself!"

In a contest that sported throwback uniforms, Henry Clayton found himself many reasons to be angry, but among two of those reasons were these; a delay early in the second quarter that lasted nearly forty minutes and the simple fact that this game would decide whether they made it into the post-season or not.

Though they had been leading the entire game, an offensive holding call that went against them caused Clayton to snap.

"There are two plays that will drive any coach mad," said former referee Hernandez,

“offensive holding and not being able to convert third and short. So when you combine those two together, it's a madhouse.”

Bert McCormack was the culprit, who was called for holding as the home team attempted to convert on third and two. Clayton did not agree with the call, and after basically quarreling with Austin the entire game on what he suspected were bogus calls, he finally ran up to him during this penalty, asking, “What kind of trash call was that? Fuck you! Piece of shit.”

A yellow flag flew into the air, dismissing Clayton from the game with less than half of a quarter left. As Clayton began his walk into the locker room, cheers from fans could be heard throughout the stadium, as this was the closest the home team had come to a championship for many years. This ovation would be remembered as a highlight of the season.

“That was an exciting game. They didn't just have to win, they needed two other teams in their conference to lose. They got really lucky with the odds, I'd say,” said former referee Copenhagen.

Inside the locker room, Clayton watched the rest of the contest with Croft. The home team eventually won, but the battle was not complete until the other two teams lost, setting up the home team for what would be an historic playoff run.

“That team was a joke, that's where players went to retire, and for the first time in sixteen seasons, the 'Claymen' were going to the playoffs.”

“Anthology is a conspiracy,” declared Paxton, “the narrator conspires to keep information hidden from you or masks it in an obscure way. Some parts read almost like a riddle; Lynne's appearance is important yet there is actually very little detail given about her appearance, for example, her face is never described except for the exception that it has an abstract light about it. The narrator also plays tricks on you, keeps certain information a secret, and” a student interrupted Paxton, asking, “Is that why the white rose is secrecy?”

“What do you mean?,” he asked Audrey. She replied, saying, “The only person who know about his feelings towards Lynne is the reader, he keep it to himself like a secret...”

“The white rose could indeed be a symbol of his love for her, but” Paxton is again cut off, this time by Cedric, “He doesn't love her, he's just obsessed with her.” “What makes you say that?,” P inquired.

“He says it over and over again, that he don't know how to love. And he proves it at the end when he doesn't let her stay with him,” finished Cedric.

“But,” Carson inserted himself into the conversation, “what if it's not something as simple as whether he loves her or not, or if he's obsessed with her, what if he just feel a way about her that the average person can't explain or define?”

“I think he really does love her, but at the same time is confused because he hates humanity,” stated Chris. “Does she love him?,” Karen turned the question on its head, emphasizing “she.”

Latasha, who wanted to take part in the conversation of love, rubishly rose her hand, and Paxton allowed her to speak.

“She probably doesn't love love him, but I'm sure she has strong feelings for him too. One thing I noticed is that we have almost no connection to her mind, we see everything through him. That would” Latasha is interrupted by the school's intercom, “May I have your attention please... The last bell for the school day has not been set to ring early for early release, teachers please dismiss your class at 1:40. Thank you.”

The message had thrown the conversation out of loop, and when Paxton asked Latasha to finish, she stated that she couldn't remember what she wanted to say. This prompted Becca to speak, “I think I know what she was going to say. Since we can never see in her mind, we can never know how she feels about the narrator, which is the core of all relationships. Not knowing another person, not knowing how they feel about you. It brings insecurities and doubt, which is something I think both he and she have to deal with, because you have to note that she keeps whatever she is feeling a secret as well.”

After the clock had struck 1:40, high school students flowed out of the building early. Chris Bell, who was in very close proximity to James Paxton, was going through his locker when he heard Paxton mutter the words “goddam motherfuckin' son of a bitch” under his breath.

Chris accurately guessed what had happened, and closing his locker, laughed as he walked over to James who had been conned by a vending machine.

“It ate my money,” Paxton said to Bell. “I got you P-trunk,” Chris said taking out his wallet. Paxton politely refused his advances, but Chris suddenly pulled out a single dollar with what appeared to be plastic attached to it. He inserted it into the machine but held on to the plastic, effectively fooling the machine into thinking it had received currency, and quickly pulled the dollar back out as he held on to the plastic.

Paxton was amused, confused and excused. “Now you got two.” “...Yeah.” “Ain't that that shit we be talkin' 'bout in class. Even-sum or something?” “You're right, it is.” “If the machine don't play by the rules, why should we?” Paxton, still fascinated by the genius of the plastic dollar, could only say “I agree.”

“You ain't gonna snitch or nothing right?,” Chris joked as he slapped Paxton's shoulder. Paxton laughed, then made a motion as if he was going to hit him, causing Chris to flinch. “You flinched,” they both laughed.

Chris then began to walk away, and soon after heard his name. When he turned around, Paxton tossed him one of the two candy bars. “It's zero-sum, Chris.”

As Chris was walking to meet Becca, he heard a sudden car honk, and then a sudden yelling of his name. It was Becca's mother, telling Chris to come. He walked over to her and she asked him to get into the car, telling him she was picking up Rebecca and would give him a ride home.

Chris was hesitant but found it difficult to refuse, and he climbed into the backseat of the vehicle. Moments later, Becca appeared, a bit surprised to see her boyfriend sitting in the back.

¶ We wandered through a bright charming place,
¶ For all around us was magic, a glaring light that streams,
¶ But it dove into an endless rivercase
¶ And in eternity, we saw the dark city of dreams

Chapter 34

ORIGINS

2:1:4:34

STANDING at her bedroom door was Lynne, who was calling me over with a smile on her face, ready to let me in. When I entered I saw that her room had ebony-painted walls, which reminded me of her wall painting at my parents' home. The moment I stepped in I began to float, and she followed, too floating behind me.

The walls had the stars and planets of deep space on them, and in a dark corner I saw twin sunsets. When I looked back at her, I noticed she was now wearing “Déjàs Are Forever,” the black dress with a red stripe down the middle.

“The universe has no origins?,” she asked me. As we floated past each other I told her that it was possible that the universe perhaps has never “started” and will never “end.” That it was possible the universe was structured in a way that it could not not exist, but at the same time only presented the illusion of existing.

“Elaborate,” she insisted as she bounced off the ceiling and towards the bed through a wormhole. Usually when we talk about the origins of the universe, we talk about how or where it “began,” but a scientist from Luxembourg decided to go a different route, he proposed the universe could never be “turned off,” and that for there to be “nothing” would be completely erroneous. He died, though, never proving his idea.

She bounced off of the bed and floated towards me with a sapphire moon attached to her silver foot. “It makes me think of God turning a line into a circle to create an endless and eternal universe.” “What do you mean?,” I asked her. “With a line, you have point A and point B, bend the time, and you end up with infinity.”

Just then, a revir opened up in her closet and sucked us in, sending us at blazing speeds of what appeared to be an invisible tube.

She, having less mass, was the first to go, and I soon followed. The location was now even deeper space, where fire and ice was but a yard away.

“At night, Cellardoor's waves are ice blue because of a chemical reaction,” she told me, and after saying this, a backdraft blew her dress back towards her, revealing her undergarments. The cardinally obsidian panties made her extremely sexy.

“I donated my old prosthetic and my old yellow dress,” she again spoke, and I now realized why I hadn't seen the dress I first saw her in for such a long period of time.

Suddenly the revir split into two ways and we found ourselves going in different directions, to what we thought would be different destinations. As she blazed further and further away from me, I could hear the echo of her calling out for me, “Spooooooooook!”

For a while I traveled through dark space, then light space, until finally I could see her room at the end of the revir. As I plowed through, there was much friction that

slowed me down as I entered back through the door, and the same happened to her as she entered back through the window at the same time.

In the room, the slow momentum propelled us both towards each other, and floating to each other, we extended our right arms, then our right index fingers, and when we finally made contact, an onyx butterfly came out of her mouth. She smiled at me, like she had done so many times before, but this time in a black dress and with a darkness in her eyes.

Sara opened the door to the bedroom and found us both lying wide awake on Lynne's bed, "Mom, you didn't hear us ringing the bell?," she snapped. "I think it's broken again," Lynne replied. "Oh...," Sara closed the door.

In the living room Dave was going through his newly acquired cards when he decided to phone Gun Ho, though it was Dam Son who answered. "No if I do my dad will be mad and he will make me run," Dave spoke over the phone. No deal was to be made with the boys downstairs.

As Lynne and I went to exit her bedroom, she informed me that the hospital called and told her that her tumor was benign.

She walked over to the kitchen and I went into the living room, staring at Dave for no reason. After a while Lynne called out to me, and this put a confusing look on Sara's face. "What did you call him?," she asked. Sara found her mother's nickname for her friend interesting at least.

"Olya just messaged me, she's done with your vacuum, which is actually my vacuum." "Okay." "Okay so can you go get it, she's busy helping someone set up a yard sale." "Why? You're the one who left it in my apartment." "Yeah after vacuuming it." ... "You can't beat me on this one, just go get it..."

I walked out into the daylight and began walking towards Olya's apartment building. On my way there I could see the yard sale being set up, and when I finally got to her she quickly ran upstairs to retrieve it. I greeted her friend, he greeted me back, and he continued to display various items for passerbys.

While waiting, I noticed a sort of suction instrument, but what was less interesting than it was a plain and simple gold-band ring alongside it. "How much are you selling this for?," I asked the merchant. "For you, ten bucks..."

I thought about it, then told him to tell Olya that I would be back. After leaving my apartment with a ten dollar bill, I walked back to him to find Olya coming out of her apartment with the vacuum.

"We have just won the team's first playoff game in sixteen years. It feels good." "Not sure why I have decided to record this, but I feel like it's something I should do. One thing I regret is not taking more notes on the last playoff run." "So I could learn from my mistakes." "I think maybe this is also a good way to ease tension and relax

as we go into the work week and start preparing for the divisional round.” “Children are sleeping, wife is reading.” “These are just some thoughts I would like to have a record of.” “I wonder what Isaac is doing right now.” “Anywho, that's not important. I need to focus on the strengths of yesterday to visualize our gameplan for next week.” “Whether we lose or win, I believe football as we knew it is no more, end to the era, because I have done something, or I mean, we have done something, to change how it is played.” “Football... What a wonderful game.” “Second family. In ways I feel married to it. Married to the game.” “Copper Field... Sixth seed never sees home again...”

Somewhere in southern Asia, the three of us made plans to rob a cruise ship. During the heist, Mushashi was struck in the back by a solitaire sword, dying almost instantly. His death was that of a careless one, mostly on his part, but his lawless life was made of the things you'd find in genesis tales.

“A pair of masked thieves from New York burglarized a bank on Wall Street earlier this morning, leaving with an estimated \$31,500. The criminals have not yet been identified, but it is heavily suspected that the two were involved in a prior kidnapping of a law enforcement officer who was found inside the Brooklyn tower.”

Chapter 35

NIGHTS INTO DREAMS...

2:1:4:35

IT is “four,” but not “fourty.” It is “forty,” but it is derived from “four.” I noticed this when Dave told me I spelled the number “40” wrong after checking his math homework.

Dave and I had been walking to my parents' home when in the distance he pointed out the image of a few men working on a home. Renovating it.

The sight reminded me of my hazy past: of Jose, Jason, Jakub; building an extension to a middle school, or a junior high school, I'm not certain which is the correct term.

When we finally got to the home we saw Lynne and Sara's bicycles laying in the middle of the backyard. Around the corner I saw her dead and dying garden.

It is “anthology,” but “antho” is a prefix meaning “flower.” Yet, an anthology is a selection of works, not the study of flowers. Why not “anthography?,” where the suffix is defined as in a relation to writing.

Dave chose to visit the treehouse for moments of solitaire, speaking to himself as he cut across the lit yard, and I went inside the home to find Sara walking around quickly in search of something. “Spookie,” she called out to me, that was what she was calling me now, “did you see my nights into dreams things?” I nodded my head sideways. These “things” she was talking about were block building toy sets for children, places you could design and build at a childish level.

She began walking away, continuing her search and speaking to herself, “I already have autumn nights into dreams built, I need to find winter nights and summer nights before I can build spring nights, but I don't know where it is!”

It's “its” to show its possessive form, but it's “it's” to show it's a contraction. Though I would say “Sara's sets,” using an apostrophe and an “s” to show possession, I could not say “Saras sets,” which seems to go against saying “it's sets” and “its sets.”

As I made my way up the stairs and towards my younger brother's room, I heard faint music coming from Lynne's art room. When I opened the door I saw her laying down on a sort of homemade bed, and right next to her was a desk, atop it a laptop which the music came from. This was the same computer I bought for Sara and Dave.

I walked over to her and after a while she noticed my presence. “I have a name for it now,” she said. “For this huge painting?,” “Yes,” she laughed, “...The view from Datura,” she finished.

After she saw me think for a moment, she added that it was influenced by something I said to her the last weekend. I couldn't remember saying anything about views and I have no idea if Datura is a person place or thing, and honestly, all in all, I have no idea what the name itself means, but I told her that the name seemed fitting.

She reached for my pants and pulled herself up, and without saying anything else left the room and walked towards a pantry, where I overheard Sara asking her about winter nights.

I looked back down at the bed, then at the computer, and finally directly in front of me for a strange view. I've seen it before, many times, but it is still quite a view. Look up, down, left or right, diagonal, ahead or back, and you will see something she created in her mind.

Maybe she named this room Datura? And maybe in it you can observe all types of things? I don't know...

A great irony is that many of us believe it is the things outside of ourselves that will make us happy, but really, isn't it the things inside of us that do? When you cultivate a dream, it is something you see happening in the outside world, so instinctively you will reach for it, trying to attain that dream. The problem is we don't realize that these dreams are actually occurring within, making a reach for it pointless, because a person cannot reach for the imaginative mind or for the desiring heart.

A wise man once called up a foolish man in the middle of the night and began playing jokes with him. He teased him, saying he could see everything he was doing through the window. When the foolish man had had enough, he cleverly escaped through a back way and ran towards the only other building rooftop that the wise man could have been spying at him from. When he got to the rooftop, he saw that it was empty, and looking back across the way to the home he had just left, there on its rooftop he saw the wise man, laughing and hurrying into the ghostly darkness. Everything you need is inside, not outside.

Looking at the view from Datura, I understand that Lynnette has more dreams in her soul than I do in my apartment. This gives her the fantastic ability to turn nights into dreams...

¶ THE VIEW FROM DATURA

¶ Venus-light, up above, calls to me within these closing walls

¶ To think upon a vast universe, angrily governed, by these strange man's laws

¶ The waters ripple, then wave, then tsunami, according to design

¶ But each movement so delicate, and yet so backwards without reason or rhyme

¶ When did this all begin? Can it start? Can it end?

¶ Or is it all just a doomed illusion, some geometrical bend

¶ Off the asteroid, off the satellite, off the country of Finland
¶ The echoing soundprint dances once, then twice, then comes back again

¶ Philosophy, the lovers of wisdom, of pain, of madness and sorrow
¶ They know only one thing, that they know nothing, and that knowledge is only something you borrow

¶ Diamonds and crystals and emeralds and rubies, gold and silver, onyx, sapphire
¶ They demonstrated the daisied dame as she sang in daisies and satire

¶ A portrait of the ladybird in her rosedress,
¶ Twin souls, too rare to die, and sleepless in atlantess

¶ This is my view, my disease, my dark aurora
¶ This is now my home, furnished with a philosophical view from Datura

¶ 12/4 – A soulmate isn't always another person. Poetry, reflection, adventure, these things have souls too. I took a midnight bike ride last night, my first ride in months, and realized this on my short journey.

¶ We visited my lover's home, and because he fell asleep while watching Forensic Files, this left me to ponder the night alone, something we recently have been doing together.

¶ I rode back to my apartment because I had forgotten my new earphones, and then began my ride on an unfinished bike path they were making a few blocks down the road. Music has always had a way of reviving my soul, and this anthology of soul was no exception.

¶ When its done, I hope they'll give it a ruby rosy path. Forty-thousand red roses all along the ups and downs and stops to loose yourself in brand new dreams.

¶ There's this guy who lives in my building. His buzzer says Cheng. Mr. Cheng seems friendly enough, but it's his ladyfriend that I'm uncomfortable being around. You know those people who are always polite but in an unpolite way? Like you can just tell they talk about you behind your back. She thinks I have no idea but I know she's a bitch. I feel sorry for Mr. Cheng, especially considering they have a baby on the way. Man is she gonna use that baby to manipulate him. I know because I've had thoughts of doing it myself. Not saying I'm a bitch, but when times get rough people get low.

¶ My love has been a little bit softer with me since I departed from the hospital, but there are parts of him that have become rougher, I'm not sure why. He has been rougher with me during sex, but he doesn't realize it, and at some points it really hurts me, but I say nothing. He doesn't like it from the back, he prefers it face to face, which is actually the exact

opposite of Silvio, but I'm starting to see that they are both two sides to the same coin.

¶ On my way back home my jeans got caught in the chain and this ruined them. I'll probably still wear them... Or just sew them back up. Night over...

¶ Sitting here writing, listening to his snores, I am beginning to realize that I enjoy solitude as much as company, if not more. I think I've always known that, but it's only now that I am actually beginning to see it, that I have a tendency to cling on to people, but even when I'm on so tight, I am still alone...

¶ *"Whosoever is delighted in solitude is either a wild beast or a god..."*

"...Is this thing on?" "Oh, there we go." "Let this serve as the second tape of my fourth playoff run." ... "Bradley made history today, being the first rookie quarterback, as a sixth seed, to beat a first seed team." "I'm proud of the kid... Had a running play where he broke multiple tackles for a touchdown. He has worked hard this year..." "Some of the analyst are calling it the biggest upset in league history, and that we are finally real contenders, even though I personally believe we have been playing at a level superior to most other teams late in the season." "The name on the front is more important than the name on the back." ... "Kevin hasn't said a word to anyone since the wildcard game. Well, he's talked, but he's only said what he needs to say, which is just as shocking as us winning the division game." "...Finally figuring out this recorder. There is actually a red light at the bottom to indicate you are recording, I didn't notice that before..." ... "In addition to these notes, I am noting that our opponent's field conditions were terrible, and is something the league should look into." "If a play goes on long enough, it starts to break down and is beneficial to the offense... I think given enough time, an individual will become aware of their strengths." "I was a part of drafting Okadigbo, and he is now one of the best running backs in the league." ... "Sometimes I wonder if I have pushed him too hard, or if I'm too stern with him. Like a hardened father. I look at him sometimes, and it is easy to see that there are moments when he feels alone..."

A sign of the Devil playing a trumpet could be seen on a building a few yards away from Clinton Community High School. Inside the school building, on the first floor, Mr. Allan's Principles of Economics class could be observed as they learned about economics. On the second floor, Ms. Murphy's Anatomy and Physiology class could be observed as they learned about the human anatomy. On the third floor, Mr. Paxton's Critical Thinking class could be observed as they learned about analyzing text.

"Do I have to spell it out for you, Mr. P! The Sun at the end is a symbol of Lynne's smile! Geez!" exclaimed Karen. Paxton stood there, for a moment, confused and perplexed, and not understanding how he had never seen the ending to *Anthology Complex* in this way before.

Into the next session of the class, Arimatla read aloud a passage from the novel: There

is a story of a woman who forgot the English language after being hit by a car, and the only words she knew were the words she heard. She wouldn't remember the word "hypnosis" until you said it to her, and only then would it be part of her vocabulary again. The philosophical concept of the story is that we only know and understand what we have experienced.

After his reading, Latasha raised her hand to give her analysis of the text. She spoke to the tune of all peoples of all backgrounds being separated by social constructs, using the term "social constructs" deliberately and accurately, which prompted Paxton to ask her where she had learned that phrase from. He was both impressed and a little excited.

The bell ringing signified the end of the school day, and after Latasha had eaten and left Paxton's class, Paxton sat down to read a few pages of *Paradise Lost*. Lost in its pages, he was suddenly pulled out of the universe after hearing the sound of an explosion, followed by loud screams and yells, and after running into the hallway, found a gulf of smoke coming out of a locker.

He ran, running up to the victim who was already being calmed down by Mr. Howard. When the smoke cleared, he saw that the victim was one of his students; Christopher Bell.

The explosion had done very little damage, but had torn across his left eyebrow and left behind a small trail of blood.

Mr. Howard continued to support Chris, holding him down, as Paxton got up to look inside his locker. There he found something of a homemade bomb which was connected by yarn to the locker's inside doorhandle. Further inspecting the locker, he found another book, which was a companion textbook for *Anthology Complex*, annotated by G. Matthew McClane to help one understand the puzzle more easily.

Looking down at the companion book, as a human being, Paxton felt sorrow, and as a teacher, he felt alone. Excluded from his contemporaries. But from this sight, he also understood that students were not divided by their class, but divided only by their growing thirst for knowledge.

Chapter 36

THEN CAME THE LAST DAYS OF AUTUMN

2:1:4:36

ANDRE, deciding to attend first period English, was delighted to see a substitute teacher. Carson, trying to obtain information on Chris, sat in second period Biology confused. In third period Art, Monica was half-asleep. Becca, with her head down on the desk, learned nothing in fourth period Health. Latasha, wondering more about Paxton than Chris, grew evermore curious in fifth period Lunch. Cedric, on his way to sixth period Sociology, wondered if goats saw in color. Audrey, playing tennis during seventh period Gym, couldn't stop thinking about how close she was to the locker-explosion. Sandeep, in the school's library during eighth period, though he should have been in Geometry, played endlessly a game called "Super Monkey Ball." In the ninth and final period of the day, all of these students, including many others, did not meet in the classroom that they normally met in, but instead journeyed to an abandoned classroom where they attended an investigation by a former police officer.

There, they are asked many various questions, namely the subject matter of the things they had learned about and discussed in Critical Thinking. *Anthology Complex* had been challenged by the school once before, and in a way, was being challenged once again. Of the matter most concerning to the officer, and which would be relayed to the school's board, was the study of that of a man who had a deep hatred for the entire human race.

A day later, Chris laid wide awake inside room thirteen of Harry S. Truman University Hospital. In the afternoon he was visited by James Paxton, and sometime into the discussion, Chris revealed to him that he had been colorblind in one eye. The stress of this, combined with the stress of racial tension that came from a relationship with Becca, a relationship he only a few moments ago had ended despite her cries for a non-secretive relationship, carefully constructed his next words to Paxton.

"Julien was wrong... Black people... White people... Don't matter how long we're in the same room, it ain't ever gonna work." After Chris saw a specific expression on Paxton's face, an expression as if Paxton felt he had failed Chris, Chris continued. "We cool though," Chris asked for a fist bump, which Paxton returned.

Establishment and teachers had begun discussion information provided by a former police officer, and more importantly, had begun discussing Paxton's future with the school, despite the fact that there were no connections between the attempted murder of a student and a novel he had been reading for a particular class.

By the end of the week, the entire class would be completely canceled with the help of nine cautious and concerned parents.

"...Some people think you have only have one chance to succeed, but this is not true."

... “We lost our first game to them, won our second, and a couple of days ago we eliminated them from the playoffs in the conference championship game. A shootout, 43 to 39.” ... “Sorry, 42 39.” “One game away from winning it all and somehow I feel too calm about it, like it isn't real.” “I think I will try to get down to Cop next weekend during dawn to look down the field one last time before the league's championship game.” “A teacher must always remain a student of the game.”

Last evening, I had a nightmare in the desert. I stalked through the sand and the night following Sid's trail. Eventually I got to the point where I could see him crawling, disabled by a missing arm, the sand clinging to his face.

After he had realized I was behind him, he stopped and turned over, pleading for his life. I grab him by his long hair, force his body upright, and I hear the sound of mete as I tear off his already wounded right arm, making him now completely armless.

It was now time for him to pay for his sins. I put the dull saw up to his neck, and still yelling, I go back and forth to dull out the screams until his body falls forward and all that is left is his head in my hand, his life depleted.

What is a lifeforce? What is life? Scientist argue over the definition of being “alive” and cannot come into agreement on whether a litype like a virus is actually alive or not. So what constitutes livelihood? Is it consciousness? The ability to move? Should life be defined as the capacity to reproduce? Is the universe itself able to reproduce forms of matter? Maybe life, or “alive,” should be defined as the ability to measure stimuli in any capacity.

After I had placed his head inside a paper bag, I went to his fallen body and began to cut pieces from it. One by one, I ate parts of him; his fingers, parts of his liver, his gallbladder. I wanted his lifeforce, his genotype, I wanted him to be a part of me. When an animal dies and rots into the soil, its remains can help fertilize a new life. I believe the same can be said about cannibalism.

At about two-thirty or so, with a light drizzle, I found myself helping Tao move a large fishtank into a moving truck as his barely pregnant girlfriend watched... How sad, a mini-tao... Man, she's a high maintenance bitch, but I guess she's exactly who Tao deserves. I wonder if she is forcing the move into a home on him. Does he even have the expenses for that? His job also recommended that he move, so maybe it's that... Who knows.

With their truck now completely packed, a third of their possessions in the truck and a fourth still in the apartment, it was now time for Tao to say goodbye. He extended his hand out to me, and I guess I had to shake it. Without saying anything at all, he turned a professional handshake into a thuggish one, and he was out of my life forever.

As I entered the building and as they drive away the rain grew heavier onto the

colored leaves. I sat down on my couch. That lovely couch. I thought about Lynnette.

I picked up my telephone and called Famous Max's Diner, and then I asked for her. When she took the phone I said hello and eventually asked her if she could leave work to come home. She laughed at me, saying this was not how employment worked. "Just tell them it's an emergency, I miss you." "You do?..." "Thugs get lonely too." A very hoarse laugh came from her end, trying to conceal the laughter from others. "And I want to tell you about some new genetic information." "Really? What is it?" ... "I have to physically show it to you." "Okay, I can't leave now, but I will try to get out early, under one condition. Only if we can talk about the philosophy and mathematics of intimacy." "Deal."

A couple of hours later I heard Lynne's familiar knock on my door and I opened it to let her in. She was still dressed in her work uniform and partially wet from the rain. She walked in and sat her purse on my kitchen counter and eventually I asked her if she was going to go home to change, to which she replied by going into my bedroom.

I followed her into it and saw her going through my drawers of perfectly crumpled endless black shirts. I watched in complete silence.

First, she took off her work pants, revealing basketball shorts I had seen many times before, and second, she took off her work shirt, revealing a brassiere I had seen many times before, then turned around as she began to put on one of my shirts. "Got all my clothes here," she joked.

Walking towards me, I stopped her from putting on my shirt after seeing those veins on her chest. Attraction is a strange thing.

I put my index finger on one of the veins and followed it passively until it ended abruptly. I was going to tell her that if you completely sever the carotid artery, the victim will bleed out, on average, in forty seconds. But that was not what she came to hear.

"The ancient Chimanian culture thought veins were passage ways for emotions to travel through. Love, hate, anger, joy, sadness. They imagined that these same things existed outside of people, invisible passage ways, so that love or hate could travel from one person to another, or so that two people could share the same emotion." "Does it work over long distance? Like, could I be in another state and we could share the same feeling?" "The brain moves the foot, doesn't it?" She laughed. "It sounds like a telephone," she finished. "Telephones, quantum entanglement, it's all the same thing," I laughed.

"This is exactly what I chased down the bus for." "You ran after a bus?" "...That would have been another forty-five minutes of waiting. And I knew you couldn't live without me."

Silence came upon us as she sat down at a desk and began using my computer. I stood

behind her until she told me she found a website last night that dealt with the most important unanswered questions in science, then I got another chair and sat beside her.

Somewhere in the discussion there was a pause and she told me that she had begun practicing yoga. The cancer scared her and she felt like she needed a tool to help ease her mind. "I think if I have whatever this is, this objectivity thing, and yoga, I can stop tripping over my own feet." "You don't trip over your feet," I told her, "it's me. My feet move too slow." "That's what I mean. I mean no, that's not what I mean. What I mean is..." She didn't know what she meant, and under her breath in her frustration I heard her say "passion flower."

"I want to show you something," I got up and she followed me. I opened the door to the composition notebook room and she followed me in, curious and confused. We moved closer into the room until we were standing directly in front of two bookcases.

She stared at them for a little bit, trying to figure out what they were supposed to be. "These books were my father's, he left them for me." She didn't respond, but she moved closer for a better look.

"Your dad read everything from Ulysses to The Cat in the Hat?," she asked, looking at the books behind the glass. I laughed, telling her that these books were worth thousands, and that this edition of The Cat in the Hat was a rare limited edition that was never published and was still in its original packaging.

The sound of two keys came out of my pocket and I handed them to her. "I'm showing you this so I can give you these keys for my apartment." "I don't understand..." "So you guys can come over, even if I'm not here. All that I ask is that you tell them not to come anywhere near these books, and that you yourself don't touch them, because even I can't touch them."

"I don't want them," she said, "I don't want them if it messes with your privacy." After going back and forth she eventually took them, but was intent on never using them.

"You're the first person I have ever shown these books to," I slowly put her hand in mine, "because I trust you, and because you understand my distorted mind." When she looked up at me, I could feel the same trust radiating from her body.

"There are so many worlds in those books and we are going to visit all of them, Lynne! We are going to go on all types of adventures! One hundred days adventures! Me and you forever! Ninety-seven years and fifty-five thousand seasons! Haha! We're never be apart! Everyminutemeandyoadventuresdotcom!"

Suddenly the buzzer went off and I found I had been clutching Lynne's head against my chest, her hair in a frenzy. It was Dave and Sara, whom I'd met in the hallway and showed into my apartment where they saw their mother with neck-pain.

Sara, for some reason, walked around very carefully, finally saying "This is weird..."

It was the first time we had all ever been in my apartment.

Dave walked into the kitchen, telling Sara they had to finish their drawing. Lynne followed them, then did I, asking about the drawing. It was a project for school concerning family matters.

He took out first a finished picture of a family of four, it was himself, Sara, Lynne and Silvio, and he took out second an unfinished picture of a family of three, himself, Sara, Lynne, and the beginning of me.

Lynne and I watched over them as they finished drawing me, and the whole time I could feel Lynne's mild anxiety. As they finished me, Lynne invited me to the backdoor and we sat down on the top step, a slight autumn breeze and early dusk. I guess you could say I felt like a backup to a starter.

I nodded my head in protest, telling her she need not say anything. We stayed completely silent, something we learned to do well, as these silent moments brought out the most affection.

When the kids finished, Sara came out and gifted me the drawing. "He's using the bathroom," Sara told me. The both of them began walking in the direction of their home and I watched as they entered through their backdoor.

I go inside to find Dave coming back into the kitchen. He glanced at me but didn't say anything, then went to retrieve his backpack. Something fell out of it, a water pistol, and he bent over to pick it up. He looked at me once more, then tucked it inside into his underwear.

Putting on his backpack, he began to speak. "Spooker... I did not choose the thug life, the thug life chose me." And he vanished into warm darkness. I really wish they'd stop calling me that...

I walked back into my composition notebook room and slid the glass that led to The Cat in the Hat, and I removed it from its spot, and hidden behind it I found a composition notebook that dealt with cannibalism and dismemberment.

I read through it, but what I really thought about was Lynne and the fact that she was nothing like May-ling. There may have been a time before when she traveled down the same path, maybe not, but if she were, I have saved her from that doom of insatiable material desires. And in that same salvation, she has taught me how to love, because I can say now, with all of my heart, that I love her. A non-material woman in possession of the rare diamond rose.

But... I am slow thinking... And I am still afraid to tell her that I love her directly. Even so, I know that I have told you this, at the very least, so that someone might have some record of my passionate love for her.

Chapter 37

DÉIJÀS ARE FOREVER

2:1:4:37

I stepped out the shower, the towel around my waist into a foggy mirror scene, and I took the comb to comb my hair, then I took the deodorant, it was strange and foreign to me, and I rubbed it against my armpits, and I later walked out and then back into brush my teeth, only a moment later would I leave to go into the bedroom and into the closet to remove a suit and place it on the bed to spend a minute or two ironing the pants and the shirt and the coat, and suddenly it was on me, the same regular fit it had had before some time ago, though going back to the closet I had to decide, “Which tie should I wear, the black one or the gray one, I don't know,” and I eventually choose the gray one, and now I had to clean my dress shoes, so I did, spending five minutes a piece on either shoe, and hereafter I put them onto my feet and looked at myself in the mirror, I don't remember the last time I made myself to be so presentable, when could it have last happened, I wonder, I ponder, but I cannot remember, who cares, I walk back into my kitchen and open a top cabinet where I find a miniature cardboard box, taking it out I put it into my pocket, far away into the dreams of paradise, where summer sets and winter rises, where dark bloom fields reach the green skies and when there is light in December, “A million miles of yellowish red cellar door,” and I am not who I told you I was, and I am not who you think I am, and I am on my way to the altar.

When I entered Lynne's apartment I found her sitting in the living room watching television. After she turned back to see me, she smiled and asked me why I looked so handsome. After I had asked her where Sara and Dave were, and after she told me they were in their room, I asked her to join me in her own bedroom.

Once inside, I glanced outside through her window and into a painted scene, then turned around to meet her, a confused yet excited look on her face.

Closing my eyes, I kneeled down on one knee and rested my left hand on my left knee. This was not a sort of kneel towards a higher creature, but was so a sign of admiration for her feet. From the soles to the toes, to know the mystery and the unknown around them. And as I went from them to her legs to her face, I took out the cardboard box which inside was a golden ring, and I moved closer with the desire to know her philosophically.

All that was left now, for everything to be accomplished, was correspondence. The only ingredient which was missing, for this odyssey to be completed, was unity. The gap had now been bridged, and for all to be known, for it all to be absolute, it had to be understood that in the entire universe, which stretched as far as the human imagination, there was now one simple question which had to be asked, and so I asked while showing

her the piece of jewelry, “May I marry you in philosophy?”

A sort of calm and stoic smile grew upon her face. “Stand up,” she said. I stood up, and looking down at her, she finally answered, “...Yes, you may.”

I immediately removed the ring from box and she then stuck out her hand. It felt like eternity as the ring slid down her finger, and then, stopped. When it was on, she raised up her hand to her face and stared at it, studying it, admiring it as the symbol of cell fusion.

I cleared my throat and began speaking, “Before this can be official, I have prepared a document you need to read over and sign. If you agree to the terms of the contract, then we can move forward with our arrangement. If you do not agree, changes can be made provided I agree with the changes.” I handed over the contract to her and she began to read its contents:

CONDITIONS

A. You will make sure:

1. that my clothes and laundry are kept in good order;
 2. that I will receive my three meals regularly in my apartment;
 3. that my apartment is kept neat, and especially that my desk is left for my use only.
- B. You will renounce all personal relations with me insofar as they are not completely necessary. Specifically, You will forego under my instruction:

1. my sitting at home with you;
2. my going out or traveling with you.

C. You will obey the following points in your relations with me under my instruction:

1. you will not expect any intimacy from me, nor will you reproach me in any way unless asked;
2. you will stop talking to me if I request it;
3. you will leave my apartment immediately without protest if I request it.

D. You may speak to me regardless of whether you are first addressed or not, though I will not guarantee a response or even acknowledge that you are speaking, and if I ignore you, you will not persist or seek out attention.

After reading, she found a pen and bent over to begin signing her name. “Wait what are you doing?,” I asked, “We need at least one witness present at the time of your signature.” She stopped signing and then thought for a moment, then said, “If you want me to sign this, I will sign it, but only under one condition of my own.” I sweated a little bit. “We have to have at least some kind of ceremony,” she finished.

A red rug had been laid out, stretching from the apartment's front door to the inner living room. On either side were flowers that had been temporarily taken from Spookie

Garden, Lynne's garden around the apartment building.

The first to walk down the rug was the narrator, accompanied by Sara, who wore a bright green dress. After the two had reached the television, they turned around and waited for the bride and her son to make the same walk down the same road.

Dave, who previously had on a full suit, had taken off the pants because they were causing irritation, and now wore only a suit jacket, dress shirt, dress socks and underwear. He accompanied Lynne, who wore an ivory dress and an onyx necklace.

When the four were finally standing in front of the television, Dave switched into his role of the marriage officiant while Sara switched into her role of the document bearer.

“Not all ride into the sunset, for some must ride into the harvested moon,” Dave recited. We all looked at him strangely. “Please allow the groom and the bride to present their pieces,” he finished.

Lynne wanted to go first, and at first she simply closed her eyes. I waited, and waited, and waited, and then the slow humming of a song began. It caught me by surprise, a weird revelation, and it was not too long before I realized that this was not exactly a song, but a siren. I knew this because I had to physically stop myself from moving closer to her.

Her humming was sad and lovely, with bright things in it, contrasted by a ghost who had a secret in the dark. For some reason, it reminded me of Misses Nosleep.

As I listened, illustrations played out in my mind, and I envisioned her as a mermaid who hummed a mystical siren and whose intent it was to lure me into her waters. Then I saw her as a bird, a new bird, named a lynn timer, the same size of a humming bird and the same wings of a singing bird. In my mind, a lynn timer came in many colors, but this one was specifically blue.

I wondered how she almost sounded like a violin, and one of my first conclusions was the fact of her small stature, that perhaps this was how she created such notes. “My God,” I thought, “a swan violin.”

When she was done, she opened her eyes and looked at me. Her singing, which at best was sub-par, was easily surpassed by her surprising ability to hum, and I didn't quite understand it. Her humming was strange, but great, and I didn't have words because I was speechless, but because I was caught so off-guard I didn't know how to compliment someone who had just hummed a perfect song.

Staring at her, I realized that I had heard this song before. It was called “Vadean Waterfall,” composed by a violinist a long ass time ago, and only now have I just remembered it.

After the silence, she told us she hummed it because she was so bad at singing. I told her that she sounded like an opera chorus and that she should definitely pursue a career in professional humming.

“That's what it sounds like when my teacher plays clavicle music on the computer,” Sara complimented her without knowing it.

Shortly after, she told me it was my turn. I hesitantly took out the poem I was forced to write for her and trembled as I began reading it. A part of me wanted to tell Dave to leave the room.

¶ Down by the river, I saw you in sunshine, where yellow was the color of your hugs when you gave me golden friendship. Over the short bridge, I felt your beating heart, where red was the color of your love when you gave me ruby kisses. Among the ash-heaps and millionaires, I heard your singing voice, where white was the color of your siren-song when you gave me diamond smiles. Under snowfall in January, I wanted you at twilight, where purple was the color of your sky when you gave me crystal desires. In the city of darkness, I saw you in the night, where black was the color of your spirit when you gave me onyx butterflies. A lady in my mind, I followed you in mysterious dreams, where blue was the color of your beautiful dress when you gave me sapphire muses. Across the grass fields, I was influenced by your femininity, where pink was the color of your softness when you gave me spinel feelings. Under rainfall in April, I saw you drown in sorrow, where peach was the color of your cry when you gave me pearl tears. By great folly, I grew with you on the farm, where orange was the color of your fruit when you gave me amber passion. Around our home, I smelled your garden roses, where green was the color of your poverty when you gave me emerald treasure.

“...I'm finished,” I told them. They stayed silent for a moment, then Lynne finally asked me if I named it. I hadn't thought about a name for it as it was the first poem I had ever written. Not wanting to look like an amateur, I quickly said it was title “My First True Friend.” When I realized what I had said, I quickly snapped at the three of them, saying if they tell anyone about this, I will simply deny it.

“...That was beautiful, Spooker,” Dave reassured me, and just then Lynne reached forward, snatching the poem out of my hand, folding it, and holding it warmly in a fist. “Okay, you guys have to stop calling me those names,” I insisted.

After clearing his throat, Dave began again, “Let us continue our ceremony in matrimoney... I'm not really sure what comes next, but I think I am supposed to ask you both if you agree to be man and wife. “I do,” Lynne answered quickly.

The three looked at me. “I do,” I answered. And Dave finally said what Sarah had been waiting for the entire time, “You may now sign the document.” Sarah approached us with the document and a pen on a pillow, and as Lynne went to sign it, Sara put on her glasses and monitored the signature. Thereafter, Sara signed the document herself as a witness and the union and was complete. The only thing left was for me to snap my fingers, commanding her to dance with me.

After the ceremony the audience had gone home, and the bride and groom found themselves in a odysseus bedroom.

“How do I look?,” I turned around so she could see the whole suit, “I put it on by myself.” She laughed and joked, “Oh wow, really? Good job.”

I told her I also had a little plastic rainbow rose, but I forgot to put it on. She suggested that I should put it on now, so she could see how it looked. When I came back she couldn't stop staring at it. “It's so pretty!,” she declared girlishly. “It's so pretty!,” I repeated in a mockingly girly voice. I took it off and gave it to her, telling her she could have it.

She took it and immediately sat on the bed, raising her foot to adjust her silver side. I saw her do something, sleight of hand, and then watched as the rainbow rose floated around in her sole with a Fadean butterfly. She later told me the prosthetic was hurting her knee so she had the sole section modified to encase some kind of silver liquid, which would allow for softer steps.

Then, finally turning around, she said that she wanted to give me something in return, but couldn't think of any items I would want. She was wrong.

“There actually are two specific items in your possession that I do wish to acquire.” “What are those?” “With your permission, I would like to procure one of your panties.”

“One of my panties?,” she asked confused. After she thought for a moment, she said, “Well, I have more than I need, so you can have one, but only one,” she wagged her finger.

She went over to a drawer and one by one took panties out and showing them to me, asking if I wanted this one, or that one, and I nodded my head at each one until she was finally out. “Those are all I have, you have to choose from one of those,” she told me. I nodded my head again.

“I don't want clean ones, I want the one you have on right now.” For a moment she looked out of the window, and when that moment was over she raised her dress and took off her panties, throwing them at me. Her panties had the image of what looked to be that of a pink cartoon kitty cat's face with a ribbon or a bow on the side of its head.

“What's second?,” she asked quickly. “I want one of your heels,” she became very suspicious, almost disturbed. Going into her closet, I told her that this time, any of them will do. She eventually pulled out a purple pair of heels and threw them at me. I threw one back at her, telling her I only needed one. “Spookie, you are deranged, did anyone ever tell you that?” She left the room after saying this, and watching her leave, I couldn't help thinking that her beauty is what poets write about. The poets who dare to capture her.

Outside we heard Sara humming the same siren of her mother, and Dave laid out on

the floor watching cartoons. On the wall in the kitchen, my spirit jumped a little when I saw two theater masks on a wall. I asked about them and she told me that she got them at a thrift store. I took the happy theater mask from off the wall and put it on my face, then turned around slowly to stare at her. With bizarre laughter she took the sad theater mask and put it on, and she said something to me that I will never forget. “Today, two faces have become one.”

She then went to the living room table to sit down and eat. I stayed in the kitchen, the mask still on my face. And at some ghostly hour, I snuck up behind Sara and Dave with a knife in my hand, just standing there waiting for them to turn around. Dave turned around first, after maybe four minutes, and the sight of the mask and my proximity to his face sent him into a sort of horror. When Sara saw this, she too turned around, also frightened by my ghostly appearance.

The both of them laying on the ground, half-scared and half-relieved, I took off the mask and said the only thing that now needed to be said. “...Boo.”

Chapter 38

ALL-PRO

2:1:4:38

¶ CLAYTON ERA BEGINNING OF DYNASTY?

..."Many people erroneously think they have only one chance to succeed, and if they miss that chance, they are doomed to failure. In fact, most people have several opportunities to succeed." These words were famously said by Henry Bill Clayton and they have never been truer as he is shown here kissing the league's most prized trophy. The season had...

¶ OKADIGBO'S FINAL GIFT OF THE SEASON

...Okadigbo, after scoring his first touchdown in the second quarter, runs over to the crowd and hands the ball to a child. Okadigbo has given away touchdown footballs every season since his second season in the league in memory of his newborn son who died shortly after childbirth, and now he has finally given away a championship football.

Declarations have been...

¶ THE CLAYMEN ARE CHAMPIONS

...In stunning fashion, the Pirates have conceded in what is certainly one of the biggest upsets in sports history and one of the greatest Cinderella stories you will ever hear about.

Starting off at a record of 0-3, the...

¶ CHIPPER (QB) IS FIRST ROOKIE TO WIN LEAGUE CHAMPIONSHIP

...Bradley Chipper has made league history after winning his first league championship. Chipper, who started the season as a backup to Sammy Nordstrom, played well enough to keep his job despite a later injury. No other rookie in the league's history has ever won a championship in his rookie season, and perhaps this is...

¶ TAYLOR LAWRENCE KICKS EVENTUAL GAME-WINNER

...Early in the fourth quarter, Lawrence kicked a field goal which would be the last score of the game and which would win his team the league's championship. Lawrence, who went 35 for 39 in FGs, ended as the league's top kicker. Boe also...

¶ LATERALS THE FUTURE OF THE LEAGUE?

...Calvin Marshall lateraled the ball to fellow receiver Michael Cunningham, confusing the defense and gaining more than forty yards. Clayton has devised a playing scheme that incorporates lateraling (which has become his trademark and was inspired by Ed Deer) in a way we have never seen before, and could possibly be adopted by other teams if...

¶ **RICE POINTS, SHOUTS, “ALL-PRO, BABY!”**

Rice (middle) shouting after team's victory, shortly after dumping water on Coach

¶ **COACH MASTERSON ON NOT USING FINAL CHALLENGE**

...Many viewers are questioning why Masterson elected not to use his final challenge during a play that included referee interference. The rules state that any involvement where a play is affected by an official may be reviewed, though Masterson chose not to challenge this, perhaps confident that his team had enough time to score more points. The office of officiating is looking into this matter to...

¶ **TAMANA CHASES DOWN PASTO TO SAVE TOUCHDOWN**

...After a second quarter interception thrown by Chipper, Boe Tamana chases down Heire Pasto to help prevent the Pirates from scoring a touchdown. This effort would lead to the Pirates walking away with only 3 as opposed to 7. The succeeding play...

¶ **STADIUM OVERTAKEN BY TEAM AND FANS**

...The benches cleared and the crowd spilled out into the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum stadium after the final play had been played and the officials called for the end of the game. An unknown number of fans are being treated for minor injuries currently, though...

¶ **KEVIN FAULKNER HELPS TAYLOR LAWRENCE FIX HELMET**

Faulkner (left) helping Lawrence with helmet

¶ **REGGIE GIVEN SPOTLIGHT UNBEKNOWN TO HIM**

...came roaring out of the tunnel Sunday night in what would be their first league championship appearance in well over a quarter of a century. Shown here is Bert McCormack, holding teammates back to give the spotlight to veteran linebacker Reginald Rice. Rice is expected to...

¶ **CLAYTON & CO. WIN, 20-17**

...“Only in sport are there clear winners and losers,” and Sunday turned out to be a winning night for Henry Clayton and his “Claymen,” winning twenty to seventeen against the New York Pirates. Among the broken records...

¶ **FAILED HAIL-MARY ENDS GAME**

...In the final seconds of the championship game, the Pirates, in desperation mode, attempted what would be a seventy-five yard touchdown pass. The ball fell short of its mark, indicating the end of the game. One wonders if adopting the strategy of Clayton in lateraling would have proved a better effort, but...

¶ **PIRATES, FIRST SEED, LOSE TO SIXTH SEED OPPONENT**

...have completed their historic run, defeating the heavily favored New York Pirates in an upset for the ages. The Pirates fell behind early in the second quarter and would never regain the lead they acquired late in the first. Football enthusiasts and theory specialists are digging deep to understand...

¶ **CONTROVERSY IN USA'S MOST WATCHED GAME**

...scoring a field goal early in the fourth quarter to go up 20 to 17, the Pirates would attempt a quick reply by driving down the field to reach field goal range only a few plays later. However, controversy would break out during the field goal try that would tie the game after an umpire, for safety purposes, interacted with a player who was in position to receive a penalty. The umpire, correcting the player's position, should have resulted in a penalty, however this was not the case and the Pirates' attempt was blocked only a few seconds later. The Pirates elected not to challenge the...

¶ **RIOTS AND LOOTING PLAGUE CITY AFTER CHAMPIONSHIP**

...Damage totaling up to 140K has plagued the city after winning its first championship game in twenty-eight years. Fans and opponents alike took to the streets in destructive emotion over what would, no matter the case, be an historic event. Police were called to multiple locations after several injuries were reported, one injury eventually leading to the death of...

¶ **LEE'S MOM WATCHES SON FROM CROWD**

...Joseph Lee's mother, for the first time, watched her son play in a football game. Margaret Lee, who is very concerned with her son's decision to play a heavy-contact sport, normally would not watch, but this was unlike...

¶ **CLAYTON CARRIED OFF BY HIS PLAYERS**

...Amid the chaos on the field, coach Clayton was picked up by several teammates and carried off the field. With a smile on his face and one arm in the air, Clayton becomes the first coach in the league's history to defeat a first seeded team with a sixth seeded team.

Early in the season, football spectators referred to Clayton as the mad scien...

¶ **FAULKNER OVERCOME WITH EMOTION**

...After the most important game of his career, Faulkner's exhaustion was accurately portrayed just a few seconds after the game had ended as he fell to his knees, his helmet pressed against the turf. As he raised his head, a frenzy of fans erupted onto the field, and it was at this moment a photographer caught the professional athlete crying. It had been nearly thirty years since...

...I'm certain now, that the only way to win at life is to live it as if an experiment.
Coach Clayton

Chapter 39

CLASS OF 2014

2:1:4:39

CARSON met with Cedric at his locker to discuss the school schedules they had received for the semester. “Who you got for ninth?,” Cedric asked. “I got some nigga named Paxton, you?” “I got him too! Critical Thinking?” “Ooohhh yeah yeah fo sho fo sho,” finished Carson. “I heard he's new and he's white, we ain't gonna learn shit, and we ain't gonna have to do shit.” “Yeeeeeah.”

“I read some of it,” said Sara, “I think she has to always do his laundry now.” “Did he give her a ring?,” asked Christina. “Yeah, she has it on her finger now.” “I'm going to always make sure my husband is clean,” interrupted Pattie. “So all you have to do is sign a piece of paper and someone has to watch you and you are friends forever?,” asked Christina. “Yes, for the fifth time Christy,” replied Pattie. “Yup, they were flower friends but my mom says now they are lonely lovers, and she says he belongs to her now.”

With a dark face, Rebecca told Latasha that Chris's mother had him transferred to another school. When Latasha asked Becca about Paxton, she said she knew nothing whatever about his situation.

Later in the day, Latasha would continue to ask around for Paxton's whereabouts, but she would never be told that he had been fired and was now beginning his search for work in the tutoring industry as it was unlikely any schools would accept him.

The same dark face that plagued Becca now plagued Latasha, though where it was information that rooted in Becca's, it was a lack of information that rooted in Latasha's, and the feeling of never being able to give him the letter she had penned haunted her. To not be able to express how thankful she was for him and that she was hoping everything would go well for him.

The following week, the ninth period class would be told by a substitute teacher that Critical Thinking had been canceled completely after letters from parents, and each student would be given a substitute elective for ninth period.

Lynne traveled to the basement of her apartment building and to her storage unit. Combing the numbers 11, 20 and 16, she opened her unit and retrieved a bicycle pump and oiling-spray.

Only an hour later would the bell for ninth period sound, the same time she sitting in the auditorium of Clinton Community High School, to the left of her her mate. Parents of students who attended South Kennedy Elementary School were invited to a children's play, of which Sara and Dave had a very minor role. As two astronauts landed on the stage floor, Sara, Dave and several other students all danced around them in “alien” masks.

The narrator eventually asked his mate if she saw the kids. “Sara is on the right, Dave is in the middle,” Lynne replied as she took a photograph.

In the crowd also was Karuna, sitting to the left of the narrator, watching her old students perform. She was now a tutor to blind children, reading aloud all types of stories to them and instructing them in the English language. Withholding a tear, Karuna thought of a sign that stood on the property of her previous employer. She contemplated it now, only because she merely over-sighted it before. “The soul is healed by being with children.”

At this same time, there were four empty classrooms throughout Clinton. Of the four was one in particular that at one point had the sound conversation of many subjects, including, but not limited to, art, science, romance and philosophy, and on one of its desks there was the carving of the words “fuck critical thinking,” and just beneath them, with the same distinct style of carving, were the letters “P-trunk,” which was spelled out carefully in a new tan wood.

Chapter 40

¶ LOVE, LYNNETTE

2:1:4:40

¶ 12/18 – **LAST** night, I had a dream. I can't remember it fully, but I definitely remember being in the ocean alone in the middle of the night. I remember the waters gently pushing me back and forth. I remember the waters being a platinum electric blue, and sometime in the night I heard something coming towards me. I remember later that I saw a wolf paddling in the distance, but it didn't notice me. It continued on, and I watched it, and suddenly it stopped, dying, and its spirit rose.

¶ Yesterday was a sort of honeymoon for me. For us. I am writing this today so I can remember that forever, the amazing time I had and how it all felt like a dream. After much persistence and persuasion, I got my family to visit Cellardoor Lake with me.

¶ It was kind of strange, because besides being married there, every other visit I had to it I was always alone. After school, during my marriage, on work breaks, there were always other people there but I went by myself.

¶ Some time ago, I was left alone and by myself. Not because I chose to be, but because in a way I was forced to be. I had an accident that left me in the hospital for quite a while, and the whole time I was there I felt how I felt when I would visit Cellardoor. All I had was myself. I almost died, my love was angry with me, and all I had was my fucking self. And now I know, the only person you can depend on is yourself.

¶ At the lake, I watched him bury Sara and David on the beach. They had a great time. Laughing the whole time. And the lake was so calm. Inviting. Sounds of the ocean are always soothing. And yet there is a tidal in him. Ripples and tsunamis. There is something wrong with him, and even if I feel like I know exactly what it is, I know that I really don't.

¶ Some point when he was burying them, he got up and began looking around. Probably for me. And after enough time our eyes met, and something inside me felt fear because he looked at me with the same eyes Silvio used to look at me with. I'm not sure how to explain it, but it is more an instinct than an insight.

¶ I wonder, what did he mean by he wanted to marry me in philosophy? It's such a strange way to tell someone that you want to be with them permanently. Whatever, I am not going to complicate this one. I am married in philosophy to my soulmate, my one true love, and that's that!

¶ I also want to tell you about what I wore on my honeymoon! It is an ebony dress. A dream dress. I also wore my onyx necklace, which is shaped like a butterfly and a heart mixed together into one, AND today I put a picture in it, it was a picture I took yesterday at the lake, my family playing on the beach! I've put a copy of it in this entry.

¶ Ok anyway! Why I chose an ebony dress, I don't know. If I were to take a shot at my psychology, I would say it was because part of me wanted to be... Misses Spookie. I am his

lady, no matter what I will be by his side, rain snow sunshine and hail, because I know in some other life, the world left us both broken.

¶ I've seen him when he is alone and the thought of his solitude scares me. To think if I am ever alone, I could end up like that. So strange. And while solitude is scary and important, he has also shown me how powerful human connection can be. I've had four, maybe five bikes in my life, but only now can I see that the day you stop racing is the day you win the race... If you know how to live, you don't have to be afraid of dying. That was a quote. I am not there yet, but I'm trying to get there.

¶ On the way to the lake, the radio said it was going to be getting colder and might snow around New Year's. This is good, because it means I will get more snuggling time, more cuddle sessions and longer hugs. I may have signed away some of my dignity, but he signed a contract that he is not even aware of.

¶ Just before the beach, there is this dress store that has been around since I was in high school. Passing by it, it reminded me of the summer and when I showed off my dresses to him. He made me feel so pretty and beautiful. Last night he slept here with me and told me that he sometimes has dreams of writing poetic books about me and showing me off to the whole world. He has never lied to me, which is why when he tells me something I don't take it with a grain of sand, I take it with the whole damn beach.

¶ Since he's been spending more time with me and sleeping more with me, I started to redecorate this bedroom. I added a desk and I mounted a plank of wood that will hold all of my diaries. Sara and David hardly ever come in here and I don't care if he reads them... Something tells me this is going to be a very sacred, memorable and important place in the times to come.... A million years from now, when humans are extinct and aliens roam the earth, maybe they'll find things that proved we were here. And in those things, they'll find both the beautiful and ugly things humanity was capable of. Maybe not I don't know, I'm just talking out of my ass.

¶ ...When I lived deeper in the city, there was a year where my life was completely unpredictable. I spent my Saturday nights in the bathroom because those moments were sometimes difficult to bear... But I always came back to the place that was, as best as I can describe it, tangible without being actual.

¶ I hope you ladies will forgive me for saying this, but romantic love is just one big lie that almost everyone of us women perpetuates. We delude ourselves into thinking that there is such a thing as unconditional love for a partner, but I don't think it exists. We see everyone around us displaying how happy they are with their lover, when everyone is just simply playing along with the huge scam. Worst are the people who don't realize they are doing this, but often they are the same people who believe in the illusion. I don't know if I'm one of them. I probably am.

¶ What I am learning, though, is that liberation from pain, finding peace, it does not

come from fulfilling a goal, it doesn't come from finishing a book or having a child or finding true love. It is a life-long process that concludes in death. Maybe death is the only way out. What do you think? My happiness will not last, nor will my sadness, someday I will die, but always know that I do love you. Whoever you are, I love you. I will suffer with you, but that's all right, that's okay, still, let's turn the page.

¶ *For a splinter of a second, I saw what he saw in my lovely Cellardoor Lake, for my love is showing me a brand new world, dark, mysterious and cold, but beautiful, and where déjās are forever.*