

THE SHORT STORIES OF

**B S J K**

11 - 15

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*Published by*  
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Some names and identifying details have been changed to protect the privacy of individuals.





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SHORT STORY 11  
2017  
UNHOLY WATER

DISCLAIMER:

*This was written as my logbook while at sea off the coast of Belgium at the end of January 2017.*

LOGBOOK, ENTRY 1  
DEPARTURE

As the RV Onbekend pulled out of the harbor and headed into that all-encompassing gray, I glanced back at the equally dismal city of Ostend, and knew that these early mornings were going to be far worse than the rough seas. With crossed arms and a surly scowl, I turned head-on with the wind and walked below the bridge toward the bow of that big ship. I wasn't sure if I was meant to see England on the horizon, but all I found was a blur of storm clouds and endless swells. Scanning back over the dead straight coastline, I reminded myself that during this entire voyage we'd never be any great distance from land. However, like an astronaut in his tiny oasis-bubble of homeostasis, I had contradictory sensations of claustrophobia and agoraphobia. Regardless of my pathetic swimming abilities, it was obvious that I wouldn't last ten seconds down there in that churning sea while wrapped up in all my layers of winter and wet-weather gear. But the research vessel was a tough looking cunt. Its wide hull and chunky silhouette plowed through the incoming waves like a champion – until we struck our first giant swell and the foam crashed over my head like bitch-slap from hell! Fuck yes! I loved the smell of salt air and the rise and fall of the ship. As the water trickled down my collar and soaked into my chest, I remembered the commute to and from my home island as a teenager, and specifically when two good friends and I had spent the day in the outskirts of the city where we had been rained upon nonstop. Being loud-mouthed lads with egos eager to prove who had the bigger balls, we had all merely laughed at our sodden predicament. That evening, when we caught the ferry home, I was still high from hysterics and roared with laughter at the high seas. My two pals however, were less than amused as they gripped their armrests and looked pissed off at my smug tempting of fate. I was surrounded by death, but so fucking what! I knew that I should have had a healthy fear for open waters, but I mostly had an idiot's

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faith in the structural integrity of both my childhood ferry and this research vessel. Was it worse to enjoy the ride like a fucking asshole, or cling to the constant paranoia of an untrustworthy ship? Fuck it, I'll be fine. What could possibly go wrong.

### LOGBOOK, ENTRY 2 KEEP QUIET

After toweling myself off, I stumbled through the narrow corridors toward one of the on-board labs. Professor Samuel was at his computer, and another old guy was busy plugging a huge cluster of cables into an overhead conduit. There were at least two dozen computer screens around the various science stations, but Samuel immediately slammed his laptop shut once I approached. "What are you doing here?"

"Rough out there," I grinned, rubbing my cold nose. "So, is there a place around here for me?"

"No."

"Okay, then. Where?"

"I don't know."

"Who should I ask then?"

"No idea."

"Really. You have no idea."

"I'm not in charge around here."

"Okay."

And then the other guy dumped his cables and exited out another door.

"Listen, this was Chloe's idea, not mine! You better know when to keep your mouth shut around the others!"

"The fuck could I tell them? I don't know shit about this fucking expedition."

"Exactly. There's no room for tourists. You've taken Chloe's place, for some godforsaken reason I'll never understand, but if the captain learns that you're not writing a PhD or collecting statistics, he'll have a chopper pick you up at your own expense! In fact, don't ever speak to the captain about anything. He's as impatient as he is perceptive. Stay away from him!"

"Sure. Anything else I should know before I—"

"Don't mention anything, not a thing about what we are scanning for. Keep your mouth glued shut!"

"Everyone speaks French, so that's not going to be a problem—"



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“Most important, and this should go without saying, just imagine you’re on a flight, even joking about bombs will get you in serious trouble. The same applies here with your swimming dysfunction.”

“Dysfunction? Jesus, that’s a hell of a way to put it.”

“How many grown adults do you know who can’t swim?!”

“So, what exactly am I doing here, then?”

The old, bearded professor scoffed and turned back to his laptop, “Ask Chloe what the hell she was thinking.”

Clenching my lips and jaw, I stood there for an extended period, wondering what the fuck I was going to entertain myself with for the next eight days.

### LOGBOOK, ENTRY 3 SOMETHING TO DO

My exploration of the ship soon led me to the bridge, and taking note of Samuel’s warning, I gave not a single fuck. It was a large space about thirty-meters above the water, with four men about the computers consoles. None of the crew seemed concerned by my presence, so I glanced about, trying to discern who was in charge. They were all short guys in thick clothes with shabby beards, but I couldn’t picture anyone of them as head of the pack. Scanning the whole vessel from bow to stern, I estimated that it was about eighty-meters-long, with the bridge roughly in the middle. I know ships are meant to have a female pronoun, but I couldn’t even pronounce the name out loud, so like all dogs, I’ll refer to the ship as ‘it’.

Ignoring the cold-shoulder of the crew, I continued back downstairs. Eventually, I found the passageways filling with more and more pipes and plumbing. I’d say that the RV Onbekend was built in the 70’s. Some of the walls looked as if they had been repainted a hundred times, as you could see the various layers that had flaked off beneath the recent coats. Everything at sea rusted, including people. My father had bought a small yacht when I was a teen. I have no idea how he afforded it. My mother was always in charge of the finances, but I think she had calculated that his sanity needed it. For the longest time his yacht sat on a trailer surrounded by other old boats near the causeway. I hated helping him clean and paint the thing. Boys do resist their fathers. Finally, though, he acquired a mooring in a small cove on the south side of the island. I’ve been thinking about it for a while now, but I swear to fuck, I can’t remember the name of the bay, nor the name that my father gave the boat. The little yacht seemed to make a lot more sense once it was actually

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in the water, but I have absolutely no memory of my father ever sailing it anywhere. It was always on the mooring. Perhaps it was just his man-cave. I failed to appreciate that idea at the time, but now that I think back, it must have been hard for him when he had to sell it.

And then I ended up in the engine room, or rooms, or area. I think I had been optimistic with my appraisal of the ship's age. Sure, there were plenty of modern appendages and upgrades, but the state of the overall hull was worn out and haggard. But then again, maybe the vessel was less than a year old, and this was the toll that the ocean had already taken on it.

Someone then yelled out over the roar of the diesel stinking machinery. A guy in earmuffs and overalls waved me aside and closed a metal door behind.

"Sorry, do you speak English?" I asked, in that same tone of voice that I've said a billion fucking times.

The tough-looking, fifty-year-old grumbled through his gray beard, "What you looking for?"

"Nothing," I said with a smile, glancing around the panels covered in dials and switches, pressure gauges and old-school buttons. Not a digital screen was anywhere in sight. "Just looking around."

"Very busy here. No time sight-seeing."

"Do you need a hand?"

The engineer twisted his mouth to one side, "My English not so good."

"My French is worse."

"Speak Russian?"

"Ha!"

"Osip," the guy said, patting his chest. "What your name?"

"Alan," I replied, and for the life of me, I have no idea why I used my father's name. Maybe, it was easier than going through that boring conversation of trying to get foreigners to articulate, 'Bruce'. "Call me, Alan."

### LOGBOOK, ENTRY 4 FIRST NIGHT

I was surprised how quickly my first day at sea went. There were no windows in the engineering section of the ship, so when I went up on deck again, I was encapsulated within pitch black.

At dinner, I counted eighteen, including myself, in the mess-hall. All men. I assumed there were at least one or two on the bridge, so let's say that there were around twenty aboard. Judging by their attire, half were scientists. Yet,

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everyone looked like the sort of guys that you would find pouring asphalt on roadworks. They all seemed to have a precise role to fill on the ship, all except for me. I was a fifth wheel, and didn't know if Osip really needed my help, or if I was slowing him down.

After dinner, I grabbed the laptop that Chloe had given me to write this Logbook, and I sat on the bridge composing her a WTF e-mail. The internet was restricted, so I saved my message until the morning.

I was staring out the wide windows at the spray crashing down over the ship, when I slowly became aware of another individual standing over the radar. I hadn't seen him at dinner. He quickly noticed my prying eye, and nodded once. He was like a bearded Cary Grant, but a lot more bitter. I had no doubt that this was the captain of the ship, and Samuel's description framed him perfectly. He took a seat and didn't bother me as we both stared out into the abyss ahead.

Rain soon smothered the windows, as I listened to Horn Of The Rhino, *Brought Back*, through my headphones. Drifting back over my memories, I rocked with the ship's slow-motion highs and lows. I could hear that familiar sound of metal cables whipping against metal masts, like a rope against a flag pole. It was the rattling of a marina in a strong wind. Whenever I had to help my father with the yacht, I always volunteered to row the dinghy out to the mooring. I still have this weird love/hate relationship with deep water. I liked to row the boat but I was petrified of looking over the edge. It wasn't so bad when we were on the yacht where the water was just a constant jade. But in the shallows, I could make out dark shapes that drove my teenage imagination into hyper-drive. There was one summer's day when my friends borrowed kayaks. Not wanting to look like a chicken shit, I joined in. Everything was Jim-Dandy, as long as I didn't look down. Like my first vacation in Greece, when my Fiance and I had hired a paddle boat and ended up a good kilometer from Corfu, yet I was fine. However, when I looked down and realized where I was, a wave of panic surged through my nervous system! I had to remind myself to look straight ahead. Don't fucking look down, you idiot! But what if I fell in?! No! That's not going to happen. Everything is fantastic. You will never fall overboard. Just don't look down and you have nothing to fear but the fear of Jaws itself. Remember, people are watching. Man up! But then there was that one time when I had fair reason to shit my pants. It had been a brilliant summer's day when I was around twelve. My father and I had decided to climb around the rocks between our local bays. I had always liked exploring and looking for pirate treasure as a kid,

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so this was my idea of a good time. Except, we had gone further that either my father or I had realized, and the tide had begun to come in. He knew we couldn't make it back the way we'd come. There were cliffs above so we had to keep going around to the next beach. We could see it from where we were so there was no cause for alarm. Until we came to a large section in the rocks where it dropped off. There was this five-meter-gap that was impossible to climb around. I was horrified! The family dog, Smoky, didn't give a damn as my father threw him into the choppy waves. He happily swam and then scrambled up the other side like a real fucking trooper. My father was the kind of guy who once took a litter of unwanted kittens in a sack and threw them out to sea. He didn't fuck around. Telling me to climb on his back, he said he would leap onto a rock just under the water half-way across the gap. I stared into that great divide and thought he was fucking insane! But what choice did we have. So, like a skinny rodent, I clung to my big father and dug my fingers in as we took a leap of faith. There is something about trusting someone in that kind of situation that makes you admire them on a fundamental level.

### LOGBOOK, ENTRY 5 OF NO USE

I had my alarm set for 6am, but everyone had already finished breakfast by the time I walked into the deserted mess-hall. Taking my coffee up to the bridge, I found the crew all staring out the back windows. That was when I learned that the ship had been built as a trawler before being modified into a research vessel in the late 90's. At the stern of the ship, large hydraulic cranes were deploying equipment into the foam.

After my coffee, I headed down to the aft deck to see if I could be of some assistance. I was however, quickly told to get the fuck out of the way! At least that's what the crew's tone of voice and gestures implied. So, I stayed back like a good little dumbfuck.

The storm seemed to have worsened overnight. I cringed when some kind of large, submersible thing swung wildly on the crane, and then smashed against the railing, before dropping into the waves. They built them tough, cause that thing just had the shit knocked out of it.

I enjoyed watching the crew busy themselves on deck, but there's only so much voyeurism I can deal with before the devil wants my idle hands.

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### LOGBOOK, ENTRY 6 EVERYONE HAS AN AGENDA

Samuel was preoccupied with his scans of the sea floor, and he had nothing but a snobbish grunt for me.

I ended up in the engine room, helping Osip and two other mechanics with a series of busted fuses. The weather was putting some major strain on the systems, and multiple pressure valves were hissing louder than pistons. Osip said that we were dragging sonar equipment for some oil company, as well as another machine for a telecommunications conglomerate. Science doesn't pay for itself, after all. It seemed like everyone aboard was working for various international corporations. No wonder the conversation around the dinner table was as superficial as shit. Samuel was right to be paranoid, apparently even Osip had signed some huge nondisclosure contract before shipping out. In fact, this was Osip's first voyage on RV Onbekend. From what I could make out, Osip had moved to Belgium a year ago while looking for work. Said he had previously earned his keep on the Black Sea. Before that, he was vague, mumbling about some falling out that he had had with his family church.

The other two engineers soon displayed their growing intolerance toward my presence, but I couldn't think of anything else to do, so I let them stew in their fucking juices. And it stunk something rancid in that humid hole.

### LOGBOOK, ENTRY 7 BETTER THAN A COLD SHOWER

We seemed to get the overloaded systems under control by midday, so I pulled my wet-weather gear on top my overalls and headed up on deck. Sweating like a filthy fuck, I went right up to the bow. The very first wave that I faced, collided with the ship with such force that all I saw was a mountainous spectacle of white water above. I had about one second to live in regret before I was slammed into and swept clean off my fucking feet! Sliding down the flooded deck, I thumped into something solid and clung to it as the sea drained away. Winded and soaking, I slowly climbed to my knees, just as another massive wave thumped onto my back! Holding on with instantly frozen fingers, I looked up and saw the crew in the bridge laughing at me like the stupid shit that I was. But I swallowed that flight instinct. A smaller wave poured past as I turned into the storm. Grabbing the railing on

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the side of the bow, I inched all the way up to a ladder heading to the very tip of the ship. More icy foam gushed over my head, but my pride demanded that I climb up to the top and see the oncoming battery with my own two eyes – I didn't make it. Grabbed from behind, one of the crew screamed at me as he pointed back at the bridge.

Expecting a grilling, I stood hunched and shivering in front of the angry-looking men on the bridge. The captain however, only gave me a brief glance.

“Don't do that again,” was all he said, and everyone went back to work.

Fair enough.

### LOGBOOK, ENTRY 8 WHAT THE FUCK AM I DOING HERE

Warming myself with a few mugs of coffee and clean clothes, I was sitting in the empty mess-hall, when I heard Samuel's voice coming from down the corridor. With a blanket around my shoulders, I peered around the door, but I was distracted by a small round window. There, I saw the only other ship that I had seen since we had left port. It was a tiny fishing boat. Those cunts had some serious backbone to risk this weather. Samuel then walked by at the intersection of the passageways. He was busy talking Spanish on a satellite phone, so I followed him. I wanted to know if he was speaking to Chloe. The ship then rocked violently and I spilled my coffee over the blanket. By the time I steadied myself, Samuel was nowhere in sight. Hurrying down the passageways, I soon heard him yelling, and then I walked into a large cargo hold. Samuel abruptly went silent and stepped out from behind a stack of crates. “Bruce?”

“Professor.”

“What are you doing?”

“Heard you on the phone.”

“You know protocol. No phones or means of tracking our location aboard!”

“I saw you.”

“You're mistaken!”

Knowing full well that I'd seen the thick aerial of the satellite phone, I slowly said, “I need to call to Chloe.”

“Enough of this talk of Chloe!”

“She paid for my little trip. Don't you think I should be doing something out here on her behalf?”

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“No! All she wants is for you to be here. That’s it!”

“She said you had something for me to do out here!”

“Why the hell did you even come? Last year you expressed absolutely no interest. And that suited me just fine! What, or who exactly changed you mind?! Who have you been speaking to?!”

Smiling, I glared back into the old professor’s bloodshot eyes. Perhaps he knew about my encounter with Aviv at Christmas. “Just over a week ago, for my thirty-ninth birthday, instead of strippers or steak, I did a spontaneous suspension. My first.”

“What?”

“You know, meat hooks in your shoulder-blades.”

“Why on earth would anyone do such a thing?”



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“Seemed like a good idea at the time.”

“Deviant!”

“Yeah, well, maybe. But the moment my feet left the floor, I saw something. That’s the only reason I came. Not for you, or your precious fucking archeology. So, you can calm the fuck down. I’m not here for you.”

“Great, you’re schizophrenic too.”

“Man, I’m just fucking bored. Give me something to do, that’s all I’m asking.”

“Go ask the captain, if you must!”

“Speak to the captain? Now you want me talking to him?”

“Do what you like! Just don’t bother me! I’m not your damn babysitter!”

Holding my blanket tight, I glared back at the fidgety old guy as he began coughing. With no intention of wasting another moment on that prick, I sneered, “Yeah. See you round.”

As soon as I stepped out of the cargo hold, I ran down the long passageways to the lab. There were two others working on their computers, as I casually leaned over Samuel’s work space. His laptop was obviously password-protected, but beneath it were several enormous charts of the English Channel and North Sea. Spreading them out, I stared at a cluster of numbers marked in red. I might as well have been reading equations written by Stephen Hawking. Rolling them up, I marched back to the bridge with a cheery skip to my step.

There was now only one guy at the helm, and he was coughing his lungs out. He didn’t speak a lick on English, and as I showed him the charts and pointed to the highlighted areas, he shook his head annoyed, then pulled me over to a computer, muttering something in French as he tapped at the screen. I was blank-faced. He snarled madly, grabbed the charts, and then began typing in the red numbers. Suddenly an alarm rang throughout the bridge! Yelling, the guy tossed the charts aside and snatched up his two-way radio. Staring back at the computer, I was lost. I couldn’t read anything in French. Were the numbers coordinates, the sea depth, or just the phone numbers for international hookers?

### LOGBOOK, ENTRY 9 SECOND NIGHT

I wanted to ask Osip about the charts but he was even busier and there was a loud howling noise that hadn’t come from the engine before.



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So, I put on my rubber pants, coat, and boots, and went out onto the back of the ship. There, several guys were reeling in a heavy cable.

Finally, I found something to do in the kitchen, and peeled potatoes like a chump. Still better than doing nothing.

I avoided the crew at dinner and ate in the kitchen.

Spending the evening in my corner of the bridge, the captain and I ignored each other as I listened to 1000mods, *Low*, and watched the waves crash over the bow. It was completely black out there, and then I'd feel the drop just before the white spray was lit up by the ship's lights. Last year, when I had visited my aunt in Edinburgh, she had mentioned something in a passing comment that had stuck with me. She said that my father had been dealt a 'bum-hand'. I don't dwell on my family often, but when I do, it's my father who comes to mind. I remind myself never to become like him, yet I recognize the value of the lessons that he had tried to teach me. For like Michel Foucault said, "*We must mine our history for the gold.*" I always remember my father yelling, but I also remember him laughing just as much. When I was sixteen, he hired a small motorcycle and taught me to ride. He rode his own bike and roared with laughter at my attempts to change gear on an uphill. It wasn't fun, though vastly easier than learning to ride a bicycle. I could always hear my father's motorcycle coming for a mile off. The specific tone the engine. And then the jingle of his key chain. He wasn't in a biker gang, but he could have run one. Yet, he dressed more like John Wayne. He was half-biker, half-cowboy, existing in a cross-over world that was all his own. There was this story that he told, one summer when he was young, while riding his Triumph in Scotland, a fucking bumble bee flew into his shirt! He swerved on the highway and slammed on the breaks. In the middle of the stalled traffic, like a lunatic, he ripped off his clothes, threw them on the street, and then pulled out a handgun and shot the shit out of his fucking shirt! Classic. I'm amazed he never spent time in prison. Guess my aunt was right when she said that his time in the military straightened him out. One important lesson I learned from him was: WALK WITH YOUR CHIN UP! When I was a kid, he used to design the firing mechanisms for guns, and then he would build them out of wood. He then showed me how to file down a plank of wood into the hull of a Spanish galleon, which became one of my favorite childhood toys. I spent hours alone, out the back of the house in the dark workshop, chiseling away at that block of wood. He didn't just teach me a craft, he taught me to confront my fear of the dark, until all I saw was the work. Just like now. All I see is what I focus on. The storm wasn't even there

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unless I thought about it.

### LOGBOOK, ENTRY 10 WHO'S IN CHARGE HERE

I woke the next morning to find that I wasn't alone. Several others were still sleeping, so I double-checked my alarm clock.

While on my second mug of coffee, I gradually climbed up to the bridge in the dark morning light. It was hailing, and my thick raincoat felt like a cozy sleeping bag. I saw Samuel's charts still rolled up and in the corner, but I had no interest in attempting communication with either of the two crewmen.

It wasn't long before one of those two sailors began a coughing fit that only ended once he collapsed upon the floor! I turned my head, watching as the other crewman took a knee to help. With one hand on the window frame, the other buried in my warm pocket, I was perplexed as the crewman yelled something in French before I was left all by lonesome on the bridge. Glancing around, over either shoulder, I opened my mouth but had no one to express my formal concerns toward. Seriously, you left me responsible for the entire ship? Where the fuck was the captain?! Stepping over to the consoles, I was wide-eyed above what could have been a mixing desk in a sound studio, for all I knew. There wasn't even a steering wheel to cling to for dear life. So, I just stood there in the middle of the bridge, not touching a fucking thing. But then again, there was nothing out there in all that gray mist, just waves beyond the frosted glass.

Captain Grant soon appeared, and I shrugged at his cautious approach as if he wanted to say, what-the-fuck-do-you-think-you're-doing-at-the-helm? My expression relayed, I-don't-even-know-but-you're-fucking-welcome-motherfucker.

Seems I was wrong. I actually enjoyed the early mornings. With the new year, I had decided to go to the gym in the mornings instead of after work, and to my surprise, I had adapted remarkably easily. Maybe I was getting old and needed less sleep. I hoped so. Sleep is an utter waste of time. Though, I was anticipating having a shaky time once we returned to dry land. The longest I had ever spent on a boat before this, was a fishing trip with my father and his buddies on a crappy launch in the gulf between the island and the city. I was never into fishing, and that was the one and only time I ever partook, but we had a good haul. I even took a turn on the wheel, motoring straight into flocks of seagulls that were dive-bombing schools of fish near the surface. It

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was all fun and games until the weather packed in, then I had sat in the cabin, clutching the seat with white knuckles. I had no faith in that tiny boat against the chop. Of course, we made it safe and sound to calmer waters, but that night my balance was way off, so now, I wondered how long it would take for my inner-ear to recover after this extended excursion. Maybe, if you're a lifer, like Captain Grant, you only ever feel normal on a perpetually moving platform. A few years ago, while my back tattoo was getting completed, I read, *The Old Man And The Sea*. It wasn't at all what I was expecting, yet it left a rather mocking impression upon me. You spend your whole life doing what you do best, and then you wake up an old man and you still have nothing. Even when you finally get a chance to prove yourself, you're left with fucking nothing. Nothing but another day of try, try, and try again. It's the only work of Hemingway that I've read, but I heard somewhere that he once said, "*You have to live life before you can write about it.*" My father came to mind, he had always been a man's man. A rebel forced into the army. Worked in the shipyards. Was a scrapper and a boxer. Climbed mountains and traveled the world before he met my mother at a bus shelter while hiking. Then he was a weight-lifter and literally slaughtered sheep for the table. A drinker who made home-brew. Rode big bikes and worked the land. Loved his guns, knives, and westerns. When on a school trip with my brother, he slipped on a mud track and permanently injured his knee. On that same trip however, he loved to recall how, while riding horses, my brother's stallion suddenly bolted! He shrieked like a little girl, and my father laughed just like I did. My brother never went near a horse again. Unlike my older brother, the good, strong son, I was the weakling, so I had to prove myself with whatever means I could. When I turned fifteen, I took the opportunity to prove that I wouldn't allow an animal to intimate me. I never saw them as much more than meat. Once you've seen rabbits bred, butchered, and buttered up on your dinner plate since childhood, you soon appreciate that you're made of the exact same stuff. Some say that animals therefore should have rights and be respected. I however, went the other way. We are no more than worthless fucking meat! Like when my father was lying unconscious in his hospital bed surrounded by family, I just watched his heart monitor slow down to nothing. And I felt nothing. He had finally become nothing. I might have both feared and admired him, but at the end of the day, I utterly hated that miserable old prick, and I was glad that he was fucking dead! I stood over his body. He was defeated. I was not. As my mother, brother, and sister wept, I stood with dry eyes, just like at his funeral. If nothing else, I would never repeat his self-

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confessed mistakes. If his genes live through me, then I will be all I will be. I am the son of man. And I have no pity for the past.

And then a huge tarpaulin down on the front deck tore loose! The captain grabbed his radio and barked orders, but to no response. I looked at the growing irritation of the captain, so I shook my head and pulled up my hood.

The rain was like getting shot with a thousand BB guns all at once. As I made it to the flapping sheet, another crewman also arrived on the scene. Only one side of the tarpaulin was still roped down, and just as the other guy grabbed his corner, the ship dropped, a wave crashed, and a wind picked up, sending the guy flying five-meters into the fucking air! I couldn't help but smirk when he slammed flat on the deck like a pancake!

### LOGBOOK, ENTRY 11 STRESSFUL DAY AT SEA

It took about half an hour to get the tarpaulin pinned down. I was exhausted and soaked through. Felt as though I had been wrestling with a giant hog on a leash. I had no dry clothes left to change into, and began wondering if this wet-weather gear was doing anything at all. My rubber boots were full of water and the pack of thick woolen socks that Chloe had given me before departure, were now all wet. I don't know how fishermen do it. Was there some technique to keeping the water out, or do they simply not give a fuck. While sitting in the mess-hall with a mug of coffee, I ringed out my socks and stared at the rivets in the walls. That was when the cook walked in. He paused and then blurted out something in French. I was too tired to care, so shook my head, straining to remember the French word for 'WHAT?!'

"You not sick?!" the cook managed.

"Only in the head," I sneered with a scowl.

"Everyone sick! We go home!"

I sat up, looking around as the cook disappeared into the kitchen. Pulling on my damp soaks with salty hands, I sunk my cold feet back into my boots, and then went to confirm the cook's revelation.

There was a small infirmary, and someone lay in the one and only cot. I immediately headed to the bunks, and found nearly all of them full. Crew and scientists alike, all shivering with a fever. Even Samuel was wrapped up in blankets with eyes clenched shut.

I was on my way to the bridge when suddenly that constant hum of the engine fell silent and was replaced with the ever-present collisions of great

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waves. Changing direction, I went straight to engineering.

Osip was yelling, as I looked down from the railing. Another crewman was on his knees vomiting, while plumes of steam gushed from a vent and something like oil poured from a rattling pipe. Avoiding the sick seaman, I called out to Osip. He was still cursing in Russian, but pulled me close, pointing to a row of gauges that were all on zero. I had no idea what Osip was saying or what the problem was, but he put me to work. Less than a minute later, Captain Grant himself showed up, and exchanged some serious words with the engineer.

It only took the whole day before the steam was replaced with a slow moan, and then that grinding as the engine returned to the tense suspicion of everyone.

I accompanied the captain to the bridge and finally asked what the fuck was going on. He merely repeated the cook's assessment, but he was absolutely livid once we found the last sailor passed out on the bridge floor. The captain took to the intercom, and soon all the remaining crew arrived on the bridge. Unfortunately, that was only Osip and the cook. No one else showed up. Shit was getting real. And due to the failing engine, Osip insisted that we shouldn't push the ship too hard, despite the captain's priority of returning to the mainland ASAP. It was the cook who then silenced the yelling men. I followed his outstretched arm, and we all saw a huge ship emerge from the distant fog. The captain immediately grabbed the radio, in both English and French, he made an emergency call, but only static replied. He then noticed what the rest of us already had. This big ship was leaning awkwardly forward. It was maybe twice the size of the RV Onbekend, but listing and dead in the water. My first assumption was that it was a cargo ship, and then there was this drawn out moment where everyone slowly looked at each other, before scanning the distant ship again. The captain tried the radio once more. Nothing. He then grabbed his binoculars, and we all waited.

"We have to go aboard."

My neck slowly craned around, and I whispered, "We?"

"It's our duty. The ship's in distress."

"We in distress!" Osip yelled, grabbing the captain. "No one to spare!"

It seemed, for Captain Grant, to be a matter of principle. "We three will take an outboard and investigate."

"And leave the cook in charge?" I frowned.

"He's the only one qualified to steer the ship."

"You're fucking kidding me."

# Unholy Water

## LOGBOOK, ENTRY 12 THE DERELICT

We dressed in wetsuits under our wet-weather gear, and I wished that I had had this shit two days ago. Osip hung lengths of rope over his shoulder, and handed out big flashlights. The captain said that we had to hurry, as it was already getting dark. We would only look for initial signs of life, grab the logbook, and plant a GPS beacon so that the coast guard could salvage the wreck.

It all sounded reasonable enough, that was, until I was looking down at the huge waves between the two ships. At that point, I grabbed an extra life-jacket and pulled it over my raincoat. I was NOT a happy camper! The wind was deafening as Osip worked a crane and lowered the outboard. I was extremely unimpressed. It looked like the jet boats that Greenpeace used to harass Japanese whalers, but from my point of view, it was thrown about like a tampon in a flushing toilet. Shaking my head, trying to see the humor in the situation, I nervously chuckled to myself, "I didn't sign up for this shit."

We had to climb down a rope ladder and then just jump into the outboard. Hopefully we would get our timing right and not break a leg or get tossed out. I really, really didn't want to do this bullshit. But then again, the ego never wants to swallow its pride. So, fuck it. I landed and was shoved immediately against the side of the research vessel! Osip caught my collar and pulled me back just as a gap opened and the outboard sped away. We all huddled behind the windscreen in the center of the inflatable, as it bounced across the swollen sea. At least it was a quick trip.

However, the next ordeal was scaling the hull of the unknown ship. It might have actually been fun, if I wasn't worried that I could get crushed between the two boats. Osip went up a rusted ladder near the rear of the ship. Then it was my turn. I missed the rungs at first, caught the ladder on my second attempt, and then the outboard dropped out from under me! I clung on like a leech. But then the sea rose up and went way over my head. Panic seized every inch of my body. So, I reached up and climbed. Climbed for oxygen. Climbed the fuck out of this clusterfuck of freezing fucking water. Suddenly the sea dropped and I was exposed again. I didn't stop for anything. Up, up, and over the motherfucking top I went.

Osip laughed and swung me against a wall where I grabbed a banister and wished I had never come on this fucking nightmare expedition. I'm no sailor! I hate the fucking sea! I don't fucking belong here, "For fuck's sake!"

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As the captain pulled himself over the railing, I glared back at the ship that we had just left. It was a good hundred-meters away. And then it struck me, we had just boarded a sinking fucking ship! What the fuck was I thinking?! This is a job for brave young heroes, not a fucking asshole like me!

Osip made the astute observation that all the lifeboats were still here. It wasn't until we piled into the abandoned bridge that we all took note of how bad the situation really was. The ship was leaning 30° to the port-side, and the bow was hardly above the waves anymore. She was going down, and nothing could stop it.

“We not search whole ship,” Osip asserted.

The captain nodded, busy switching switches, thumping control panels, and checking the dead intercom. “If you get the engine started, we could run the pumps, and buy some time while looking for survivors.”

“Engine?! You fucking crazy?!” Osip said exactly what I was thinking. “This ghost-ship! We come, find no one, now we go!”

“We have time.” Captain Grant seemed oblivious to our anger. “Check the crew quarters in the aft.”

“Look, night here!” Osip yelled grabbing the captain. “You say we go before dark!”

“And now I'm ordering you to check the aft!”

My earlier assumption that the captain reminded me of Cary Grant was way off. This cunt had no charm or charisma.

“Fifteen minutes, we leave,” Osip said slowly, backing out as I reluctantly followed. My last glimpse through the windows, was of another enormous wave sweeping over the front of the doomed ship.

“Got any idea how long before this thing goes under?” I asked, as we struggled along a distorted corridor. “You ever done this sort of shit before?”

“No,” Osip said, peering into empty cabins. “First time.”

“What do you think happened here?”

Osip stopped and looked at me. “What I think. Captain should know better!”

“Fucking agreed.”

“Crew find breach. Radio mayday. Other ship save them. Ship left to sink,” Osip speculated with distinct logic. “We should not be here!”

“Been saying that for days,” I grumbled, as we continued, checking empty room after room.

“Jesus!” Osip yelled, lunging back from the door that he had just bashed in. Swinging my flashlight into the tiny cabin, I was repulsed by the stench

## Unholy Water

of bodily fluids. Mostly the stink of old spit and bad breath. Our flashlights focused on what was balled up in the corner. Like some Mayan mummy, a man was plastered within hundreds of pieces of paper. At least five discarded Bible covers lay about the floor. The paper-mache cocoon looked solid and spread right out onto the walls, securing the incarcerated occupant to the corner. His legs were sealed up close to his chest. His hands covered his face, which was the only part left exposed. Osip stepped carefully into the cabin, slowly reaching out – when suddenly we both heard the cocoon begin to cry. He was still alive! Swearing in Russian, Osip tore at the pages on the wall in an attempt to free the man, but the occupant instantly began screeching! He didn't want our help. This guy had done this to himself.

Shaking his head, Osip backed way, pulling out his radio. “We get captain.”

But there was either no reception or something had happened to Captain Grant. Quickly retracing our steps back to the bridge, we found our miserable captain leaning over a laptop, watching video footage of crewmen working the deck on the ship.

“What's that?” I asked, as we all braced ourselves while the ship heaved harder than before.

“It's all in Norwegian. But the equipment is for survey the sea floor.”

“Like we're doing?”

“This is much better hardware. Used to chart vast areas. Probably for a pipeline.”

“That's nice,” Osip stated. “We find someone.”

“Alive?”

“Psychotic,” I added. “You speak Norwegian?”

“A little.”

On our way back to the crew quarters, the captain relayed his findings, “They struck something last night. The submersibles dragging behind caught on something. It stopped the entire ship where it was. The water's not so deep around here at Dogger Bank.”

“Maybe they found Samuel's standing stones.”

“What are you talking about?” the captain asked.

“Honestly, I don't know shit. It's his obsession, not mine.”

“What do you think they found?” Captain Grant insisted.

“I don't know, the Stonehenge of Doggerland. You know, magick circles and shit.”

“What you know of such things?” Osip demanded.



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“Seriously, this isn’t my fucking fetish. It’s Samuel’s thing.”

“What exactly do you know about it, then?!” The captain was at the end of this tether. “Speak!”

“Back before the water rose, people lived out here, right. It was dry land. Samuel reckons places like Stonehenge weren’t built as sites of worship, but as places where evil shit was buried. You know, big stones hold down bad things. He’s got this pet-conspiracy-theory, that the people who built these megaliths needed some real hardcore fucking motivation. The kind of energy put into erecting these stones should have been put into defenses or food. He reckons it was a way of protecting themselves from, I don’t fucking know. But the seafloor here’s flat as fuck, isn’t it? If you’re dragging a net or whatever, and it suddenly gets caught in some fifty-ton stone, that’s bound to fuck up your day, isn’t it? Isn’t it?!”

“We would have found such stones by now,” the captain dismissed. “These waters are thoroughly known,”

“Well, you’d know then. So, what the fuck happened here? What could stop a ship this fucking size dead its tracks?”

“I don’t know.”

Once we reached that stinking cabin, to our confusion, the bundled-up man had somehow completed his cocoon and cover his face and hands in spit-wet Bible pages.

Captain Grant stood in the doorway, glaring in. “Is he alive?”

“He was,” Osip said, glancing down the blackened corridor. “He spoke.”

The captain placed his hand on that rigid mass of paper. Nothing. Putting his ear on the cocoon he listened. “He’s not breathing.”

“He kill himself?” Osip shook his head. “Ah, I hate this!”

“We can’t leave him here,” the captain asserted, standing back as he stared at the grotesque cocoon. “We have to search for others.”

“No! No more!” Osip was unflinching with determination. “We find this! We leave now!”

Suddenly a hand broke out of the bible pages and grabbed the captain’s arm! The man inside then kept screaming the same thing over and over, until finally the captain yanked himself free – just as the derelict was smashed into by something worse than a wave! The collision sent everyone ass over elbow. The floor rose, dropped, and then everything went sideways and back again to the sound of shrieking metal on metal.

Running for our lives back to the bridge, Osip insisted on knowing what the crewman had screamed, even though we hadn’t even tried to free him.

## Unholy Water

The captain was only interested in radioing his own ship, but to no response. When we made it topside, we discovered the RV Onbekend was now floating parallel to the ghost-ship and right within spitting distance. Snatching Osip's radio, the captain tried hailing his ship again, but we couldn't see even a light onboard anymore. The engine must have died. As the last remnants of daylight faded, all the world was plunged into chaos, and I thought of Milton, *"Into this wild abyss the wary Fiend stood on the brink of Hell and looked a while, pondering his voyage."*

"We're so fucked!" I whispered.

"Get to the boat!" the captain ordered, stuffing the laptop into a sealable plastic bag and handing it Osip. "Radio me when you get on board. Get the engine running!"

"The fuck are you going?" I yelled, as the two men went in opposite directions without hesitation. "Jesus fuck!"

"Forward hold!" the captain shouted over the wind. "He said the rest of the crew were in the forward hold!"

Everything forward was underwater. My choice was a no-brainer. Jumping down a staircase, I hurried after Osip – just as the research vessel came plowing straight into the side of the derelict and annihilated our escape route! The ladder was sheared off, and the outboard was completely obliterated.

"Fuck!" Osip yelled, along with other things in Russian that I assumed had similar implications.

"There's plenty of lifeboats!" I called out, my mind racing.

"Lifeboat not take us to ship! No motor against current. We not go back to Onbekend!"

Now if there's one thing you don't want to surround yourself with in a disaster situation, it's a naysayer who has given up all hope. So, I ran back inside and went after the captain.

It took me all of 30 seconds to regret my new decision, as I sunk knee-deep into water full of fucking seaweed. No one likes walking through seaweed. Seaweed is only ever any good when it's in sushi. Fuck this shit! And I yelled with everything my lungs had, "CAPTAIN! WHERE THE FUCK?!"

A voice that was most definitely not the captain's then moaned without words.

With a pissed off sigh, I marched on, gripping my flashlight like a fucking club. There were busted pipes and cables hanging all over the passageway with sloshing water in every space. Just look straight ahead, I kept telling myself, don't look at what you're walking through. La, la, la. Everything

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will be fine. Blah, blah, bull-fucking-shit! The ship heaved and a small wave surged down the corridor and into me. Slipping on the slimy weeds, I nearly fell on my ass. I punched the wall and then stood straight up with a snarl. Fuck this place! Cracking my neck from side to side, I relaxed. Fatalism took over. This isn't the end of my story. I've been in worse situations. Though, I couldn't actually think of when.

That hissing voice groaned again. The water was half-way up my thighs as I looked into that room. An old man, in not a thread of clothes, sat upon a large, winch-like machine. He had no legs, as they had been fed into the meat-grinder of a mechanism. Preoccupied with a pair of needle-nose pliers, he took little notice of my presence. Merely squinting at my flashlight, he ripped chunks of fat from his own belly. He was eating himself! I began backing away into deeper waters, when I heard the mutilated man whisper, "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither. The sea gave, and the sea hath taken away. Blessed be the name of the sea."

There was then this awful sound of bones cracking and meat slowly tearing. Grasping the edge of the door frame, I leaned around as that deranged man splashed into the water. Regardless of his crippled state, he swam at me like a fucking alligator! His teeth flared and claws slashing out. I wrenched the door shut, driving it right into the man's skull. Bashing him aside with my flashlight, I pulled the fucking door shut. Spinning the handle, I heard him shrieking and scratching on the other side.

"Come out on a boat trip, see the sights, they said," I laughed sarcastically to myself. "It'll be fun, they said. You'll love it."

And then that unmistakable impact of the two ships striking each other, knocked me clean off my feet! I slammed into the very door that I had just sealed, and the whole ship leaned dangerously close to capsizing. With another demonic howling of fractured metal, the hull however, corrected itself the right way up. I was furious with terror! While yelling for the fucking captain, I knew that the way out would always be upwards, and getting lost in a ghost-ship was never something I had planned to accomplish. I then waded into a huge space where water was leaking from high above. Captain Grant was standing a few meters ahead, staring into the darkness. His flashlight was at his side, underwater and ignored.

"For the love of fuck!" I yelled, as the ship leaned again and the water dragged at my legs. "This party is over! Let's get the fuck--"

The flooring beneath my feet disappeared and I sunk like a lead-weight. If the place wasn't flooded, I would have seen that I had been on a catwalk.

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Luckily, I managed to catch a railing and my life-jacket brought me back up. That's when I saw what the captain was so transfixed by. The light from my torch reflected off the surface of the water and glistened across the ceiling beams. Yeah, we found the crew. What was left of them. It was as if the internal organs of thirty men had been melted together and stuck to the ceiling like a gigantic wad of bloody chewing gum. There was no sign of their limbs or heads. Just webbed bowels, bloated membranes, and skinned flesh. It could have been an effect of the distorted light and the swaying of the ship, but the multiple lungs and exposed hearts still seemed to be functioning. I mean, the whole fucking thing was breathing!

The moment I grabbed the captain's shoulder, the two vessels locked horns again! If there was an appropriate time to shit your pants, it was right then as the ship rolled clean over! It was like being trapped inside an enormous fucking washing machine. Gagging on salt water, I was lost to utter disorder. Once the ship rocked into some sense of equilibrium, I found myself clinging to a wall. The ship was now lying totally on its port-side. Coughing like a diesel engine, I heard something to my right. That mutilated madman lurched through the water at my throat! Crashing back, I was shoved under – but just as quickly, I was dragged away. The captain held me by my life-jacket while he beat the shit out of that legless freak with his spare fist!

“You done napping?” the captain said deadpan. “Come on.”

“Really?! What's the rush?!” I spat, as we began climbing the plumbing toward the doorway that was now high above us. A hand then sprung out of the water and grabbed my ankle! I can't express how satisfying it was to stomp that demented fuck in his delirious fucking face!

A new noise then came from that disfigured mass of human body parts. There was movement coming from inside of that abominable sack of flesh. Just when I thought nothing could make me hate the sea more, something began tearing itself out of the mesh of organs. We all start out as fetal fish-people, before we evolve into biped human-fucking-beings, but my only question was, what the fuck was that thing being born as?

The door had shut during the capsizing, and the captain seemed to be struggling to open it. I joined him, right when that legless cunt came crawling up the wall below us.

With another BOOM from the two colliding vessels, the captain managed to finally rip open the door. As we hurried into the sideways corridor, I heard a slopping explosion. Glancing back, I saw something big and black pouring out of that patchwork sack of human atrocity. I raised my torch, but only

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saw the legless man grinning as he climbed through the doorway. Then he screamed! Watching for another moment, as he was torn back into the flooded hold, I then ran the fuck off! His shrieks restored my slacking adrenaline.

The captain and I scrambled up to the bridge, just as a massive swell swept over the entire derelict! We were both washed back into the passageways, but he and I quickly made it outside just as the sinking ship began to rotate! To my hysterical relief, Osip's flashlight revealed his position aboard one of the freed lifeboats. On any other occasion, the idea swimming in open seas was never a fucking option, but we waited for nothing and swam frantically from the rolling hull.

After Osip pulled me aboard the lifeboat, I looked back and it appeared as though the upside-down derelict was a god-sized dead whale. Our ship however, was nowhere to be seen. I was never prouder of my feeble swimming abilities than that frozen night of inexplicable encounters.

### LOGBOOK, ENTRY 13 AND THEN

A fishing boat from Denmark picked us up just after dawn.

We were taken to a hospital in Den Helder.

The RV Onbekend was located and rescued by the British Navy. The entire crew was found unconscious and suffering from hypothermia.

There were no reported sightings of the Norwegian derelict despite the beckon that we had attached.

### LOGBOOK, ENTRY 14 IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING

I was standing outside the entrance to the hospital, still dressed in the wetsuit and raincoat. Without ID, cash, or phone, I had to wait for Captain Grant to arrange a ride back to Belgium. The wind was almost as bad there as it had been on the voyage, and my balance was all over the place. At least, for once, I wasn't soaking wet, as I crossed my arms over the salt-stiff layers. A nurse had dried our gear while we were getting checked by the doctors. Apart from a few cuts and bruises, the three of us were perfectly fine.

Osip appeared, saying that there was a phone call for me. I shook my head, who the fuck knew where I was? Taking a step toward the entrance, Osip said it was some woman called Chloe. Ah, and I stopped, returning my

## Unholy Water

gaze back to the bleak parking lot.

“You no want to talk?” Osip asked.

“So, what’s next for you?” I replied, as he shrugged and stood side by side. “You heading home?”

“Home?”

“Yeah, you know, that place where you shit and sleep.”

“No. Why return to Moldova?”

“Where?”

“Moldova. Home. I come from.”

“Thought you were Russian.”

“Soviet times. Speak Russian.”

“*“The man from Moldova.”*”

“I am.”

“Small world.”

“It is.”

“You happen to know any women,” I asked, with a pause. “From Iran?”

Osip laughed, “I know women from everywhere!”

I joined him in a chuckle. “Specifically, Iranian. In the last year or two?”

Osip’s smirk slowly faded and he looked away. “Women from here, from there. What does it matter. Woman is woman. But past not the same.”

The rain began again, and Osip lit a cigarette. Thinking about his words, I wondered if the outcome from last night would have been the same whether I had run after the captain or stayed with Osip. Either way, he was right, our experiences weren’t the same.

“Women are like Muslims and Jews. Abraham, father both. But Ishmael and Isaac both say they god’s chosen one. Same story, different stories. First born, son of whore. Second born, son of wife. Who is illegitimate? Both? I not know.”

Soon, Captain Grant came out while going through a thick folder of paperwork. The laptop from the derelict was still wrapped in plastic and under his arm.

“God speaks to Abraham. God himself. God tells Abraham sacrifice son. Isaac or Ishmael. The one chosen to die. But it not god who stop Abraham. Abraham should have sacrificed son. But angel stop him. Genesis 22. Perhaps angel was fallen one. Demon wants illegitimate son to live. Perhaps that why god never speaks to Abraham after.”

“Why did you leave Moldova?”

“Was deacon,” Osip coughed with a smile. “But blasphemy is blasphemy.”

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A van then drove into the parking lot, and the captain waved it down.

“She was very beautiful. Long black hair. I not know if she was from Iran, but she looked so.”

“Who?”

“The messenger. The one who excommunicated me.”

“Why do you think a devil spared the illegitimate son of Abraham?”

Osip walked straight out into the rain and climbed into the van, casually saying, “Divide and conquer.”

### LOGBOOK, ENTRY 15 CLOSURELESS

I spent most of the drive south sleeping, but awoke just before Ostend.

My phone, wallet, and some spare clothes were in a locker at the port office, and it was there that Captain Grant finally confronted me. “The rest of your belongings will be mailed back to you. You’re not stepping aboard my ship again.”

“Pardon me?”

“You weren’t studying deep water currents. You and your associate lied by your own admission,” he stated from across the locker room. “Get your things and get out!”

“You weren’t the only one lied to,” I acknowledged. “What do you reckon happened to your crew?”

“Food poisoning.”

“Seriously?” I sniggered. “And the crew on that sinking piece of shit?”

“Investigators will have my report and decide for themselves.”

“Hey, do me a favor, would you.”

Silence.

“I left a bunch of charts rolled up on the bridge. I took them from the professor. See if you can make any sense of what they’re all about. And also, if you find a satellite phone on him, Star-sixty-nine that motherfucker.”

Captain Grant looked viciously skeptical.

“Oh, and hey,” I said, pulling on my Chuck Taylors. “Thanks for not getting me killed.”

Soon, I stood on the pier, staring out to sea. I had literally come full circle, and the clouds were just as dismal as ever. Osip came strolling over from another building. He smiled, shook my hand firmly, and then marched away without a word. In my palm, he had slipped a folded piece of paper.

## Unholy Water

Instinctively, I stuffed my hand into my jacket pocket, assuming that there was a reason for Osip's secrecy.

Raising my eyes to the morbid sea, I wondered what I had to go back to in Berlin. Nothing worthwhile. It felt like I was still standing on the Holy Mountain Of Pigs. What the fuck was there to look forward to? "*You should have died!*" I heard her say. The Iranian woman. She was right. But the body has a will of its own. You fight against a sinking ship, just to face a life not worth shit, not without someone lighting the way back down the mountain this time. You don't want to be, but you don't just stop. And there, upon the edge of the sea, I finally recognized that which had been born in the belly of the ghost-ship. In hell, there my father roamed. Unlike Hamlet, however, I pitied him not. After all, old man Satan was calling me, as he always had, from below the water. We are only allies when our own agendas cross paths for the benefit of the greater arcana. And if we are all enemies, then we can never be betrayed.

Opening the small piece of paper, I found an address in Romania. Below was the word, *AMAIMON*.

Bruce



Bruce Stirling John Knox





SHORT STORY 12  
2017  
TEMPTING FATALISM

DISCLAIMER:

*This was written in a journal the same day the events took place,  
between mid-March and mid-April 2017.*

UNU:

A CHANCE ENCOUNTER

It had been raining all weekend, so I sat reading *Cyropaedia* in a small Russian cafe at Rosenthaler Platz. Several men had occupied the front corner of the cafe since before I had come, and after an hour, two more big guys in black suits arrived. All but one of them soon exited. I sipped on my second latte and stared directly at the last individual. He was in his fifties, with a thick, Bismarck-like mustache, and he wasn't shy about returning a look of who-the-fuck-do-you-think-you-are! Lowering my glass, we suddenly both shared a moment of confused recognition. This guy was oddly familiar, and he too struggled to place my face. So, he got up and stepped over.

"New shoes," he nodded.

"Twin Peaks?" I frowned.

"Excuse me?"

"New shoes. Twin Peaks. Yeah, I never liked that fucking show either."

The old guy inhaled, and slowly gestured toward the empty chair.

"Please."

"No more Chuck Taylors?"

I smiled as alarm bells rang in the back of my head.

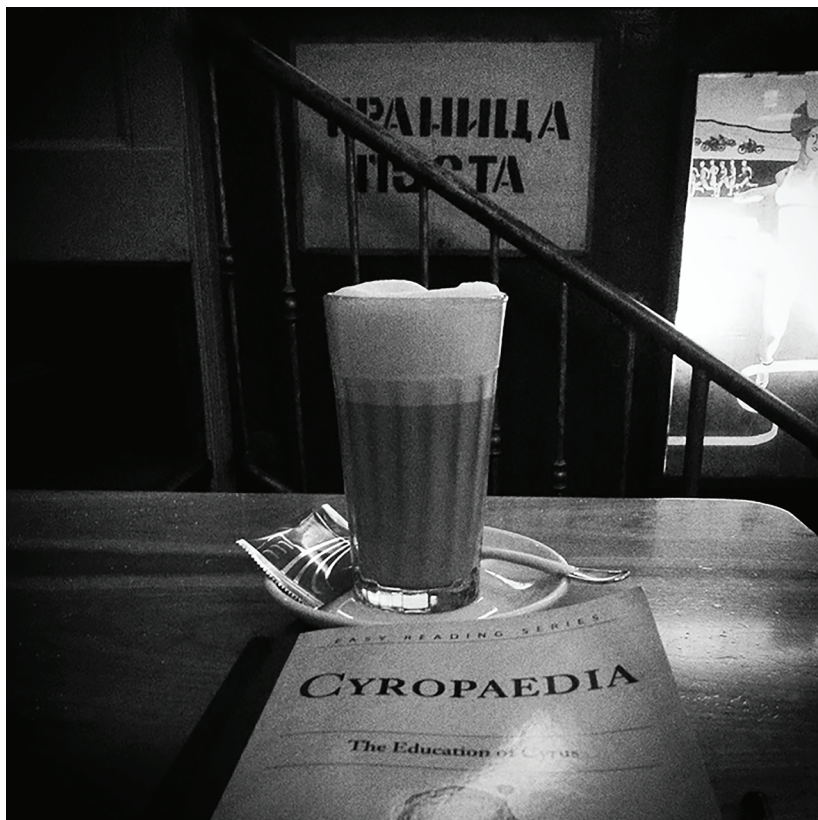
The gray-haired Mr. Bismarck wore a fine charcoal suit as he sat comfortably, and I wondered how exactly we knew each other. He then crossed his arms, saying, "You shaved the beard off."

Shaking my head, I racked my brains trying to recall where we knew each other from. After all, he had a face that you shouldn't easily forget. He obviously knew me, but where the fuck from? Had we met at a party, a business meeting, or maybe he was just a friend of a friend who I'd pissed off on-line.

"You still playing the drums?"

Squinting, I was at a total loss.

## Tempting Fatalism



“You don’t remember, do you.”

Hesitating, I pursed my lips.

He waited.

Grinning with clenched teeth, I finally replied, “No, no, no! I remember! Of course, I remember you! How could I forget! Not after all the good times – back in Nam?”

He smiled. “You have a wonderful evening.”

And then my synapses went CLICK!

And he noticed.

“You like the pelmeni here?” I asked.

“Not as much my mother’s,” he said.

“Nothing’s ever that good.”

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“I don’t know how she afforded to feed the whole family, but I never went hungry till the day I left home.”

“True.”

“We ungrateful sons.”

“A child has no debt to his parents,” I sneered, glancing away. “A child isn’t responsible for being brought into this fucking world. A son owes his parents nothing!”

“And what of that which you owe to me?”

“If you’re wanting the car back, I’m afraid I have no idea what happened to it.”

“Cars, like people: not necessarily as reliable as their cost.”

“Stop hiring Slovaks then.”

Mr. Bismarck looked out the back of the quiet cafe, before leaning in a little closer. “You know, managing business is all about weighing up the response to unspoken implications. Can I trust you? Are you one of those, you know, ruthless type? The sort that doesn’t let ethics get in the way of certain things that need to be done. How do you say in English, a pragmatist? But no, you’re not a business man, are you. No, you’re just another nobody lost in the chaos of modernity. But you owe me more than just a car. You recognize my face. Now you tell me, how much of a business man are you really?”

A threat is a threat.

“I need someone reliable. Someone no one knows about. Someone random like you.”

At this point, I noticed that my arms had unconsciously crossed over my chest.

“I want you to deliver a message.”

“Ever heard of the phone?”

“No. No, this requires the personal touch. I need you in Romania.”

“Romania?”

“The motherland.” Mr. Bismarck then drifted off mid-sentence, becoming disturbed by something on the wall as he scanned above me. He seemed transfixed as he sat back in his chair. I was dying to follow his line-of-sight but I had no intention on turning my back on this hardened criminal. “You know, as a boy, I used to tell my friends that my mother was a witch. The way she would cook with a huge pot on the fire. It was funny when we were children. But after I found her scrying mirror, I no longer made such jokes.” He suddenly went tense, reminding me of a tiger watching its prey crawl

## Tempting Fatalism

across the wall behind my head. Slowly rising to his feet, he eventually forced his eyes down at me with a look of cautious disdain. “You have a pleasant evening. May we never meet again.”

Clenching my jaw, I watched the stocky gangster focus on the wall again as he backed away. Crossing himself, the old guy pulled on his trench-coat before slipping out into the rain. I couldn’t help but coil my neck around so that I could inspect the lamps and ceiling behind me. There was nothing there. Evaluating the situation, I recalled the events that had led to how I ended up in hospital back in 2012. Quickly paying for my coffees, I grew increasingly paranoid, envisioning two Eastern European men in black leather jackets entering the cafe with SR-3 Vikhr assault rifles and opening fire on the whole fucking place!

Glanced around the busy pavement, I knew, from personal experience, that these weren’t the kind of people that you wanted to piss off. So, marching out into the cold, I pulled up my collar, and headed straight toward the stairs of the nearby Ubahn. But then, a black Audi SUV crept along beside me. Turning my head, I looked into the eyes of Mr. Bismarck in the back seat, just before I descended the stairs to the underground.

TREI:

### IN THE HEART OF WORTHLESSNESS

Two weeks later, I was listening to Ordos, *The Infernal God*, as I stared out of my window-seat on the train and watched as the dilapidated city of Bucharest faded out into fields of trash and ponies. What a fucking shithole. This was unmistakably a crumbling product of Soviet subjugation. The filthy train was full of grannies with scarfs wrapped around their fat heads, grandpas in loafers with pickled faces, and a pretty blonde Russian in a white fur coat giggling toward her glistening iPhone. The train was soon surrounded by a countryside of barren fields, just like every other part of the world outside of human metropolises. But these empty spaces didn’t look like farmlands. Where were the crops and all of the livestock? These were just great plains of neglected soil.

At last, I asked myself, what the fuck was I doing here?! Was I trying to escape that reoccurring suggestion that I should tie a noose around my fucking neck? Or was I trying to avoid that incessant reminder that I had achieved nothing. Or perhaps I was trying to prove to myself that I could just get up and leave my prison-cell-life-in-Berlin at any moment. I remembered

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when I first moved to Berlin, back in 2005. One day, I stayed home from work because of a migraine. I was sitting in my building's courtyard, when a girl from the massage parlor came and had a cigarette. She told me a prophetic statement that I have never forgotten, "*People come to Berlin because it seems like a fun place, but they soon find themselves unable to escape the substandard living.*" She was right. I was trapped and I had no one to blame but myself. I might be running away, but ultimately, I was going nowhere. As like I said years ago, if you can't make it in Berlin, then you won't make it anywhere. Yet, I'm still supposedly free. I'm free to decide for myself. Yeah, right! Only as free as my past decisions have left me a product of determinism. No, I'm not free to do anything. I had to come here. It was inevitable. I am merely the sum of my past experiences. Thus, my past has

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already written my future. However, why was I still feeling so indignant?! I've always enjoyed getting away from Berlin before, and gaining some perspective from all of those familiar associations. Alone you have to fend for yourself and pay close attention to each trivial event that confronts you in new environments, therefore, raising your present-tense-consciousness. But, is it better to feel free and know that you're not, or better to know that you're free but not even feel it? And these feelings matter. Dismissing the validity of emotional responses was like trying to become a stone. When nothing feels right, no amount of hollow reassurances that rationality can out-think your pain will make your shit life worth living. Of course, skeptics whine against the legitimacy of 'feelings' while favoring 'facts'. Yet, like Gerry Spence once said, "*All decisions are based on feeling. Although logic may be factored in.*" Emotions trump reason! So, I let my contentious feelings clash with my violent thoughts. I wanted psychological warfare. And that's when I knew that I had only come here for the resolution through conflict!

Forested hills rose up out of the vacant landscape, and despite the white blossoms on scrawny trees, the low hanging clouds declared that winter wasn't letting go just yet. The train passed through small villages, as I continued to stare bewildered at the trash everywhere. The garbage was like weeds that didn't only entrench the ghastly little towns. Piles of rubbish clogged the ditches, rivers, and was scattered throughout the woods where no one seemed to live. The further into the stony hills we went, the more ramshackle the houses became. Ricketty wooden fences surrounded thatched chicken-coups and flimsy shacks of pitiful shed-like homes. The steeper the ranges, the less architecturally advanced the construction techniques. The odd crucifix upon a steeple would slide through the leafless trees, as we passed more and more ghost towns. And then suddenly the tracks rose up and the train went deep into the mist-draped Carpathian Mountains. Snow above, trash below.

For the next hours, the train descended the mountains and headed north through more fields of remote wilderness. At some point among the desolate hills and patchwork villages, I had fallen asleep. Waking, I found the back-half of the train had disconnected and been replaced with an old, bloated guy who was sitting directly across the table from me. He was a polite enough fellow and snacked continually throughout his travels. Eventually, we had a brief conversation, despite this broken English. After the usual formalities of who, where, and why we were on-board, he laughed and shook his head at my remark about the how nice the woodland scenery was. He confessed that he refused to go anywhere near the forest. Said, he was raised in one of those



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rundown little towns on the steep valley walls. As a kid, he would often play in the woods, until one day his two best friends went missing. The search party found their bodies a week later, but no one could reach them. They were behind a large area of bush that was so tightly packed together that not even the dogs could find a way through. Glancing out the window, I knew that the fat guy wasn't kidding, the jagged branches from the undergrowth looked like a clusterfuck of barbed-wire. He said that it took the men another week to hack their way inside the vines. Once they entered that enclosed section of the woods, they found that the trees were all dead, along with many other animals. The bodies of the boys themselves had been ripped to shreds and not even their heads were in one piece. No one could explain how the kids had gotten through the thick bush, or what had caused their gruesome deaths. Bears and wolves would have left fur on the surrounding branches. The old guy had later moved to the city and lived the rest of his bovine-life miles from any forest. He stressed that the deaths of his two best friends had never been solved. No one was found accountable. There weren't any answers, and even their local superstitions had a hard time explaining it. However, he personally believed that the forest had just eaten them.

Soon, I started noticing areas of grass that were either, blackened, smoking, or still burning. I assumed farmers had caused it in order to prepare the soil for planting seeds. Except, I never once saw anyone tending to the fires. It seemed to me as if the land here just spontaneously burnt of its own accord.

After arriving in some unremarkable town, I booked a return train ticket, and then jumped on a bus full of working-class folk. We then drove for an hour into the vast hills. The driver was a maniac, and the hectic ride reminded me of the school bus from when I was kid.

Dusk fell quickly over the clear skies, as I stepped out of the bus onto the deserted streets of a tiny village. A fortified church with classic Romanian towers stood above the town square, while countless dogs yelped at the fading daylight. I had almost no orientation as I circled the church walls in search of my hotel. The road immediately became dirt, as I left the main street, and I discovered, to my growing irritation, that I wasn't in fact staying at a hotel, but at a cottage without a reception desk or a light on. Exhausted, I took a breath and called the 24-hour phone number. An old landlady soon came down the back road and cheerily showed me around the cottage. There was a cozy kitchen, two modern bathrooms, and four double-bedrooms. I had the whole place to myself. Once alone, I crashed onto my bed, hoping to sleep

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away my headache.

I awoke freezing in the middle of the night, and found that the radiators weren't working. So, I grabbed several other blankets from one of the spare rooms. Lying in bed, I felt no more isolated than when I was back in Berlin. I hate this fucking place.

### PATRU: THE MIDDLE OF FUCK THIS

My first morning in Romania was picture perfect. There were birds in the blossom, as I had coffee with the old landlady and sorted out the registration. She spoke no English, yet some German, which made getting directions from her a rather complex game of charades. While writing notes on a paper napkin, I handed the pen over, and the jolly old woman drew a crude map on the other side. I was glad for the coffee, but then reality came to shit all over my upbeat mood. The landlady said that no one used credit cards to pay for accommodation. Worse yet, there wasn't an ATM or even a bank in this village. With a bitter smile, I luckily had enough cash on me to cover the two nights, leaving me just enough to pay for the bus back to the train, and then the bus to the airport. That meant I only had ten Leu left. I wasn't going to be eating in the next couple of days, but fuck it, I can do without food.

Taking a stroll, I found that the town consisted of a main street, with a small convenient store, a police station, a school building, a restaurant, and no other businesses that I could locate. The looming church was quaint, and up there, I surveyed the tiled roofs of the crumbling brick village. I accidentally walked into a swarm of flies loitering upon the dirt, though, even the insects were too fucking lazy to get off their asses. The town was by no means big, but large enough to wonder where the fuck everyone was? I saw a child watching over a herd of sheep on a hill, and then I came across a couple of old drunks, passed out at 10 in the morning. Mostly the place seemed occupied by stray dogs. Again, I had that daunting sensation of disappointment. People here were exactly the same as everywhere. There was nothing special about this spot on the map. It was the same as Berlin. I was alone. I shouldn't have come. It was another waste of time. Just like everything I did in Berlin. Wasting my time with fruitless obsessions. Shut the fuck up! I knew this was just a mood. I knew that it would pass. All feelings pass. I just had to control myself. But I had no control. All I could do was wait it out. Maybe I was bothered by the unknown expectations of what I would find in the woods. But

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then again, I already knew that wherever I was going, it would lead nowhere.

Buying a couple of bottles of water with the last of my cash, I dumped one of them in the cottage, before grabbing my pen-light. I didn't fuck around another minute, and headed out into the hills. Looking at the notes I had written on the napkin, I immediately came across a slum right next to the village. Even poverty had a hierarchy, and these were the poorest of the poor. Feral children played in a garbage-lined creek, while shacks divided the kids from the adults who were working a plot of land with a horse and plow. Dogs lay about in the dust and didn't give two fucks as I walked through the smoke of more burning patches of grass. There was no logic to where I found the smoldering soil. They could appear anywhere: hillsides or gutters, sometimes in small areas and sometimes in vast fields. I had one theory, that the people

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were in fact burning the strewn trash as a way of dealing with it.

Taking a path up to my right, I quickly scaled a hill. I knew that I was on the right course once I came upon three tombstones overlooking the village. Regardless of how spiteful I felt, it really was a beautiful day. The sun made me regret wearing my hoodie and jacket, but the shade in the woods reminded me of why I had brought my gloves. The higher into the forest I went, the better I felt. It was a good, hard workout, and I knew that this was why I still went to the gym. When all else fails, you have to know you're able to walk away without the help of anyone else. Apart from my father's motorcycle, my parents only briefly owned a car, so that meant we had to walk great distances on a regular basis. As an impatient brat, I wasn't always pleased by our family expeditions, but I learned to appreciate that it taught me to move myself. There simply wasn't any other option. Later in life, it gave me the confidence to walk myself out of trouble, as well as walk straight into some.

It took a good thirty minutes of hiking higher and higher before the bleating of goats was replaced by a guy with a fucking chainsaw. Eventually, that also faded, and finally, so too did my lingering depression. I despise depression. It doesn't afflict me often, but when it does, I find it as distracting as having a headache: annoying but not crippling. As I trudged through all those masses of dead leaves, I laughed at that idea you throw around when you feel like a failure and you're right back where you started. It was in this moment of moving myself by my will alone that I acknowledged the absurdities of figurative speech. The truth was, that even if you feel like you're in the same place, you're not! You have moved. You have changed. Whether you feel it or not. Like magick, it defies the scientific method of repeatability. Personal experience is always subjective. My initial impression of Romania could never be recreated, for my prior knowledge would alter my perception of a repeat experience. Even if someone was accompanying me right now, their perceived experience would have been radically different from my own. My mood alone changed how I observed this place, and I knew it did. Much like Heraclitus said, "*You cannot step twice into the same river.*"

Following the summit of the ridge for an hour, the path led me through a gauntlet of tall thickets, riddled with inch-long thorns. The track was thankfully wide and clear, but I couldn't help imagining the damage that those thorns would inflict upon your naked flesh if you ran blindly into the middle of it. That made me paranoid about the wildlife around these parts. Earlier, I had seen a deer bolt off, but what about those bears and wolves. I didn't have my knife on me, as I had only brought my small backpack as

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carry-on luggage. I decided to remember this location if I ever needed a place to evade something like a demented bush pig. But then again, the place could have been crawling with deadly snakes and poisonous spiders for all I knew. After all, the ground was alive with beetles and bugs, and whenever I stood still, the ground rustled with constant movement. Insects ruled the forest. So, I didn't stay in one spot for more than a few seconds.

Once I had gone far enough along the ridge, I had some water and appreciated the open view. I saw the main street way down to my right, and a distant dirt road down to my left. The rest of the vista was pure nature. Ahead, the forest thickened and widened. I was glad that my head was no longer preoccupied with the drama of identity-politics and the click-bait bullshit of fake-news and the #waronfreeexpression. There, I thought of something that good old Bill Hicks had said, *"I realize what bums me out, I watch too much news, man. It's depressing. You ever watched CNN for longer than say, twenty-hours in one day? I got to cut that out. Watch CNN, it's the most depressing thing you'll ever see, man. War! Famine! Death! Aids! Homeless! Recession! Depression! War! Famine! Death! Aids! Over and over again. Then you look out your window. [Crickets.] Where's all this shit going on, man?"* I must remind myself of the crickets. The crickets of right here and now. At the end of the day, there's just me and none of that extraneous pressure. I was alone. Suggestions only influence you if you allow yourself to be exposed to them. But then again, what choice do we have about what we're forced to be subjected to, and who knows how much of an impression the slightest idea can have upon our unconscious. But what do we have without our fucking illusions! If we don't make a big deal out of our own lives, then we are no better than those kids playing in the trash. A few days ago, I was having brunch with some people, and the woman sitting opposite me was wearing a t-shirt that said, *"Don't be afraid of being different, be afraid of being the same as everyone else."* A social-paradox. Wanting to fit in while still being unique. But not too unique or you'll be shunned! Yet being different-but-the-same was no different at all! We tell ourselves that we matter, that we're important, and that we stand out as individuals. But no, we don't fucking matter! We're all just meat! I had a small epiphany recently, after my arguing with Aviv. I realized that you can't change someone's perception of you by simply telling them that you're not what they think you are. Louis CK said it best, *"You know, like when you say to a friend of yours, you're being an asshole. And they're like, no, I'm not. Well, it's not up to you if you're an asshole or not, that's up to everybody else. You don't get to say no to*

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*that.*” However, we’re all hated by somebody, it’s more productive to move on with your agenda than to constantly pander to insatiable naysayers. We will always be attacked, and when attacks continue, the ego gets involved sooner or later. If the attack escalates and sinks to the inevitable shit-slinging, then you should only fight fire with fire. If they insult you personally, don’t defend the accusation because that’ll mean that you’ve acknowledged it. Reflect what is said. Facetiously dub them as worse. Then watch as they squirm and protest and disassociate from the label while they scream how unjustified it is to attack them exactly how they attacked you. And there’s nothing respectable about someone squealing how fucking innocent they are, because we all know, deep down, that no one is fucking innocent!

The path slowly became less defined, and at times I doubted that I was still heading in the right direction. Trees had fallen across the supposed path, and the branches forced me to climb under or go around. When I blurred my eyes and focused ahead, I could still make out the loose indentations in the scrubs where others had trampled the ground long ago. Heading into a gorge, I happily leaped down the rugged path and swung about tree trunks. I was raised in the bush, this was childhood playground!

Coming to an overgrown dirt road lost in the forest, I recognized it as the very last note on the napkin. So, I continued to my left. More fallen trees denied any access by vehicle, but it hadn’t looked like an automobile had ever been down this stretch of the woods. A humming noise soon rose up ahead. Irritated, I assumed that I was approaching a main road. However, the sound wasn’t coming from the engines of human transportation, but produced by a million honey bees. A huge tree stood right in the center of that forgotten road. Its massive branches stretched high about. The tree looked like a willow and not like anything else that I’d seen in the woodland. Maybe its unusual size was the reason why this colony of bees had chosen to coat it with enormous layers of honey-cone. There was very little of the actual trunk left exposed. I’d never seen such an extensive hive, and it was as beautiful as ominous. Being no fan of bee stings, I cautiously side-stepped that monumental structure. On the far side, the sunlight penetrated the forest and glistened wetly upon all that golden sweetness. It looked fucking delicious. Fortunately, I hadn’t seen many bees outside of the actual hive, so I quietly backed away – until I tripped over a log! Stumbling awkwardly, I cringed, hoping that I hadn’t awoken any bees from their midday slumber. My attention was instantly redirected toward that which had tripped me up: a three-foot-long fucking lizard! That fucker hissed as it lunged at me! It looked like a mix of an alligator and a

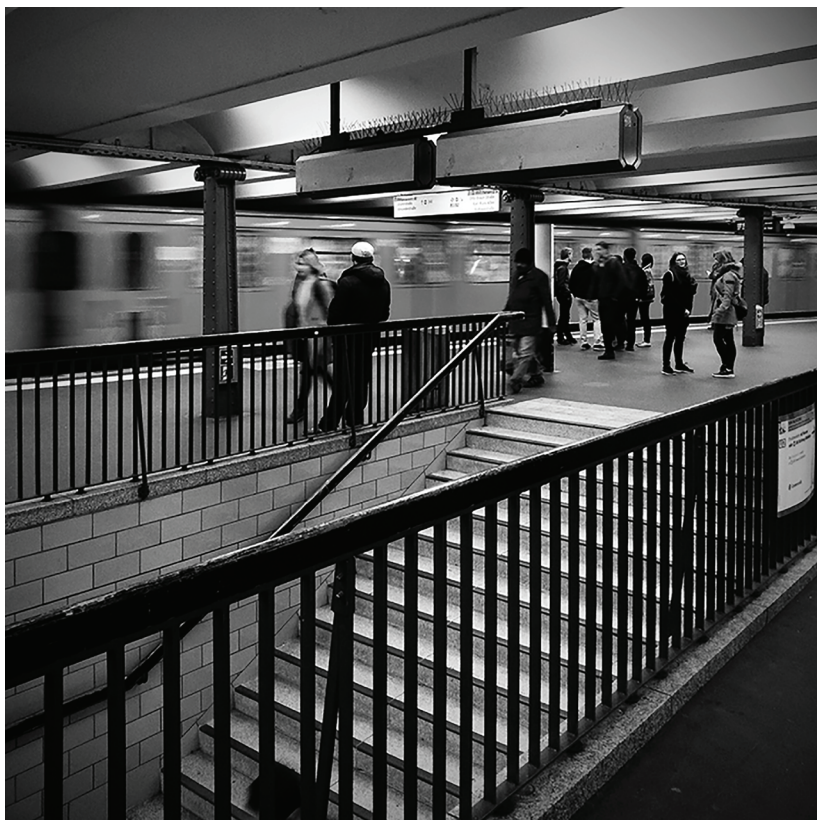
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Komodo-dragon. And it wasn't alone. Other big lizards surged out of the dead leaves, snapping their jaws at my ankles. Fuck this shit! High-tailing it out of there, I jumped over several other reptiles, and landed right on the head of one that was charging straight at me. And fuck, did I love it when I crushed that cunt's skull under my heel as I kept on running. If I had my knife on me, I would have cut its fucking head off as a trophy.

Once I was sure that I'd evaded the last of the camouflaged lizards, I came across the rusted remains of a mangled gate in front of a shell of a cottage. The roof was sagging inward like a limp tent. One entire side of the small building was just gone, it lay demolished as if god himself had taken a shit on the place. I would have called it uninhabitable, except I had seen people living in worse conditions back at the slum. There, I unfolded Osip's letter and read it again as I glanced back and forth at the ruin. I'd come this far, so I was definitely going to take a look inside the shack before writing off this adventure as an epic waste of fucking time. Screwing up the letter, I stepped over the broken gate, and waded hip-deep through the thicket in the front yard. Lo and behold, there was nothing of significance inside that dump but vines that threaded the rotted furniture. Sneering in disgust at my own gullibility, I aimed my frustration toward the scapegoat of this whole fucking country. I wanted to fucking smash that fucking ruin into an even greater state of desolation. Though, I didn't feel like getting tetanus on top of everything else that pissed me off about this fucking trip. Instead, I just stood there on the obliterated side of the cottage, glaring unadulterated hatred into those shadowed guts of abandoned human shit. What had I really hoped to find?! You dumbfuck! Get the fuck out of here! Turning, I sucked all the saliva from the corners of my mouth, and was about to spit – when a glint of sunlight caught my eye. There was something shiny. Something smooth. Taking a few steps closer, I reached down into a disjointed cupboard and picked up a thick black disk. It fit comfortably in my leather-gloved hand, and was about the width of a CD. Wiping the dust aside, I knew exactly what this piece obsidian was used for. Flipping the solid glass over, I found a series of symbols etched around the edge of the gleaming surface. What the fuck?! I couldn't believe what I was fucking reading. Was the universe really trying to fucking tell me something?! No! There was nothing here for me! It was just a coincidence! There was no fucking meaning to any-fucking-thing!

DOUA:  
A VIOLENT OMEN

## Tempting Fatalism



Less than a week ago, I was on my way to see the new *Ghost In The Shell* film, until the trains fucked up. Defeated, I turned in the Alexanderplatz U Bahn and headed home. Even after you've taken all the necessary preparations, those counting on you will only have you to blame! No matter how much you explain the train situation, you are the one guilty of fucking up! Yet, they still say accept it. Acceptance is the only way to avoid wallowing in frustration. Take personal responsibility. Yeah, take responsibility for the trains. You must be held accountable for that which is beyond your control. Just fucking accept your shit luck! Accept the blame and know that no matter what preparations you make, it will never be enough to push against the tide of the great indifference of the fucking universe! Despite resisting, you can't beat fate! You are no one. You're a meat-insect. You make no fucking difference.



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Now gladly accept your optimum-trajectory and bottle up your unimportant fucking frustrations at your perpetual failures, you fucking piece of shit! So, what if people are disappointed, they already think the worst of you. But then, I heard that drill-sergeant philanthropist, smug-faced kick-starter, Trump-wannabe motivational-speaker in the back of my head screaming, *if you really wanted to get there on time you would make it happen! Only losers blame circumstances! Find a way! Make your own luck!* Sure, I could catch a cab and hope the traffic isn't a fucking nightmare, but is a movie worth it? No. It's just a fucking movie. Accept it. Though, ultimately, it was about money. It's not about making your own luck, it's whether or not you can afford to buy your luck! With enough cash, you could solve almost any problem. And if I had all the money in the world, I wouldn't still be living in this fucking dead-end town.

That was when I looked across the busy platform and saw some big guy in a black leather jacket and hoodie come stomping in my direction. He was actually stamping the concrete with his boots. At first, I thought he was just another asshole trying to staunch out every cunt in sight, but then I saw that he was actually glaring straight at me. As you do, I glanced around in case he was eyeballing some other target on the platform. Nope. Looking back at that approaching Neanderthal, I suddenly recalled what my old friend AJ had once said had happened to his flat mate. Late one night, he had drunkenly picked a fight with a pro kick-boxer. Needless to say, his flat mate had thoroughly gotten smacked down. However, the next morning, when AJ saw him, he was gleefully whistling in the bathroom with a black eye and a broken nose. He had just laughed and told AJ, *that sometimes you need to get the shit kicked out of you in order to remind you where you really stand.*

Someone else then yelled out behind that oncoming prick. It was another giant, but dressed in a black, three-piece suit. He came running and tackled the first guy! The crowd backed off as a train also arrived at the station. While the two thugs thumped fists into each other, they tumbled right across the whole platform. I watched the two wrestling titans as I continued down the stairs toward my train. The first guy pinned the other down as he snarled and then shouted directly at me, "Osip's a fucking lair!"

I stopped on the stairs, when the second guy rolled over and drove them both into the side of the oncoming train! Struck down, the two huge men were blown aside like skittles! People screamed along with the train's breaks. I slowly strolled down the stairs shaking my head. Who the fuck were these cunts? First the old gangster mentions sending me to Romania, then two

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practicing Pagans from Romania give a lecture at my favorite book store, and now these two fucks somehow know about Osip and his letter. There's only so many coincidences you can run into before you have to wonder what this crap is all about. I kept shaking my fucking head. It means nothing! He probably didn't even say what I thought I heard him say. I'm seeing patterns where there are none! Shut the fuck up! This is all random bullshit! There is no deeper significance to any of this! You are reading between the lines and filling in gaps with delusional hysteria just to make up for your own dismal little fucking life. There is nothing to see here, and nothing to find in Romania. If you don't believe in your own fucking understanding of reason and logic, then go there and prove it to yourself that you're just a stupid fucking moron! Go and see that Osip was a fucking liar! Go to Romania and see with your own two fucking eyes! Go on, I fucking dare you! Alright, I fucking will! I will silence this paranoia and see for my-fucking-self that this is all just trivial nonsense. And once I come face to face with the truth that there is nothing to find and no deeper meaning to all of this, then I should finally grow the fuck up and learn to shut my fucking mouth!

I headed straight to my studio and booked a flight and a hotel at the closest town to the address that Osip had written down. The moment I printed out the booking information, I sat back in the dark and shook my head. What the fuck was I doing? Seriously, am I really going to go all that way just to prove what I already know? This was fucking retarded. I opened the website again and went to cancel the hotel, only to find that they would still charge me even if I cancelled the reservation. Sitting back, I continued shaking my head. Well, fuck it. I had time off from work for the next week or so, and my art for part 2 of *Uncle Fingers*, could wait. What are you afraid of finding, you fucking chickenshit?! Are you petrified of learning once and for all that these visions are nothing but hallucinations, and that all these devils are all in your fucking head?! This shit that you think is so fucking important, doesn't fucking exist outside of your demented fucking mind! It doesn't fucking matter! None of it does! You don't fucking matter! You never have and never will! You're already dead! So, I'll fuck off to Romania and see that there's no fucking escape from any of this fucking shit! And in doing so, I'll welcome a new level of worthlessness, you fuck! But then I suddenly recalled what I had heard from a seminar by a guy called Richard, *"What I tell myself is, that I'm on a journey most will never undertake and I'm going to learn things most will never know, and that will require me to fail a lot and look dumb at times. But who I am is bigger than my need to protect my ego, and at the end of the*

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*day, I get stronger and farther down the path for doing things that most will never do.”*

### SASE: ALL (F)OR NOTHING

My alarm was set early in order to catch the apparently unreliable bus back to the train station, and I awoke to the nauseating stench of smoke lingering in my room. Unlike my first morning, it was fucking freezing, so the villagers had log-fires burning throughout the night. Except, the smoke didn't have that delicious log-fire-scent. No, this stank like they were literally burning the trash that coated the countryside. Slamming the window shut, I blew snot into the bathroom basin trying to clear that repugnant smell of incinerated plastic from my infuriated nostrils. Shivering, I wanted nothing more than to jump into a steaming hot shower, but not today, motherfucker! Listening to Tom Waits, *Get Behind The Mule*, I packed my tiny bag as another tension-headache began to take hold. I had nothing good to say about this fucking place, but then again, what good was waiting for me when I returned to Berlin? All I had was spite and a longing to see everyone fucking suffer!

While I spent an hour waiting for the vague possibility of a bus, I stood directly across from the local school. Watching a small group of adolescent boys standing outside eating buns, it all seemed so obvious how they reacted when a few girls came toward the front gates. One boy deliberately ignored a pretty girl who abruptly stopped next to her friend and began whispering. They were about to enter the school, when the boy looked up and tossed his bun at the pretty girl. They clearly liked each other, but god damn it, they wouldn't admit it. We're all the same meat-insects, no matter what country or race. The teacher came out and everyone ran inside. So, then I watched two stray dogs running onto the street as they barked viciously at any traffic that came by, including the horse-drawn carts. I hoped that a truck would strike the mutts down and smear their fucking entrails across the asphalt right in front of me. But I wasn't that lucky. Thinking about what had happened in the woods, I was conflicted. If I was vindicated then why was I still so fucking distraught? What was solved by coming here? Nothing, except that now I knew first-hand what this place was like. These uncomfortable times challenge us and create a contrast that we will look back upon with distant curiosity. Remember what I've always said: the worst-case scenarios make for the best stories. Yeah, perhaps, but the present tense situation was fucking

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miserable!

The same guy who had driven the bus on the way out here also raced back through the misty hills at break-neck speed.

With three hours until my train left for Bucharest, I found a bank near the station and had my last twenty euros exchanged. I needed a coffee or two.

The train however, didn't come. Even if the train was on time, it only gave me two hours to get from Bucharest to the airport. The late train meant I was facing the very real possibility that I would miss my fucking flight out of this cunt of a country. This trip was one fuck-up after another. I sat on the platform for an hour, physically trembling with anger. I was powerless! There was absolutely nothing I could do to change my fucking predicament. Nothing but wait. Wait for something to happen. I had no control over

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anything! Ryan Air had charged an extra fifty euros just to check-in on the morning of my departure, costing more than the actual flights. I should have seen that as a sign from the gods not to partake in this fucking trip. And of course, being my third day on an empty fucking stomach left my temper with a short fucking fuse. But there was nothing I could fucking do about any of it. Just wait. I was no different than a piece of shit drying out in the sun. I have no control! The world will fuck you over, and you have no choice but to take it again and again and again, and then some smug voice in your head tells you to cheer up, you fucking ungrateful son of bitch! Finally, I snapped and marched down to the office at the front of the train station, demanding to know where the fucking train was?! The woman simply dismissed my aggression as she stated that it was about to arrive, like I was some kind of asshole for expecting it any sooner.

Romania had officially joined India on my shit-list of worst fucking shitholes on the fucking face of the fucking Earth that I hoped never to fucking step foot in ever a-fucking-gain! I wanted those grass fires to burn this entire fucking place right down to the fucking bedrock!

If I made it to my flight on time, it would be a fucking miracle. But while sitting on the train writing this in my notebook, I suddenly didn't even know why I was rushing back to Berlin. And then, I remembered that Gabi, the younger sister of a burlesque performer, wanted to have coffee with me tomorrow. Women, another form of asphyxiating self-slaughter. As the train pulled away from yet another dismal fucking village of insignificance, a stranger took a seat directly across the table from me. I was instantly attracted, despite my current disposition. She was tall, slender, and smiled kindly as she tied her wild, dark hair into a loose ponytail. Her skin was evenly tanned from forty-years in the sun. Her sharp nose and lean features sat cutely behind amber-framed glasses. She was the best thing I'd seen in days, so I took notice of the details, right down to her gray jeans with ripped knees, and woolen coat over a low-cut t-shirt. Relaxing my brow, I put on my human-face, and once again engaged in some polite small talk. Turns out that she grew up here. Now she managed a large vineyard, after she had moved to Italy in her twenties. I told her how I'd always had this stupidly romantic idea that it might be fun to work on a vineyard. She shook her head, stating that it wasn't all shits and giggles. However, in turn, she said that she'd rather visit Canada someday and live below the mountains next to a stony beach where she could listen to the waves crash into the cove. Said she could picture herself sitting on a fallen tree trunk at the mouth of a river, watching the sun

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sink beyond the great clouds of another storm on its way over. Everything she was suggesting sounded like just what I needed after this fucking shit-fest of a getaway. I asked her why she was back in this god forsaken place if she had already escaped? To which she paused before replying. She was repulsed by those living in squalor here, and had been running away from poverty for most of her life. And yet, she admitted that she really was no better than those she ran from. She was no success story. She had come to understand that her disrespect toward this country was her own self-hatred reflected back at her.

We didn't talk much after that. I spent the rest of the journey watching the rain clouds soaking the hills. The magnificent Carpathian Mountains were definitely the highlight of the last three days.

The closer to Bucharest, the more anxious I became. I had done the math and still didn't believe that I could make it to the airport on time. But it's amazing how the desire to flee can concentrate the mind. I should have been fatigued, but I was wired. I was going to get the fuck out of this country tonight, and that was all I gave a shit about. Meat-distractions faded into the background, as I went over alternative scenarios depending on when the train might actually arrive at Bucharest.

Once it pulled into the main station, I bolted off the train and sprinted to the first taxi. Luckily, I had that twenty euros exchanged, so I paid twice the going rate up-front. The champion of a cabbie earned it. He tore through the city without ever breaking! Sitting back, I watched the night lights go by while listening to bizarre techno-accordion music. It was pretty fucking surreal, but I made it to the airport on time. And then, of course, the flight was delayed. When the plane finally took off, Ryan-fucking-Air seemed to have forgotten to switch on the air conditioning and I spent the flight sweating like a rapist raping myself in the trunk of car in the middle of desert under a motherfucking magnifying-glass from hell.

But wait, it wasn't even over once I touched down in Berlin, because, for fuck's sake, the trains weren't fucking running!

Stumbling into my flat in the small hours, I had a coffee and wondered what exactly I had achieved. Lying in bed, I felt no less isolated than when I was back in the Romanian countryside. I hate this fucking place.

### SAPTE: A GIFT OF CONTEMPT

A week later, on Easter Sunday, I returned to the Russian cafe during another

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rainy evening. I wasn't planning on staying, as I stepped up to the empty bar. The place seemed deserted, so I moved over to the back stairs into the rest of the cafe. There, I paused as Mr. Bismarck looked up from his distant table. I hadn't seriously thought I'd ever see this guy again, especially not on the very day that I'd come by to drop off a package specifically for him. Walking closer, I was greeted by a girl coming from the kitchen. I didn't order anything. Politely indicating toward the vacant chair opposite the old chap, I waited. He slowly scanned around the empty cafe, and then nodded as he straightened his pin-striped vest.

"No business meetings today?" I asked.

"I believe we said all that needed to be said," he scowled. "Are you seriously looking to push your luck?"

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“Definitely not. My luck’s all run out after Romania.”

“You went there?”

“My mistake.”

“I told you not to.”

“Should’ve listened.”

“I didn’t even tell you where.”

“Didn’t go for you.”

“How so?”

“Long story.”

“So then, what are you doing here?”

“Brought you something.”

“For me?”

“Yeah.”

“Such as?”

“A gift.”

“I don’t take kindly to uncalled for gifts.”

“You know, I’ve always liked that ‘gift’ in German means ‘poison’.”

Silence.

“Anyway,” I said, placing the brown-paper-wrapped package on the table between us. “Found this and thought of you.”

Suspicious, the thick-set old guy examined the thin package in one hand before carefully ripping it open.

I began rising from my chair, when Mr. Bismarck quickly put the gift down on the table and leaned away.

“What is this?!”

“Didn’t you say your mother had one.”

“Where did you find this?!”

“In a house in the woods.”

“Take it back!”

“It’s yours now.”

“Do you even know what this?!”

Smiling with hatred in my eyes, I clenched my jaw and replied, “You know why I shave my head? Some think it’s because I’m a Neo-Nazi. Some think I’m a Skinhead. Even heard someone call me a Buddhist. That’s fucking hilarious. I shave my fucking head so I don’t have to spend all day looking into the fucking mirror like a fucking neurotic cunt. So, you enjoy it.”

“I let you walk away, twice!” Mr. Bismarck sneered. “I allowed you to go! And this is how you repay me!”



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“It’s just a gift.”

“This is no gift!”

“Of course, it is.”

“Take it back!”

“I can’t.”

“I don’t want it!”

“Then do whatever the fuck you want with it, it’s not my problem.”

“Take it back!”

“I have no power over it.”

“I won’t take it! I won’t look at it! I refuse!”

“Too late, sunshine.”

“Take it back!”

Inhaling, I glanced around the cafe, and then sat back down.

Mr. Bismarck now had veins streaking across his furrowed brow.

Staring down at the black obsidian disk lying within the brown paper, I admired the etched symbols as I thought of that half-caved-in cottage. “Remember a month ago, when you sat at my table over there, and then suddenly got up and left.”

The old guy didn’t react.

“Hold the mirror up and tell me what you see behind me now.”

“No.”

“What do you have to lose?”

A hard silence muted the rain.

“Then you keep it and all that is possesses.”

“No!”

“Then look!”

“My mother was a violent woman. When my brothers or sisters caused trouble, she would beat us far worse than anything our father ever threatened. But the day that I found her mirror, she never raised a hand. Never said a word. It was her look of insanity that scared me more than anything. From that day on, I saw her as something other than human. There is a line that cannot be crossed without irreversible consequences. I stood on that line next to my mother once. But I will absolutely not cross it here and now, and certainly not with some fool like you! You can either take this back right now, or the next time I see you, you’ll be strung up like the first time we met.”

“Tell you what,” I said, waving at the waitress, “I’ll tell you where I found the mirror, and then you can tell me if your threats still hold any weight. Okay, buddy.”

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“Why are you doing this?”

“Because you asked me to.”

“What?”

“Remember, you wanted me to deliver a message. Well, shit. As it turns out, I really am just a fucking messenger, after all.”

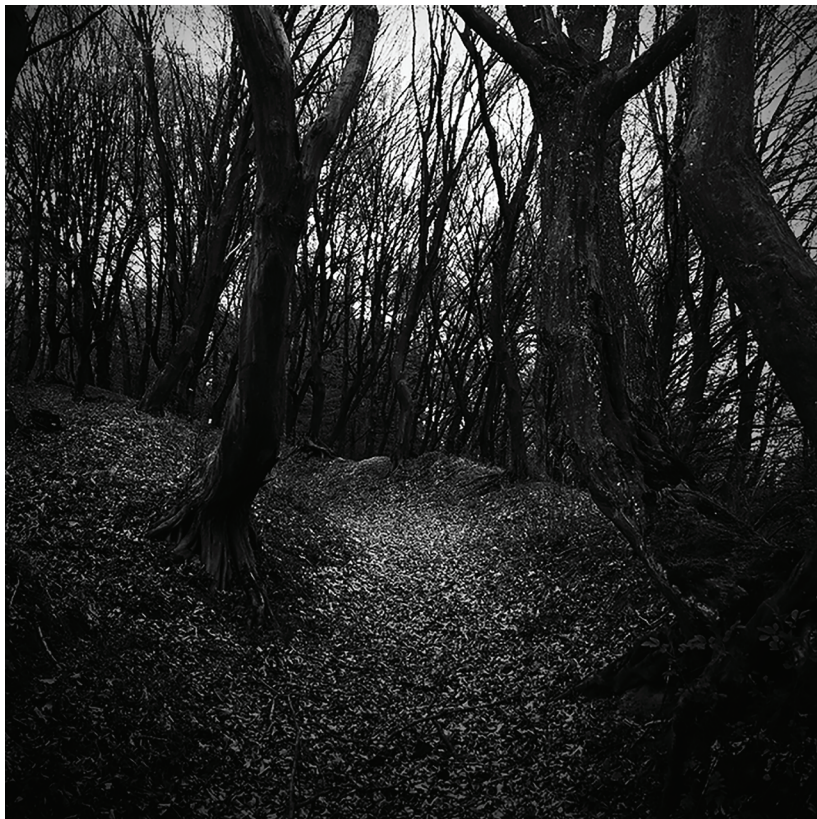
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### WHAT HAPPENS IN ROMANIA STAYS IN ROMANIA

Standing in that abandoned cottage in the woods, I opened Osip’s letter again. There I compared the name he had written, to those letters cut around the edge of the obsidian scrying mirror: *AMAIMON*. I was in the right place, that was for sure. But there was nothing here. Nothing until I glimpsed something in the black glass. Turning around, I looked into the back garden of that abysmal property. It mostly seemed as though the forest had taken over the whole place, however, from this angle I noticed a driveway from the road that continued up into the hill. I hadn’t seen it at first as the debris from collapsed side of the house had covered all signs of the route. That’s when I realized that this wasn’t actually a house. There wasn’t a kitchen or bed, it was more like a checkpoint. So, onward I went.

The driveway was long and weaved through the woods. Soon, I caught a rancid odor in the wind, and then I saw dead horses. The carcasses were blackened and hanging from the trees in an advanced state of purification. There were meat hooks in the hind legs which hung them upside down, ten-feet above the ground so that effluent fluids dripped from their gaping jaws. I counted seven decomposing horses and about a billion blowflies. Like the bees from that huge hive, I did my best not to attract their attention. The atmosphere of the whole situation brought the Iranian woman to mind. Who the fuck was that cunt?! Was she just a constant reminder that all this should have ended at Loch Ness. But this wouldn’t end. I had taken an unknown path and set things in motion that I had little comprehension of. It’s all a metaphor, yet it’s all an actualization. What choice did I have but to follow through and see where this time-line might lead? Ultimately, I’m already dead, so who gives a fuck!

A wide shadow began to emerge through the slender trees. The driveway was as overgrown as that fortified chateau. I decided to remain among the woods in case anyone occupied the place. Creeping around to the left, I examined the stone building from a distance. However, why be so timid now.



Osip sent me here to find something or someone, not hide in the trees. Yet the three-story-high walls were in ruins, and ultimately, I knew that there was fucking nothing to find but the confirmation of being led astray! Why the fuck would he send me on this wild goose-chase? Standing in the woods for an extended moment of self-criticism, I sneered. Fuck my apprehensions, and I marched straight toward the building. I was half-way across the yard, when I stopped dead in my tracks. There wasn't a doorway. This wasn't even the front of the chateau. Glancing around at the driveway behind, I looked up at the symmetrical architecture with its big windows and their shutters that were locked tight. There wasn't a door anywhere. So, around the building I went. While walking, I admired the towers, steeples, and battlements that constituted this remote fortress-like structure. The side of the place was

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longer than the width. Some of the upper windows and parts of the roof had crumbled inward, but mostly the building was intact. Once I reached the other end, I found a large stone arch and tall iron gate which presented itself as an obvious entrance. However, turning toward the supposed front of the building, I was once again confronted with a lack of any kind of doorway. This facade was no more decorated or unique than the other sides. Shaking my head confused, I inspected the entire wall, before peering my head around the far corner and looking down the other side. It too was no different. Backing off, I stood in the center of that big yard next to several fallen tree trunks. What kind of a building has no way inside? This was bullshit! With growing frustration, I then spotted one of the shutters on the ground floor was slightly ajar. The bottom of the window frame was ten-feet off the ground, but I was sure that I could make it. Without a second thought, I ran and vaulted up the wall. Catching the window ledge with my gloved hands, I quickly scrambling up with my Chucks gripping nicely against the rough stone. With the same inertia that had gotten me up the wall, I grabbed both of the shutters as I leaned back – and POP! The left shutter cracked wide open. Reaching in, I caught a hold of iron bars. I had achieved nothing! There was no moving those black bars that completely covered the filthy windows. It was just another waste of fucking time. Jumping down, I moved over to the heavy stone blocks that made up the ornate pillars on either side of the front gate. Scanning the broken statues, I saw that it would have once made an impressive welcome, but to a chateau with no doors. Wondered again what the fuck I was meant to find here, I shook my fucking head, realizing that there wasn't even a driveway beyond the gates. Was this really the front of the place?

Irritated, I headed around the final side of the building. There was more of the same, except I came across a fallen tree that was leaning against the wall. As I got closer, I saw a significant portion of the wall was missing where the tree was resting. The damage clearly preceded the death of the tree as the truck was nowhere nearly thick enough to cause such a hole. This was my way inside. Carefully climbing the 45° tree trunk, I stepped into a corridor – where the floor instantly collapsed! I clung to the tree as falling debris echoed loudly below. Turning to my left, I pulled out my pen-light before continuing inward. Constantly anxious about the state of the floor, I considered that if I fell and broke a leg, who would possibly find me out here? I hadn't told anyone that I was coming to Romania. The landlady back at the village knew that I was looking for this location, but I had already paid for my cabin, so

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she wasn't expecting to ever see me again. Given long enough, an ex might notice I wasn't answering text messages, and maybe she'd eventually break into my flat and find the printouts from my flights. But if I was trapped in here, how long could I survive without food or water? Though, wasn't that the point, I came here to be alone. And alone is exactly what I got, until that thing turned its head and looked straight at me! I didn't give a fuck about the floor's integrity as I stumbled away from the sight of that hideous fucking face in the pitch black. It wasn't human as it screamed with fantastically wide jaws! Flight instinct backpedaled my ass the fuck out of there. Running, I saw the light from the broken wall, but I could hear that thing screeching right behind me. There was no possibility of carefully scaling the tree back out into the forest, so I leaped like an idiot right over the massive hole in the floor and landed on the other side and kept going. I heard that shrieking thing follow, when suddenly it landed on my back! Horrified and out of sheer reflex, I reached back, grabbed an arm, and swung that fucking thing right into a wall! It whimpered as it dropped to the floor before it lurched back at me! However, it was actually my flashlight that blinded it, forcing it to back off. I discover that that thing was in fact some kind of fucking ape. Totally hairless, it wore a black petticoat. No one told me that Romania had an indigenous species of naked transsexual apes. That ugly thing howled and then went fucking apeshit as it screamed and sprung at me! Brutally strong hands clung to my skull, and I spun as we both slammed into another wall. I then tripped and we hit the floor. It felt like my ear was about to get ripped off, when the wooden beams broke open and we fell through to the next floor! I landed on the chimp and heard a quick succession of cracks as I felt its ribs snap below my elbow. Rolling away, I was doing infinitely better than the wheezing animal. I don't even know if it was a chimp or a human, it looked like both, but with disgusting pinkish pupils. It didn't get up, and soon its shallow breathing ran dry. With dust in the air, I stretched my back from side to side. Figures then rose up in that dark room and silently surrounded me. I could hear their snarling from beneath black sheets that covered them from head to toe. I really wished I had my fucking knife on me. Before I could reach for a plank of wood to use as a weapon, the mob attacked! I grabbed something bat-like and swung into the first head, but I might as well have been spitting in the face of an oncoming freight train for all the good it did. I was knocked down and dragged away. Then I was kicked about in the darkness of long passageways. All I could do was cover my head as best as I could, until I was yanked down some stairs and into the light.

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Clenching my eyes, I found that I had been left alone, and heard only the birds in the trees. I was outside. Squinting with pained caution, I lay facing an exterior wall. It wasn't until I slowly sat up that I realized that I was actually in a courtyard at the center of the chateau. The space was about twenty-meters-square, and full of leaves, statues, and piles of mounted-up furniture. I wasn't alone either. Those that had dragged me in there were now sitting on the ground in a wide circle surrounding me. Their dirty black sheets were still draped over their heads as they all mumbled something under their breath. What could I say, I was trespassing. I was in the wrong. I wasn't meant to be there. But this was a place where words were of no use to me. There were several arches leading back inside, but if I made a run for it, I had no idea which way was which. I was still trying to reconcile what that hideous thing in the dress had been, perhaps generations of gypsy inbreeding? That was when I noticed that the obsidian mirror had slipped out of my jacket pocket. Without making any sudden movements, I picked up the disk, and saw the reflection of the sky.

Twisting my neck, I glanced upward. There were storm clouds above. When I looked back down, the chateau was gone! All that remained were the foundations and a few pillars. The landscape was completely barren of trees, and the air was fucking toxic. Pulling my shirt's loose collar over my nose, I gasped for oxygen. The only thing that hadn't transformed was that circle of hags under their sheets. Ash coated everything. The wind came in long batteries that sent vast plumes of dust across the rocky hills. Turning slowly, I rose to my feet and spotted a figure in the distance. I thought that the blackened individual was wearing many layers that were being torn at by the gusts, but the closer he got, the more I realized that he was seemingly made of smoke. He was just another one of those unidentified things that I had seen many times before, usually in large groups. Watching him slowly draw near, I glanced around from time to time in case anything else appeared on the edge of the ridge. There were only two small mounds of stone, that I guessed were where the front gate had once been. Therefore, my orientation had been established. Little good it did though. This wasn't a different version of Romania, geographically it was another place altogether. There were mountains so close that they definitely weren't the Carpathians. I didn't know where the fuck I was, but then again, I never knew where any of these fucking hallucinations were meant to be located. After all, let's keep in mind that this was only another fever dream, or psychedelic experiences, or figment of my imagination. I should have just used my skeptical mind to rationalize this

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very visceral illusion out of existence. Come on, I can out-think anything. Though, is it even possible to out-think mental illness? It was all in my head! Just like the entire fucking universe was!

That blackened figure eventually stood outside the circle of muttering females, so I moved closer. Featureless, he was just a rough blur of a human-like silhouette. He wasn't hostile, though was very much aware of my presence. His legs faded into nothing, and his head tilted as if curious. The only thing that I knew about these translucent shadows, was not to walk through one of them ever again. A real emotion then crept into my lungs. I suddenly became aware that something else was here! I heard it behind me, inside the circle. Standing right next to that smoky figure, I forced myself to turn. In the center of the circle a big, black animal crouched. At that moment, I had as much courage as a frightened child, as I stood petrified. I tried to back away, but the witch at my feet grabbed my leg with the strength of a hydraulic press! I was trapped! Trapped again, for fuck's sake! That thing in there with me was twice the size of a bull on steroids. I couldn't define what exactly it was. Multiple limbs coiled around its torso, while a vicious spine lined its hunched back. Then it began making a groaning noise. The thing sounded like a lion growling before its dinner, but it resembled a voice, as if it was contemplating whether or not to ask if I thought Socrates was right about the afterlife. It moved like a big cat, smooth and controlled, but I couldn't make out a head within all those extremities rolling over each other. It seemed to be made of nothing but countless arms and two massive hind legs. And then it lunged at me!

Raising my arms in front of my head, I froze. Once removed from our artificial environment, we humans have no natural defenses. Naked, we're no competition against predators hungry for our bone marrow. We're cowering primates that should have never left the nurturing safety of the trees. However, apart from my leg in the clutches of that cloaked woman below, I was unharmed. With my eyes still firmly shut, I heard that creature hissing only inches in front of my face. Reluctantly, a sensation of helpless acceptance washed over my brain-stem. That asphalt-wet thing towered above as several of its huge arms pressed down on the women either side of me. It was like a great spider, spreading itself out to intimidate. At times like these, I envied those who fainted from a weak heart. Even at this range, there wasn't a face to locate, just endless layers of blackened boney limbs upon limbs. I think it was the mirror in my hand that had stopped it. Maybe. Or maybe it was the mirror that had called it here. Maybe this was Mr. Bismarck's fault for planting the

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seed of suggestion in my head. Or maybe Osip had set me up. Maybe it was the Iranian woman. Or maybe this was the consequences due after what had happened both times at Loch Ness. Maybe it was all of those reasons, and this was always going to happen. Is it ever possible to eradicate attribution-error, if you can't even predict your fate with perfect 20/20 hindsight? One of the creature's many black arms, then pointed with a foot-long talon toward



the scrying mirror. As careful as this devil may have been, its posture never eased back. Despite the terror clenching my diaphragm with every breath, I watched as that dagger-like finger traced the tiny letters in the obsidian. If I had to take a wild guess, I'd say that this thing liked the look of his own name. Without warning, another of its arms shot out and grabbed my wrist, holding me still!



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The mirror then became milky as if something began shimmering within the glass. When the creamy surface faded, an oily image emerged within, like a reflection on spilled petrol. Each time Amaimon slid his claw across the surface of the black disk, a different location would appear. I've always been a firm believer in cross-referencing, and as I watched on, I found that Amaimon confirmed that which had already been insinuated by those devils in the waters below the little white house a year ago. I was shown a constant state of war, absolute anarchy, and antediluvian cities. Here, in this primordial place, 'might' was ultimately right. I recognized some of the great serpents but I had never seen the oceans that were full of huge worms perpetually devouring each other. Whenever I saw anything that resembled humans, they were like rodents, scurrying away from much more barbaric prey in an ecosystem where mankind was the least unscrupulous chattel in the food-chain. Amaimon then showed me a mountain in the mirror. At first, I didn't see what was so special about it, but then he released my wrist and slowly pointed behind me. Despite the hideousness of this creature, the thing showed definite signs of patient intelligence. Turning my head, I saw the same mountain that was in the mirror. With my leg still in the woman's grip, I twisted for a better view of the mountain, though trying to keep as far away from Amaimon as physically possible. Through the miserable clouds, I slowly saw that there was an enormous shape cradling the snowy peak, much like a drunk would cling to a lamppost in a frozen moment of disgrace. It looked like a twisted expanse of muscle. I then suddenly felt off balance. My head hung low and heavy. I found myself blinking constantly. The woman holding my leg let go and I stumbled to the side rubbing my eyes. I think the stench of that air was giving me a fucking hangover. Shaking it off, I looked up and found that Amaimon had silently backed away. But why the fuck was he showing me all this shit?! I wasn't tired, I was just sick of this. And I still had a long walk back. What the fuck was I meant to understand about these fucking things?! I had a laundry-list of petulant questions, because, after all, what was I but a fucking insect compared to Amaimon! That thing could kill me in an instant and get on with his fucking day, so what the fuck was he waiting for?! Amaimon then stood up straight. He was about twenty-foot-tall on his two, rhino-like hind legs. Somehow his deformed body-language seemed even more pissed off than before. I wasn't a fucking friend of his. Holding up the scrying mirror in front of the mountain, I wanted to test something, so I smacked the mirror with the palm of my hand! That vast serpent clinging to the mountain immediately began to move. Soon the

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shock-wave reached the ruins and the very ground below my feet shook! That colossal beast reared back and drove its gigantic mass right into the face of the mountain! The detonation was tremendous! As the entire ridge buckled violently, the women in the circle cried out in tongues! Amaimon screamed, and I grinned with regret – when right then, I was saturated in blinding white light! The circle had been broken.

Squinting, I found myself standing in the courtyard again. The dark evening sky above. The chateau surrounding. Those woman under their black sheets were still shrieking as they ran for shelter. One of them crashed into me, and I grabbed the cunt, ripping her cloak aside. Underneath was something that resembled a burn victim with transparent, plastic-like skin. Shoving that demented monstrosity the fuck away, I spun, looking for Amaimon. He too was gone. I hadn't learned anything new! I wanted to go back! But those howling females quickly vanished into the chateau, leaving me with my dick in my hand.

The courtyard grew quiet for about two seconds, before I heard something crash into the building! Bricks from the walls fell in waves. Hurrying inside, I followed the sounds of the collisions, until I scaled a wide staircase to the top floor. Another horrendous impact hammered into the exterior wall, scattering stone and splintering wood. Twisting away, I wanted to see what the fuck was causing such damage, but then a hand the size of a fucking car reached in through the demolished wall and ripped the fucking floorboards apart! This wasn't a hallucination. Turning, I ran in the opposite direction, down toward the other side of the chateau where I had entered. My pen-light did its best to illuminate the way, but the place seemed so much bigger from the inside. I never saw any of those witches again, but thankfully, I spotted the twilight through the hole in the wall.

Avoiding the exposed driveway, I raced into the forest. I wanted to stay in the trees, though was careful not to lose my way back to the checkpoint cottage. Night closed in fast, and the temperature in the woods had already dropped significantly. I wasn't planning on spending the night lost in the woods, and resigned myself to running all the way back to town. Though, it was that golden glow that made me stop. The checkpoint was on fire! Walking at a brisk pace, I was about twenty-meters from the blaze, when something grabbed my hoodie. I spun and smacked that fucker's hand away. The pale devil snarled as it retreated upon its intestinal-like tail that was wound around a tree trunk. Glancing further up, I saw more of those cunts with their scrawny arms and mutated faces hanging from the branches like

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smutty fucking vultures. They cackled into a crescendo as we all focused on the bonfire. Something rose up within the huge flames. Something fucking big. It wasn't Amaimon, though I wished it was for some fucking reason. The blackened figure stepped out of the fire, obliterating one of the remaining walls in a cloud of sparks. When the smoke cleared, I knew I should have already been running. It then grabbed its own inhuman head and tore its armored skull right in half! An inferno gushed forth from within! Staggering away from the burning building, the giant ripped several trees clean out of the ground as it found its footing. And then I ran. I had to get around the bonfire, so that I could follow the road out of this fucking forest. Unfortunately, those devils in the trees shrieked and pointed at my escape. The giant planted a single foot and cut the road in two! Only its knees were at my eye-level. Running straight into the woods, I heard the giant uprooting trees like an avalanche on amphetamines – until a much larger impact shredded the forest and sent huge clumps of dirt flying past my fucking head! Glancing back, I saw a second Nephilim tackle the burning one! They collided with the Earth like a comet! Patches of the ground caught fire as those two fiends choked one another with ridiculous strength! I couldn't help but see the similarities between this and the events back on the U Bahn platform.

Determinism might be the death of free-will, but it was my own two feet that got me the fuck out of there. I couldn't go back the way I had come, so went running through the woods without rest. Finally reaching the edge of the ridge, I made it down the hill in less than five minutes, and soon came across a gravel road in the complete darkness.

I drank the last of my water, before removing the scrying mirror from another pocket. It could be said, objectively, that nothing terribly bad had actually happened during my time in Romania, but my fucking mood said otherwise. I hate this fucking place, and that's exactly how this experience shall always be framed. Objectivity be damned!

Bruce

## Tempting Fatalism







SHORT STORY 13  
2017  
LAUGHTER AND SCREAMS

DISCLAIMER:

*If words are an act of violence, then this story is literally happening because you're reading it.*

THE DISPOSAL

In the absence of god, I opened the front door to that flat with the keys belonging to the dead girl still lying naked on her bedroom floor. Placing my black duffel bag on the bed, I walked past that carcass with a gash in her left thigh. Staring out the fourth-floor window at the neighboring building, I was glad that I had gone home to my own bed last night. I'd slept remarkably well. Feeling relaxed, I didn't spot a single pair of eyes returning my scorn from the windows across the street. So, turning toward the naked body, I pulled on some rubber gloves while the sun soaked into my back. Bark had days like this.

Crouching next to that slender brunette, I noticed how dry her eyes were. I was about to lean down closer and spit in her pupils, but noticed the stereo below her flat screen. Michael Jackson, *Man In The Mirror*; began filling the white flat, as I stood and snapped my fingers, slowly dancing across the room. When the chorus kicked in, I spun and dropped to my knees. I clapped my hands and then grabbed the dead girl, kissing her pale lips. Moonwalking, I dragged the body into the bathroom where I pulled out my knife. After slitting her throat in the shower, I stood, holding her ankles up as her blood crawled out of her flaccid carcass toward the drain. Her calves were cold, and her dark hair drifted among the pooling blood. The wound in her thigh was deep, but hardly left a puddle on the bedroom floor. I would've been tempted to fuck her, but I'd already shot my load down her dead ass last night. I never did like sloppy seconds.

Placing her decapitated head in the kitchen sink, I stretched her freshly showered carcass upon the bench. Starting with her ankles, I placed them one at a time on my chopping-block-vice. It was a simple but handy piece of equipment. Just a cutting-board with a piece of wood nailed to the bottom of one edge, and another piece nailed to the top side of the other edge. The bottom piece pressed against the edge of the bench, while the ankle rested on

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the cutting-board, pressed firmly against the top piece of wood, thus allowing you to brace the meat in position as you dismembered the appendages with a dovetail saw. High school woodwork class still had many real-life applications.

Once the limbs were piled up, I carried the torso back to the shower. Slicing open her belly with my knife, I used a pair of big sowing scissors to chop up her organs into shit-sized chunks that flushed smoothly, straight down the toilet. As expensive as it was resharpened these scissors, they were worth it. You got to respect the elegance and efficiency of your tools, unlike those cunts at Esmod. Bitch, your seamstress skills ain't got nothing on my motherfucking meat-mincing. Returning to the kitchen, I stripped the limbs to their bones, which were then baked dry in the oven. Slithers of biceps and quadriceps were chopped up with the scissors and flushed away. I then carried the torso back to the kitchen and sawed her spine in half through the waist. Vertically bisecting her hips, I continued upward, splitting her ribcage apart. Each rib was cut loose and tossed in the oven. Looking at her two severed tits, I grabbed them in my rubber-gloved-hands and visited the bathroom. After hacking that soft flesh into sloppy blubber, it too joined the rest of her carcass in the Berlin sewers. And then the door bell rang! I continued snipping those bloody tits until my palms were empty. The bell rang again! I flushed the toilet and gave the front door the middle finger on my way back to the kitchen. As I sawed the spinal column into individual vertebrae, the door bell remained silent. The last of the bones were drying in the oven, when I realized it was time to clean up already. Washing down the bathroom and kitchen with a sponge, I rinsed the untouched head, before drying her hair with a towel. Dumping my gloves, towels, and sponges in a fresh trash bag, I pulled on another pair of gloves, and opened a second plastic bag where I placed her head and tied it shut. Opening a third rubbish bag, I carefully filled it with that cluster of bone fragments. I hadn't left a single bone in less than three pieces. In a fourth plastic bag, I packed the chopping-block, saw, and scissors. I filled the duffel bag with all four rubbish bags, before leaving the flat and locking the door.

Walking down that bright street in Prenzlauer Berg on that gorgeous Sunday morning, I glanced up at the tall green trees lining the footpath. Young couples chatted happily as they strolled on by with babies in prams and pugs on leashes. Slipping on my Wayfarers in an upbeat mood, I smiled and headed toward a nearby Impala cafe.

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## Bruce Stirling John Knox

“Bruce? It’s Bruce, isn’t it?”

Waiting for my takeaway latte, this voice distracted my scowl from the cop car that was parked across the street from the cafe.

“Hey, we met on New Years!”

“Yes! Friend of Lewis!”

“Yeah! Ethan! What a great night!”

“It’s all fun and games till someone’s blowing chunks out their nostrils.”

“So, glad I came! Really in love with this town!”

“You guys are based in New York, aren’t you?”

“I’m opening a bar here! Had to!”

“Wouldn’t be the first.”

“It’s right in Mitte. That’s how you say it, right? Want to check it out?”

“Sure, if my coffee ever arrives.”

“Fucking love the carrot cake muffins here.”

“Preaching to the choir.”

“You live around here too?”

“An ex did, down by Eberswalder Strasse. Used to be an Impala at the intersection. If you think the muffins are good here, the girls working there were, mmm.”

“Thought you were gay.”

“My honor!” I gasped, grasping my chest.

“No, no! I just assumed. On New Year’s, didn’t you all leave for a gay bar.”

“Fags aren’t the only ones that can tear up the dance floor.”

“Man, I tell you, that’s the difference between here and the States.”

“The sausage fests?”

“Make that mistake back home, and risk getting my ass beat.”

“Sounds homo-erotic.”

“Ha!”

“Are you hitting on me?”

“No, no! That’s not what I meant at all.”

“Now you insult my queer sex-appeal. Won’t someone defend me?” I smirked, as that good-looking African-America bellowed with some healthy, well-rounded laughter. He was in his late twenties, shaved head, and dressed in business-casual. The girl behind the counter was clearly checking him out, and in turn, I immediately fixated upon her long, fake white hair, heavy mascara, and pale blue eyes. I’m not a fan of Tinder, but it’s a perfect example of how humans instantly sum up a complete stranger within a split-second of

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visual prejudice. You got to trust your unconscious attraction. It knows what it wants. Women = meat. And despite the duffel bag in my hand, I was already hungry again.

“Excuse me,” came the voice of some nasal American female. “I just have to say, the manner in which you’re talking to this gentleman is just disgusting!”

My latte arrived as Ethan turned toward the speaker with a look of confusion.

“Excuse me, sir!” snarled that voice again, and then my shoulder was grabbed just before I could reach for the sugar. “I’m talking to you!”

“Ma’am?” Ethan coyly asked. “Is there a problem?”

“I’m absolutely appalled with your attitude toward this nice young man!”

“Sorry?” I frowned, examining the sugar dispenser. “You talking to me?”

“Don’t know where you were raised, but that kind of intolerance is unacceptable, especially in this city of all places!” came squawking from a chubby, penguin of a woman, standing all of five-foot-nothing. She was in her mid-thirties, with a black rockabilly haircut, and thick-framed glasses. “I demand you apologize to this gentleman for your utterly inconsiderate behavior!”

“I think you’re taking this out of context,” Ethan smiled awkwardly, embarrassed by this random intervention from his fellow American. “We were just joking around.”

“You don’t have to say anything, dear. It’s not your fault,” the woman yapped, “This prick is the one who should be doing the apologizing!”

Glancing sideways at Ethan, I began pouring the sugar into my coffee. “You know, those jeans are about ten sizes too small for you, honey. Should be careful or they’ll give you a bad case of explosive diarrhea.”

“What?!” she sneered, “You fucking piece of white shit!”

“Ma’am, please calm down,” Ethan cringed. “He’s just having some fun. He doesn’t really mean it.”

“Don’t let this offensive pig speak down to you like this!”

“Pig?” I whispered, “I love a slice of ham, but you’re the only fat-ass in this establishment, sweet cheeks.”

“What the fuck?!” she snarled. “You will not talk to me like that, you fucking misogynist!”

“Hey, just go away, would you,” I sneered, stirring in my sugar. “Go on. Trot along, you fucking swamp-donkey.”

“What!?” she screeched, holding up her iPhone as if she were about to

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start filming. “This is sexual harassment! You fucking hear me! Are you listening to me! You won’t get away with this! Not here! Not in my fucking town!”

Grinning, I ignored her existence, which infuriated her no end, as I spoke to Ethan directly, “I try my best not to engage with white-Americans and all their cumbersome white-guilt. But hey, that’s how kids make friends these days, isn’t it. Victim-thinking really is the only way of gaining anyone’s trust. I want nothing to do with them and their fucking paranoid imposter-syndrome!”

“Who do you think you are?!” the bulldog-faced woman shrieked, suddenly throwing her slice of cake at my chest! “Your opinion on the matter doesn’t mean a fucking thing! Tell me, who the fuck do you really think you are?!”

Slowly looking down at the cheesecake residue on my black jacket, I placed my coffee on the counter and picked up a napkin. I could feel the veins in my neck pulse with anger. That smug, slut-wannabe began cackling as I dabbed at the smudge.

The girl behind the bar glanced around, as she handed me a wet towel, but the tiny American snatched it out of my grasp. “No, I don’t think so, you fucking clown! Apologize!”

“Who the fuck do you think you are?!” I hissed through clenched teeth. “How dare you fake your fucking empathy for black people, you narcissistic cunt! Who are you to deem my friend here incapable of speaking for himself?! How dare you put your white fucking words in his mouth! You assume to know how he feels! You! A white-American woman?! You need to go take a good long look in the fucking mirror, review your own skin color and remember to go check your own fucking privilege! Who the fuck do you think you are treating black people like children that can’t fucking fend for themselves! Your pathetic fucking hero-complex is as apparent as your lily-white face that’s turning red from your own self-pitying jealousy that you’re not as fucking oppressed as those you fucking claim to defend! Shame on you, motherfucker! SHAME ON YOU!”

“You’ve got to be kidding!” she grunted, as I towered above. “Your opinion isn’t—”

“And who the fuck do you think you are, disregarding whatever I might say on the topic?! Who the fuck are you, dismissing an argument as merely ‘my opinion’, while praising your own fucking opinion as beyond reproach?! Who the fuck are you to criticize, when you yourself, as a white-fucking-

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American are no better than that which you call irrelevant based purely on the fact that I'm as white as you, you fuck! What the fuck gives your opinion the right to claim moral superiority over another opinion! Answer me! WHO THE FUCK DO YOU FUCKING THINK YOU FUCKING ARE, CUNT?!"

The woman suddenly burst into tears. I had silenced the entire cafe. She then sat back down, sobbing like a spoiled brat, "Somebody. Please. Stop him attacking me. Please. Stop. I can't. Please. This isn't. It's abuse. You can't."

"Judge not," I snarled, scanning around the cafe with everyone's eyes downcast. "Lest you be fucking judged!"

"I think you should leave," the white-haired waitress whispered. "Please, just go."

Ethan's charcoal Afro Romeo 2017 Giulia was parked directed outside the cafe, and as I placed my duffel bag in the trunk, I noticed that those in the cafe window were all watching the young entrepreneur climb in behind the wheel. Standing in the sun, I glanced back at the cop car as two officers came strolling down another street.

"Well shit, that escalated quickly," Ethan roared with laughter, as we drove off, with The Prodigy, *The Day Is My Enemy*, blasting at full volume. "Lewis only had good things to say about you, man, but I guess, now I know what he meant."

"Ah, he's a dreamer, that boy."

"You're pretty intimidating. Especially how loud you got. You think that had something to do with her backing down?"

"Only 7% of communication is in the words. Everything else is voodoo and body-language. I make no apologies for her failure to articulate her own perversion of logic," I stated over the music, as the car raced smoothly through the city streets. "Nothing beats face to face confrontations. Fuck internet gossip! I want face-first, no-holds-barred, verbal brutality! Right until someone has a emotional fucking breakdown and needs years of psychiatric therapy to recover from their poor choice of a fucking words!"

"So, what is it exactly that you do?"

"Mostly hurt people," was my default answer.

"You're a dentist?"

### THE PREPARATION

The next Saturday, I had a few hours before I'd typically be late for a penthouse barbeque with friends. So, with Molotov, *No Manches Mi Vida*, in

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my headphones, I tapped my shoe to the groove while leaning against a bus shelter in the midday sun. It was another marvelous fucking day in one of those iconic Kreuzberg neighborhoods, crappy and proud of it. Checking my phone, it was just after 2pm, and then she stepped out of her front door and headed straight toward the U Bahn. Right on time. Walking along the other side of the street, I followed her and entered the underground via parallel stairs. She never once looked back. No one ever does. Dressed in black, she hid her cute face in a huge scarf and wore massive sunglasses even when she stood on the platform. I submerged into the crowd, only taking my eyes off her once the train arrived, though followed her in the reflections. Already knowing which station she would exit, I casually glanced around the others packed into the carriage.

With a Scandinavian face and flowing blonde hair, I'd first noticed her a month earlier. She worked at a restaurant and had taken forever with my dinner. No tip for her that night. Tips are earned. However, it was obvious that her looks usually guaranteed her a disproportionate bonus. For the next few weeks, I had watched the establishment from other bars across the street. Of course, there were plenty of days where she wouldn't show up, either due to her having a day off, or starting the late shift. Soon, I was confident of her hours, and followed her home in stages. Then I began sneaking inside her building after her. Once she had entered the front door, I would simply ring all the names. If no one buzzed me in automatically, I would mutter something about being from DHL, after all, there was always someone waiting for a package from Zalando. Once inside, I stood perfectly still at the bottom of the stairs and counted how many steps she took before I heard the keys and she opened her door. If she lived in the vorderhaus, I would then remember to only ring the buzzer of those in the hinterhaus in order to prevent any of her direct neighbors curiously coming out into the stairs. The next time I came back, I waited on the floor above her landing and peered around the banister when she came home. She had no flat mates and she never locked the door once she was inside. I could hear her switching on the TV before taking a post-work shower. You can learn a lot simply from standing in silence. Her flat had those old, double doors with shallow locks, which, with a strong enough push, could easily be shoved open with your bare hands. From across the street, I watched her flat until her lights went out. Her weekly habits were the gold-standard of mediocre routines. The few exceptions in her schedule were just as unremarkable as her usual banal events. I once stalked her and a friend for one entire Friday evening. They had vodka and laughed like

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they were drunker than they actually were. Whenever one of them was left alone, they buried their face in an iPhone. Several different groups of guys attempted chatting up the pair, but they were having none of it, and mocked every twenty-year-old douchebag that came along. By 3am, she caught a taxi, while I followed in another cab. No need to incriminate myself with the cliché of, “*Follow that car!*” There’s nothing suspicious about someone who already knows where he’s going. And yet, I didn’t even exist as far as she was concerned. I was just another incidental background character passing by in the public arena of mundane insignificance.

That afternoon, while I followed her from the U Bahn, I knew that her schedule was set, and therefore, I knew exactly when she’d be home, and while she took her evening shower, I knew that she would be completely vulnerable. I was walking right beside her, as she turned into the restaurant. Continuing down the footpath, I could smell her perfume, but behaved as though I hadn’t registered her as anything more than a passing obstacle.

I didn’t really know the couple who lived on the top floor, and I wasn’t sure if it was really meant to be called a penthouse, but once I entered, the place lived up to the title. The lounge was wide and high, and matched with flat, rectangular furniture and an abundance of modern art on massive canvases. No one was there to greet me, but I heard voices coming from a huge balcony. Pausing in the middle of the polished concrete floor, I turned to a laptop connected to the sound-system. Ignoring the bland as fuck playlist, I hit Electric Six, *Drone Strikes*, and cracked it all the way up! Stepping out onto the balcony with the backing of the drums, everyone looked up from their trivial dribble of polite conversation, as I shook hands with whoever I came across.

“Bruce! So glad you made it,” Jan, the gray-haired host smiled, gesturing to a table of whiskey and wine. “Please, help yourself. There’s plenty leftovers from the grill.”

The dozen or so guests appeared as though they spent most weekends on multimillion-dollar yachts in the Mediterranean next to cocaine-colored beaches. The guys wore Ralph Lauren Polo-shirts, Lacoste loafers, and Tom Ford sunglasses. The girls dressed in even less but with much more expensive labels.

“What took you so long?” asked Yumi, my half-Japanese friend. She was my only actual connection to this group. “Are you ever on time for anything?”

“Hey, I’ve been camped outside on the fucking street since last night!

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Trying to make sure I'd be on fucking time. But god damn it, once I stepped foot in that fucking entrance, I got lost as shit! It's like a fucking maze of glass and mirrors down there! And maybe you're unaware, but I'm easily mesmerized by any side-on view of my own warped fucking head. Seriously, have you seen the shape of my skull?! I'm fucking sure my mother sneezed while giving birth!"

"Jesus!" Hannah, Jan's girlfriend gasped. "Thought I recognized that voice."

"I mean, come on. We all know what it's like when a girl sneezes while you're fucking her. POP! And she shits your dick out as if she'd just prolapsed her entire fucking uterus! Come on, don't look at me like that! You know what I mean. Oh, yes. Yes, you do. I see you nodding your head back there. She might not look like she's got a six-pack under that tiny dress, but when she sneezes, BOOM! That's the kind of core-strength that fucking Bruce Lee summoned when he did those two-finger pushups. Now just image that same fucking pressure crushing down on a new born baby's skull! Ah, it's fucking horrific! And here, look at this deformed skull presented before you. I'm no PT Barnum, but even I'd point and scream, back to the circus, you fucking freak! Get in your fucking cage! But you know, at least I'll always have that one consolation. That I don't have to look at myself. It's a blessing in disguise. A hideous fucking disguise at that!"

"What the fuck is wrong with you?!" another guy laughed, while spilling his drink.

"Hey, what can I say," I sneered. "I'm a product of the great vaginal-hammer of doom!"

"Oh, Christ!" Hannah looked genuinely sickened. "Please. Really."

"Yeah, well. I mean, shit. This place looks like some prime fucking real estate, man. But what the fuck kind of entrance is that surrealist fucking nightmare?! Jesus, I mean there's minimalism, and then there's designers just not giving two fucks! Don't get me wrong, you've done alright for yourself, but maybe, just maybe, some day you'll live in a place with solid gold fucking walls. Then, just then, maybe we'll know that finally, at long last, after everything, you've really fucking made it big. But till then, fuck, I don't know how you stand living in such fucking squalor."

The host chuckled, a few then burst into that fake group-laughter, and others had a look of incredulity. Yumi was giggling as she finally gave me a welcoming hug and led me to the kitchen. Opening the huge fridge, she handed over a jug of fresh orange juice, saying, "Jesus, it was like a funeral

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here before you arrived. Everyone was just on their phones. Thanks for coming.”

“The fuck are you talking about?” I asked, scowling at the blender on the counter top.

Opening a seamless cupboard, Yumi handed me a glass. “They’re all Jan’s colleges, and he only talks business when they’re around. And their girlfriends don’t want anything to do with me.”

“I love parties like these.”

“Why the fuck would you?!”

“You’ll never see any of them again, so who gives a fuck what you say.”

“Actually, thought you could talk to Jan about your art.”

I smiled and clenched my jaw as I poured the orange juice.

“He’s big into buying works from all around the world.”

The juice was fucking spectacular.

“I think, if you approach him in the right way, he might really love what you’re doing.”

It was a big kitchen, simplicity was all the rage, and not a speck of dust in sight.

“So? Will you? Tell him about your stuff,” Yumi asked, tilting her head, trying to catch my attention, as I admired the view over the sunny rooftops. “Bruce? Are you listening? Could be a great opportunity for you.”

“Fill her up,” I smiled, holding out my glass. “And let’s go do this.”

Sipping on that pulpy sweetness, I stepped back onto the balcony and patted Jan on the back, “Really admire how you’ve compensated for the lack of character in your interior design, with an exceptional collection of modern art. What’s it worth?”

“Which piece?”

“All of it.”

Jan pouted and pretended to think about the sum.

“While you’re calculating the inflation, here’s an easier question,” I smiled, nodding toward a fat guy smoking a thin cigar. “Which is your favorite artist?”

“Ah, well.” Jan looked at Hannah, who was less than half his age. She was also friends with Mara, but not with Yumi. The friends of my friends were also my fucking enemy.

“Hey, no problem. Don’t worry about it,” I said, grinning at Yumi and Hannah. “I forget the names of artists all the time. So, which is your favorite piece, then?”



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“I love the photo series above the bath,” Hannah coolly stated. “Love noir films. That series always reminds me of winter in Paris.”

“Did you buy it?” I asked.

She suddenly looked angry.

“Is that why you bought the series?” I said, turning back to Jan. “Does it remind you of Paris?”

“They’re an investment.”

“There you go,” I smiled, while rubbing Yumi’s belly next to me.

“I don’t get it,” she frowned. “What’s your point?”

“Saw an interview recently with a producer from LA. He was saying how often he’s confronted by young actors wanting to know how they can make big bucks in the business. He then got this self-righteous look of disgust on his face,” I paused, and squinted under my sunglasses as I took a sip of my juice. “He tells these kids that they’re doing it for the wrong reason if it’s only about the cash.”

“And?” Yumi asked.

“There’s a symbiotic relationship that investors and creators must maintain,” I said, looking at Hannah. “Investors don’t give a fuck about art or the artist. They only care about the returns. The bottom-line. The future fucking profit.”

The man of the house gave a subtle shrug of acknowledgment.

“The stereotype of the starving artist doing it for the love of his art, is a perfect reinforcing formula, so that the money-men can take advantage of those in a weaker position. And the moment an artist wants more than the bare minimum, he’s scorned, branded as a sell-out, and shunned for his sudden lack of talent.”

“You sound like a communist,” another background voice squeaked.

“Fuck the proletariat!” I sneered, and the fat guy behind his cigar smoke giggled in agreement. “Fuck the idiot artist who thinks anyone else ever fucking understands what the fuck he’s doing! Artistic exploitation, religious plagiarism, and cultural appropriation is fucking unavoidable in any kind of interconnected, dare I fucking say it, ‘intersectional’ fucking civilization!”

“That’s rich,” Hannah quipped. “Coming from an artist! What about all those struggling to get by on their creativity? You can’t just say, fuck the artists and all their efforts! They deserve a fair reimbursement for their hard work!”

“If you say so,” I said, turning my head, “But what you think, Jan?”

“Ah, you know,” he squirmed, and then laughed, “It’s a risk, just like any

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business deal.”

“But would you risk investing in something that you knew from the get-go wasn’t even slightly commercially viable?” I asked, while staring directly at Yumi. “Something that’s been proven to have a non-existent target audience.”

“Like with Hollywood producers,” Jan replied, as he glanced away. “They wouldn’t spend money that they couldn’t make back at the Box Office. It’s basic math.”

“Exactly.” And I raised my glass at the anxiety behind Hannah’s eyes. I could see precisely how much she was dying to call me a fucking asshole, like I’m sure she always did behind my back. So, I quickly added fuel to the fire, “Which is it, Jan? Tell us, which is your favorite piece in your private collection? You do have one, don’t you?”

### THE CONFRONTATION

On the following Friday, I walked down a sunny street in a dismal district of Wedding. There was a large cardboard box in my hands, and I wore a brown cap with matching overalls. It was going on for 1pm, when I pressed the doorbell. There was no one around while I waited, staring patiently at the list of names and buttons. A few seconds later, the front door buzzed, and I stepped inside. I had no intention of heading out to the hinterhaus to whoever had just let me in. Instead, I went straight up the first staircase to the first-floor. The place was as dilapidated as most cheap apartment buildings were in the area. Standing on the landing, I listened to the birds in the courtyard, when suddenly a door opened one level above! Adapting, I casually continued up the stairs. An old Turkish woman in a shawl muttered something, as I passed her on the way. Returning to the first-floor landing, I immediately pressed the doorbell.

I had spent the morning at the gym before collecting my equipment from my basement. With Greenleaf, *Stray Bullit Woman*, playing in my flat, I prepared my duffel bag. The chopping-block, dovetail saw, and scissors were placed inside, along with several new pairs of rubber gloves, plastic rubbish bags, and a big role of duct-tape. I then went through my selection of workman overalls and had decided for brown today. Initially, I’d thought that Germans color-coordinated their labor force. Generally speaking: red overalls were for electricians, black for builders, white for painters, blue for cleaners, yellow for post, orange for garbage-men, and brown for whatever the fuck. However, I’d seen many exceptions, including myself. After neatly

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packing the overalls in the duffel bag, I lay a thick yellow A4 envelope on top. I then sat at my desk and opened Photoshop, I had already deleted the address in Kreuzberg, and now printed out another fake DHL sticker with the current address in Wedding. The name on the sticker was random, just in case the subject who answered the door wasn't alone, then I could simply say that I had the wrong flat and abort. Though, so far, that situation had never occurred.

After that, I went to the studio for the morning, working on an educational animation for a museum. Two hours later, I told my director that I soon had an appointment at the doctor and needed to take the afternoon off. It was a lie, but a lie that was covered by the fact that I had already planned to spend the day at the pool with friends. If it was ever asked where I was, and the doctor-excuse was debunked, I could then confess that I'd been with friends who would back up my story with Instagram evidence. Not that such fucking alibis were ever fucking needed. Only jealous girlfriends double-checked my whereabouts. They trained me well in covering my tracks. Some of the best lies I've ever told were when I've said nothing at all but implied that which they'd already assumed.

I left my phone at home, and picked up my duffel bag along with a folded flat cardboard box. After the first train, I pulled on the overalls and cap. Once I left the next train, I stepped onto a quiet, side street where I stretched open the cardboard into a large postage box. It was the perfect size to fit the duffel bag. Removing the roll of duct-tape, I stuffed it into a side-pocket on my right leg.

So, while waiting on the first-floor landing, I pressed the doorbell again. She should be home. Unless she had suddenly swapped shifts with someone at her bakery. But then I heard bare feet upon wooden floorboards. The light behind the peephole flickered, and I held up the decoy-box in front of my chest. The door-chain was pulled back before a blurred-eyed, dirty-blond looked up through the open door. She was dressed in nothing but a loose white t-shirt. Smiling, I held out the package as she rubbed her eyes. I saw and heard no one else inside. She seemed glad of the delivery, but then shook her head once she realized the name on the decoy-box wasn't hers.

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Less than an hour later, while listening to Butthole Surfers, *The Shame Of Life*, I was walking toward the Haubentaucher pool, wearing my black cowboy hat, Adidas shorts, and a Hawaiian shirt. Better late than never. It was truly the first scorcher of spring, and I put on my cheesiest grin, so that

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the bouncer at the front gate would kindly let me in. It was an outdoor pool surrounded by silicon tits, clenched six-packs, and duck-faces all day long. I wasn't one of these beautiful people, but I also wasn't anymore welcomed down on the corner at the death-metal bar. The dirty-blonde hadn't welcomed me in either, yet I could still feel her skin upon my palms.

Not long after I had joined the girls at the poolside, another friend arrived. She was a talented digital artist whose asshole I'd broken on her birthday five years ago. And it appeared as though her rectum was still suffering, as she seemed uncomfortable making her way through the crowded, open-air space. "I hate these fucking people! Can't stand them! Seriously, what's going on? Where the fuck did all these creeps come from? These are Mitte people!"

"We were here just last week!" I laughed, sitting next to her as she nervously rolled a cigarette. "This was your idea!"

"Yeah, but it was empty last week!" she shook her head, occasionally peeking up from her tobacco. "I really can't stay here. This isn't what I was expecting!"

"Why?"

"Just look at these assholes! Perfect bodies with perfect makeup! The girls sitting on the edge of the pool haven't even gotten their hair wet! It's a big show! And look! Everyone's taking selfies all the time! It's fucking disgusting! Seriously, I hate these people! Grumpy bitches judging everyone else. While those gross Arab guys in their gold chains, Jesus, look! They're just perverting on the girls. God, it's not even funny, Bruce! These are exactly the kind of people I really, honestly fucking hate!"

"What are they doing that's any different to any other subculture? Self-obsessed, selfie-takers. Sounds like everyone I know."

"My friends don't have any fucking plastic surgery! Christ, look at the lips on that!"

"Says the girl with her entire arm covered in tattoos."

"That's not the same fucking thing!"

"One person's body modification is another's sacrilege."

"This is art! Their plastic faces are just fucking ugly!"

"Do you really think they believe that? When they sneer at your tattoos, do you actually think they're faking their own revulsion toward you?"

"Thanks, Bruce!"

"All depends where you're sitting. You're mocking them for their self-centered criticism of others, while you're doing the exact same thing to them."

"No, that's not what I'm doing! It's not the same thing! You just don't get

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it! These people are fake as fuck! My body-art is art!”

“How do you know they’re all fake? Have you spoken to any of them?”

“Why are you being such a cunt, Bruce!”

“What are you trying to say?”

“Gross people like this don’t belong in my neighborhood!”

“Wow,” I grinned. “Who said apartheid was dead.”

“Stop it!” she snapped. “I don’t go to the Kudamm, because I hate the fucking people in that area! So, why the fuck are they invading my space?! I hate it!”

“Ah, there it is,” I said, taking off my cowboy hat and waving at some other friends as they arrived at the pool. “There’s that closet, territorial-bigotry that Berlin’s famous for!”

“You don’t fucking get it! But I can’t, I can’t stay here!”

After taking my second retarded attempt at a swim, I pulled on my cowboy hat and joined those Kardashian-like clones on the edge of the pool. What a fucking lovely way to waste a day. The water was a vivid cyan, with palm trees overhead, and the bright sapphire sky beyond the ruined brick walls of this once abandoned warehouse. The humans that swarmed about the water were of every color, while their skimpy bathing suits left nothing to my penetrating imagination. Their skin held no secrets from me. I could see the muscles, fat, breast implants, veins, bones, tendons, internal organs, and the very shit in their bowels. Meat on display. Walking, talking meat-insects. If I focused on an individual it was like tuning into a radio station, and after listening to their personal fears and priorities, eventually they revealed that their worldview was just as superficial and meaningless as everyone else’s. Once I allowed myself to understand their rationalizations, I could fall in love with even the most obnoxious female. When I humanize my enemies, it makes their suffering that much more delicious when I betray them. But no. I’d never hurt the ones I loved. Not really hurt them. Not murder them at least. No matter how much I wanted to. Even if I dreamed about their desecration on a daily basis. No. But there were plenty of other replaceable females to project my blood-lust upon. Keep the delusion alive by worshiping the goddess as a fucking whore. Or was the whore a goddess? Either way, they were both meat. Nothing could alter the fact that they’d all end up cold, dead, and cut into pieces! Sitting with my legs swaying in the pool, I ran my hands through the cool water. Feeling the liquid between my long fingers, I opened both hands as I stared at my palms. We’re all just alimentary canals with appendages and a fuck-ton of emotional baggage.

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Mara then asked if I wanted to go for ice cream.

“Fuck yes!”

That evening we met Yumi in Hackescher Markt at a little Italian restaurant in the twilight breeze. After dinner, we took a walk and met my pregnant ex who lived nearby. While my two exes chatted, Yumi and I followed, as she whispered, “How’s this for you?”

“How’s what?”

“Being in this kind of situation.”

“What kind?”

“You know.”

“You mean taking a walk without any underpants?”

“I mean taking a walk with two old girlfriends who seem like best friends. While you and I, you know. And they even know about our history.”

“Ah, this is nothing. After the Kyuss gig, I was on the train with three girls that I was having simultaneous affairs with. I thought my smirk would give the game away. None of them knew about each other. But this. You guys all know about each other. There’s no secret. So, meh.”

“How do you do it?”

“Do it? You mean, how do I put my penis in a vagina?”

“How you’re still friends with all your exes!”

“What are you talking about?! I’m fucking charming!”

“Seeing anyone new?”

“Had an opportunity on Mayday with Commi-Star.”

“How the fuck did you manage that?”

“We’ve had this flirting thing for years now, and then on Mayday she invited me to a party in Kreuzberg. But they were all just sitting around, so I fucked off into the thick of it on the streets, and she tagged along. Which was great actually. She teased the shit out of riot cops, and we danced with the Turks. Was fun. She then got us into a private party at Prinzival where the vodka and ecstasy was on the house. There, she actually asked your ex how to get into my pants!”

“She’s really into you!”

“Always was.”

“Why haven’t you fucked her already?”

“Don’t know.”

“She’s pretty cheeky. Probably lots of fun.”

“Yeah, maybe. But still.”

“Have you even made out with her?”

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“After we left the bar, she dragged me into some hip-hop mosh pit, and she went to kiss me. But I don’t know. I mean, yeah, we made out, but I don’t know. I wasn’t into it.”

“You’re kidding.”

“Hey, at that point the alcohol and ecstasy was kicking in, and you know, you could see it in her eyes.”

“Don’t like drunk girls?”

“Drunk, that’s one thing. But a hot-sloppy-mess, that’s something else. We ended up down by Moritzplatz, where twenty riot cops were surrounding some punk sitting on the pavement. And then she decided to get involved. Kept asking what was going on. My patience was already running on fumes, so I stood back and watched her get up in the face of the cops. More arrived in vans, so I calmly pulled her out of there. I was all smiles and friendly nods at the cops. But she kept whining about how unfair the situation was, and kept talking shit to the cops. They just ignored her. So, she fucking flipped on me, and got all fucking weird and aggressive. Demanding that I fuck her right there. Yelling that I had to rape her in front of the cops. You would not believe how fucking unimpressed I was! And then she suddenly wanted me to slap her. Now just keep in mind that there were twenty fucking riot cops standing literally right next to us, as close as you are now, and she’s screaming at me to fucking slap her! Yeah, and then she fucking slapped me right in the face!”

“Jesus!”

“So, I dumped her scarf, that I was carrying, and walked the fuck away.”

“What? You just left her there?”

“No one fucking hits me with impunity.”

“But you love violence!”

I glanced suspiciously at Yumi.

“I mean, you’re not a violent person, but your art! And you looked like a psycho when we were having sex.”

“It’s a shame too.”

“What is?”

“Says she loves anal.”

“Sounds like a match made in heaven!”

“Yeah, but no.”

“But it’s you! You’re Bruce!”

“Ah, there’s the rub. She knows me!”

“So?”

“I’m not into chicks who already know who I am.”

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“We knew each other.”

“For all of, what, two days before we fucked?”

“What about Mara? You knew her for years.”

“And look how well that turned out.”

“But you’ll fuck anything!”

“Don’t insult yourself.”

“But you’re Bruce!”

“Exactly my point. You have this constructed idea about who I am. New people aren’t burdened with all those expectations and crap based on my supposed reputation. It’s freeing to fuck strangers.”

“Have you seen the art of Francis Bacon?”

“You mean Sir Francis Bacon, the philosopher?”

“The painter.”

“Then no.”

“You’d really like his work. Twisted bodies and mangled faces.”

“Why would I be into that sort fucking depravity?”

“Oh, I’m sorry. I thought I was talking to Bruce. The guy who draws himself fucking the throat of a headless girl.”

“Yeah, but come on, that’s innocent!”

“Innocent as Bacon.”

“I love pork!”

“Shut up, dick!”

“You’re obsessed with my penis.”

“Bacon was this total masochistic. Loved to be abused. Two of his lovers committed suicide. Looking at his life, it’s easy to see where all his violent inspiration came from. But with you, I can’t tell where you get your ideas from. You’re like the complete opposite of what’s in your art.”

“I’ll take that as a compliment.”

“What would you have done if Commi-Star kept slapping you?”

“I had a dream recently, that I was getting it on with Kato, the Steampunk porn-star. Except when I got her naked, I found that her vagina and anus had swapped places. You tell me what the fuck that means. And then, tell me, where do you think I fucked her?”

“Oh, Christ. Where’s Freud when we need him?”

## THE EXECUTION

On Wednesday evening, a Pakistani girl with big, curly hair, was leaving her



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flat, just as I was coming up the stairs. She briefly smiled at me while distracted by her phone. The moment was clear. I slammed the decoy-box into her back, driving her straight through the closing door and into her darkened flat! Using my momentum, I pinned her against a wall as I slammed the door shut. She squealed, as I applied the leverage of my height and forced her to the floor. Straddling her, I sat on top, tucking both of her arms under my knees, before I slapped her silent! Her black hair flared out from the impact, before my hands clamped around her throat and squeezed while leaning the rest of my body-weight down on her esophagus. Veins bulged around her eyebrows as her pretty face immediately turned maroon. Her feet thrashed, but my legs restrained her best efforts. Choking a throat was like grabbing your own thigh, your fingers don't really sink in that deep, but I could already see the blood in her frantic expression begin to sour. Her feeble grunts became feral, and her squirming limbs merely slapped upon the floor. Impatient, I pressed even harder down with a growing feeling of *get-on-with-it-and-die-already-I-have-things-to-do!* Her arms then went limp and she no longer looked back.

Being well aware of how the body can revive itself, with even the shallowest of heart rates, I grabbed the roll of duct-tape from my pocket, and warped it thickly around her mouth and nose, sealing off her airways. Rolling her over, I then bound her wrists and ankles together behind her back.

It was after 9pm, but the dim light from outside was enough for me to make out the color of her non-responsive pupils as I lay on my side next to her and counted the minutes. She was beautiful. They always were. I had impeccable taste. Moving closer, I rested the side of my head against her chest, listening for signs of a pulse.

After ten minutes of silence, I made sure the door was locked, and then closed the blinds over that familiar Friedrichshain view. Kneeling next to the dead girl, I ripped the duct-tape off, before carefully stripping her naked. I was right, she had magnificent hips! Dumping her clothes on the sofa, I opened the decoy-box and plucked out the large yellow envelope from my duffel bag. Sitting on her belly, I recalled an online conversation I had had after my wasted trip to the South of France. Amelia claimed that she had been intimidated by the sexual content of my art. I had grit my teeth and asked if she was accusing me of being a rapist?! She then fumbled and tried to apologize, yet didn't actually. So, I pulled out a life-size portrait of Amelia's face from the envelope, and duct-taped it over the dead girl's face. I'm not sick. I know exactly how it came to this. With a black marker, I then drew a sigil across Amelia's forehead. It's not rape if they're already fucking dead, and you're

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thinking of somebody else. IT'S SWEET, SWEET UNREQUITED-NECRO-PROJECTIVE-SEX-MAGICK, MOTHERFUCKER!

I was always rather peckish after taking care of business. Heading to the messy kitchen, I fired up the stove, threw a pan on with some butter, and then cut a chunk of meat out the girl's left leg and fried that fucker up. I've really been getting into Deja Voodoo lately, so I plugged my MP3 player into the stereo, and I did a little Elvis dance to their immortal song, *Beers*. While chewing on that well-salted, human-schnitzel, I stood naked above the spread-eagle body. Amelia's portrait was still staring backing at me. She had moved to French Polynesia this week. I'm not trying to sound paranoid, but part of me reckoned that she was looking to move as far away from me as physically possible. But that's crazy talk! She's just a young adult leaving home for the first time and stretching her wings. It's got nothing at all to do with me. Besides, I'm charming! I then tore up the photo of Amelia and ate it one piece at a time. Washing down the taste of meat and paper with a cool can of Mountain Dew from the fridge. Delicious!

That left me just enough time to get home, change into my evening suit, and then meet my date at the La Fête Fatale.

Machine Gun Fellatio, *Mutha Fukka on a Motorcycle*, put a smirk on my face as I approached the Bassy club while reaching into my back pockets. I had received a text from my date, saying that she was sitting outside, waiting for me. Inevitably, I'm going to be late to my own fucking funeral. Marching up to a group of costumed freaks smoking outside the front door, I grinned and tossed two hands-full of confetti over the redhead's shock and delight! Remember kids, first impression fucking matter! Make them count! Trudka was a showgirl who I'd briefly flirted with on Instagram, before inviting her out to see some live burlesque. Naturally the conversation began with the subject of dancing. Her roots were in ballet. I talked about my lessons in boogie. And she spoke about how her job sent her traveling around the whole country. From her pics, she was that classic kind of Las Vegas showgirl, with a troop of five, dolled-up in extravagant feathers of the gaudiest colors.

"Speaking of trolls!" a fat, opera singer then stated, as she joined the guests cuing in front of us. "Here's the biggest troll of them all!"

"No, no, no. I retired, graduated, and evolved into a goblin," I replied, rising to greet her and her entourage. "An ass-goblin!"

One of the hosts then called out my name from the door, just as my old friend Burroughs came out for a pre-show cigarette. He was dressed in

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mirror-ball hot-pants, enormous platform boots, and a snakeskin corset. As I introduced him to Trudka, she recognized that his makeup was based on that from *Black Swan*. I should have known that! What kind of Natalie Portman stalker do I think I am! Being part of the show, Burroughs confessed his actual costume was still in the dressing-room, it was a surprise waiting for the big reveal on stage. Though, he hinted that it was inspired by George Michael's video for, *Too Funky*.

While the girls at the door found our names on the guest-list, someone else grabbed my shoulder from behind. A smile masked my lack of initial recognition. At parties like these, with gender-bender themes and costume contests, they always left you dumbstruck while you attempted to place the voice of an unidentifiable friend. Then it hit me. It was Gabi! The cunt who'd stood me up the day after I'd returned from Romania, and then stood me up a second time just last week! Patting her on the side of her face, I had nothing to say as I spotted her older sister behind. So, I walked into the club with my hands on my date's hips.

After getting drinks, I introduced Trudka to some of the performers, the DJ, and other friends, while I continued tossing confetti over everyone. We then had our photo taken by the professionals. However, it soon became apparent, that once again, my reputation was the topic of conversation with those who chatted with my date. Smiling at their mockery, I excused myself and went to get some air before the show. Trudka soon joined me outside. A good sign. There, we became part of a group-conversation about the worst travel experiences. Trudka told of having all of her bags stolen while in Poland, and I mentioned my disgust toward India, and she was fascinated. Years ago, I heard someone say, *"If you tell a girl one unusual story, they'll say that was interesting. But if you tell them ten unusual things, they'll say that you're interesting."*

Once the show began, I found the voluptuous Commie-star standing right behind me, decked out in top-hat and tails, and without any pants. I blessed her with confetti, kissed her cheeks, and then spotted Gabi, her sister, and their dates just to my left in the crowd. I've seen more than my fair share of burlesque performances, and I've found the spectacle of onstage-sequins less entertaining than keeping track of the multiple females-of-interest in the audience.

During the intermission, I made a b-line for the exit from that smoky sauna. While Trudka and I were chatting with one of the drag-queens next to the front door, this giant goth chick and her subservient metal-head boyfriend

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stepped right into the center of our conversation and started drooling over the performer's elaborate sailor costume. The lumbering goth was so amphetamine-enthusiastic, that she answered her own questions before anyone else could. She had literally just met us, and yet demanded to know sexually intimate details about everyone, even though she paid little attention to anything answered. The drag-queen then rolled his eyes over to me as the bloated goth began ridiculing men in general, before taunting me for how conservative I was dressed.

"Honey, before you go any further," the drag-queen stated. "I'm a heterosexual husband of two."

"Oh, darling, I'm heterosexual as well!" the bovine goth reassured with shotgun-like laughter that instantly made me join in, laughing at her hideous fucking tone. "You need to keep your mind open and be willing to try absolutely everything!"

"So, then, you're not hetero," I said, grinning toward my quietly listening date.

"I just said that I was," the thundering goth grunted, running her index-finger down my black tie. "A proud heterosexual woman and not afraid of trying anything new!"

"Anything? Anything at all?"

"Anything at all! I'll never put any limits on my sexuality."

"So, you're into raping animals, genital-mutilation, and fucking kids?"

"What?!"

"Come on. You know, forcing yourself onto non-human species, brutalizing sexual organs, and even exploiting children for your own sexual gratification."

"What the fuck?! Fuck no!"

"Then you're neither open minded nor into trying anything!"

"You're missing the point!"

"What part of 'ANYTHING' don't you fucking understand?!"

That ended the conversation with an echo of uncomfortable laughter as the buffalo goth and her bitch-boy shuffled off down the street.

"Okay," Trudka said, with a smile. "So, that's what your friends were talking about."

Directly after the second act of the show, my young date had to leave as she had rehearsals early in the morning. The moment I waved down a taxi and bid Trudka goodnight, I looked straight into the sly eyes of little Gabi. She was standing in another group outside the club. I pointed at her, indicating

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that she smelt terrible! Her horrified expression, coupled with her immediate amusement, confirmed my suspicions. I gestured for her to come over. And she did.

“So, what’s the deal?” I asked. “Why do you keep cancelling on me?”

“You know!” she giggled, grabbing my arm.

“No. I don’t know. That’s why I’m asking.”

“You’re Bruce! Everyone knows about you!”

“The fuck is that supposed to mean?”

“You know!”

“Whatever you heard, I’m telling you, I’m fucking innocent!”

“I don’t think so.”

“My honor!”

“You’re a scary guy.”

“Based on what exactly? We’ve only met once before, three fucking years ago!”

“Yeah, I know! But you know. I’ve seen your pictures!”

“Pictures?” At that point, I didn’t know if she meant photos of me or my art. “Have you been stalking me?”

“I’m just a little girl from the country, and you’re, you know!” Gabi said eagerly, until she glanced back at her sister and the other two guys. Grabbing my wrist, she then pulled me into the club. “Come on! Let’s have shots!”

I arrived with one girl, and now another wouldn’t let me leave. And don’t you love it when you’re at the bar where an old buddy is telling you about his motorbike tour, but you’re not listening to a single word because your eye-fucking the shit out of the younger sister of a chick who fucking hates your guts. Gabi then handed me a shot of vodka. I respectfully declined, to her confusion. However, she got over the fact that I didn’t drink alcohol faster than most, and said that next time she would remember. How optimistic of her!

“Why don’t you drink?” she asked, as I put my hands around her waist and pulled her slender body up against mine. She had absolutely no tits but made up for it with perfect blowjob-lips. However, her watchful sister wasn’t going to give us a moments rest. “Tell me. Please. Why won’t you join us?”

“For the same reason I don’t drive,” I said with a smirk, as my erection wanted deep inside this inebriated meat. “One momentary lapse of concentration and I might accidentally fucking kill someone.”

## THE CONSEQUENCE

## Laughter And Screams

On Saturday morning, while still in Charlottenberg, I walked to the riverside east of the Schloss. There was no one else around in that nice neighborhood, as I emptied another rubbished bag of bones into the quiet waters. Once I shook out the last fragments, I also threw a set of keys into the river. Kneeling, I stared into my duffel bag at the severed head of the white-haired waitress from the Impala cafe. She'd been a fucking fine piece of ass, and I'd spooned with her dead meat all night. The cuddliest corpse in town. But now look at her. A pasty face wrapped in plastic with wet hair clinging to purple lips. Glancing around the wide streets, I wondered how many people were sleeping in behind closed doors and oblivious to my little secret. My trophy.

Zippering up the duffel bag, I pulled out my headphone plugs, suddenly wanting to hear some Hey Satan, *Fallon City Messiah*, and walked away feeling fucking chipper. Yet, I knew that this recent upbeat mood wouldn't last much longer. After my shit time in Romania, this was obviously my brain-chemistry balancing itself. The good times come and they go. Or maybe my mood was due to all the beautiful weather that had finally come to town. Scanning the bright apartment buildings on my way to the Sbahn station, I walked by a woman with her child, as she said to him, "The thing is, this is our life."

As those worlds sunk in, I had one of those random moments of clarity. This was Germany! What the fuck was I doing here?! It's been twelve-fucking-years! Of all the places in the fucking world, how am I still in Berlin?! I remembered when I was a kid, asking myself the inane question of, why was I born at this time and in this body? But what fucking choice do any of us have?! We are what the world molds us into. There is no changing the great indifference of the universe. I merely wish to better understand the environment, so that I may more efficiently navigate the terrain, and continue getting away with murder in board daylight!

Once I made it back to my flat, I went straight to the basement, unlocked my private storage unit, and then locked myself inside. There was a tiny spider-web-covered window above my head at ground level. It hardly lit anything, but I didn't need the light. The walls were the brick foundations of the apartment building. Built in 1908, it had survived the Second World War, and was then renovated in 1993 after the wall came down. Ever since 2005, this place had been home to my various developments in depravity. I sometimes wondered if the original occupants had had their door kicked in by Nazi soldiers before being dragged off to some death camp. But then again, perhaps the very Nazis who worked at the camps once lived here too.

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Who knows what saints and sinner sleep in your bed and walk the very street that you lived on. The door to the unit was made of wooden fencing material with inch-wide gaps. Privacy hadn't been taken into consideration when the East German laborers had subdivided the basement. So, after covering the door with an old black sheet, I moved aside the few empty boxes. It was silent down there. Quiet and cool. I hardly ever saw anyone else that lived in my building, and never once ran into another person while I was in the basement. Still, I listened. Making sure that I was alone with my duffel bag. Then, I grabbed the wall below the tiny window and pulled sideways before outward. The fake section of brick came away slowly and revealed a hidden compartment, I had dug it out of the soil years ago as a shrine to a beloved anal-whore. Now it was a mausoleum for the desecrated. Picking up an empty, bucket-sized glass jar, I removed the lid. I then opened the rubbish bag and extracted the new girl's decapitated head. Kissing her one last time, I placed her within the glass. While filling the jar with turps, I watched her vacant eyes slowly submerge until my trophy was completely soaked. I'd given up on sealing the lids with candle wax years ago, nothing could keep in the smell of turps, but down there it didn't matter. Still, I stretched a few lengths of black duct-tape about the rim. Using the marker from the yellow envelope, I wrote the final sigil in the sequence on the top of the jar. Placing the heavy glass back into the darkened recess, I knelt back before that throne of five heads, and I knew that my great work was good.

While listening to the laughter and screams from Fail Army videos in my flat, I opened a new envelope from Captain Grant. Briefly scanning the three pages of elegant handwriting, I tossed the letter on the pile of his other correspondence. I didn't feel like indulging in Grant's occult conspiracies, so I opened Twitter instead. There, I found that the *ACQUIT* illustration I had drawn last night of Count Dankula, had become a little bit of hit. Dankula himself seemed to appreciate the sentiment and made it his profile pic. The trial for his Nazi-pug joke was yet another example of how easily anyone could be held accountable for a criminal action if those in power focused enough attention on you. We're all guilty of some atrocity that we personally deem as normal.

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Later, after coffee and cake in the sun with Mara and Hannah, I ran into a tattooist who I kind of vaguely knew. Dennis was a friend of friend's friend. A big dude, real polite, and softly spoken. I was already concerned about getting sun burnt from sitting outside at the cafe for the last two hours, so we

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walked and talked.

“Green tea?” Dennis offered from his kitchen, when suddenly his wife and teenage step-son began screaming at each other in another room.

“Fuck, no thanks,” I winced. “Not into reheated piss.”

A door slammed shut and we both shuddered as his wife slumped against the fridge. “He won’t listen to me! I don’t know what the fuck I’m doing wrong!”

With a coy smirk, I enjoyed her distraught posture like I was sniffing a bouquet of roses.

“What’s the problem this time?” Dennis asked hesitantly, though keeping his back to his partner.

“He’s just not listening!”

“What about?”

“Everything I say!”

Dennis leaned over the sink. “What do you want to do, then?”

“Why can’t you do something?! Why are you always so fucking passive! You’re part of this fucking family! Fucking act like it for once!”

“Hey, what’s the use? He never listens to a single fucking word out of my mouth!”

“What kind of attitude is that?!”

“You’re his mother! I’m just the guy who married you! That makes my opinion worth less than dog shit!”

“Jesus Christ, Dennis! That’s real helpful!”

“Hey! I’m not the...” Dennis hunched his shoulders and glanced at my schadenfreude. “Bruce. What do you think?”

“It’s a Japanese joke. A way of mocking stupid foreigners.”

“What?!” both Canadian’s frowned at me.

“Green tea,” I shrugged. “The Japanese never actually drink the shit.”

Dennis shook his head.

“I don’t want him talking to my son, okay!”

“What else do you suggest?”

“He’s so fucking angry, he’ll never listen to anyone!”

“She’s right,” I nodded.

“Hey, Bruce. Come on, man. I’m telling you, he’ll listen to you. Everyone does,” Dennis smiled weakly. “Just have a go. Please, man.”

“No!” his wife stated.

“Got to respect the woman’s decision,” I added.

“Five minutes. That’s all I’m asking, man,” Dennis pleaded. “Last time



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he was like this, he tried running away. And hey, you know exactly what that shit leads to.”

“Look at him! He’s not the sort of person I want talking to my fucking son!”

“My honor!” I choked, while staring at the two tattooed thirty-year-olds.

“Well, I’m not even on his radar. And you’re not getting through to him. What harm could Bruce do? Seriously? What other fucking options are there?”

The frustrated mother stood with crossed arms and frantic eyes for a long time before she backed away.

Opening the door, I closed it behind and walked across that huge bedroom, passing the laptop with its speakers blasting out some generic Deutschpunk. Not even looking at the kid, I opened the balcony doors and let in some fresh air as I stepped outside. What a nice view they had over the desolate train tracks.

“The fuck are you?!” came a squeaky voice from back in the room. “You! Hey, you!”

Taking a seat on the deckchair, in my white singlet, black jeans, and Chucks, I pulled on my Wayfarers, and thought of that tiny village in the south of France. A little bit of sadness then fell over me. I’d never get to stalk Amelia there ever again. A shame. I had such plans.

“Hey! I’m talking to you!”

Looking up at the thirteen-year-old boy in camo pants, boots, and hoody, I eventually grew a toothy smile upon my hateful face.

“This is my personal fucking space, asshole! Get the fuck out of here!”

Not moving a muscle, I continued grinning at the kid, until I finally ran my tongue across my top teeth. The kid swallowed with an expression of utter disgust, and I watched him back away. He yanked his bedroom door open, but his mother was standing directly outside with her hands on her hips. Defiantly, the kid slammed the door in her face, and spun toward the balcony, just as I stepped inside and turned the music down a notch.

“The fuck do you want, huh?!”

“Listen kid—”

“I’m not a fucking kid! Now fuck off!”

I paused, watching the brat stomp about and kick his bed before dumping himself down on it.

“I’m fucking sick of listening to you old fucks with your same old fucking shit! Just fuck off!”

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“Tell you what. Let’s just pretend to talk for the next five minutes, and then I’ll get the fuck out of here.”

“You can’t fucking tell me anything I don’t already fucking know!”

Gazing across the bedroom walls, at the posters, flags, and political slogans, I sighed, wondering why the fuck I’d gotten involved. Was this shit really worth the hassle? But then again, Dennis told me to be myself. “So, you tried to run away from home?”

“What’s it you?!”

“What’s stopping you now?”

“My fucking mom!”

“How old are you, sixteen?” I flattered, and he instantly reciprocated by sitting up and looking pleased with his assumed maturity. “You’re old enough to fend for yourself. Why not, you know, discard all these Bourgeois trappings. See you’re a fan of Antifa. But how committed to the cause are you? What kind of fucking conviction have you really got?”

“Absolutely fucking committed! We have to all stand in solidarity against the fascist pigs ruining the entire fucking planet! There’s nothing I wouldn’t do!”

“When was the last time you ate meat?! How fucking pure are your goals?!”

Shrinking a fraction, he shook his head. “My fucking bitch mom, she forces me to.”

“What kind of protest against the systematic enslavement, butchery, and consumption of innocent fucking sentient beings is that?!” I shook my head and crossed my tattooed arms. “You’re either with the fucking animals all the way, or you’re just another human fucking murderer!”

The kid stared at the floor, tilting his head from side to side. “Fuck off.”

“Tell me. what’s your plan once you get the fuck out of this dump? You have a plan, don’t you? ‘Cause you know, the cops are going to be after your ass the moment you flee from your current incarceration. You’ve dealt with the authorities before, right? Of course, you have. They’re working for the state, and you know, they’re not on your fucking side! When they find you, they’ll fucking drag you off kicking and screaming. All your efforts won’t be worth jack shit once they get their fucking paws on you. You’re a big guy, but it only takes a couple of cops to physically lift you clean off the fucking ground. And then, you’re as good as cattle en route for the fucking slaughter house! It’s your mother who’ll call them. Your own fucking mother! You know what I’m saying, don’t you? You can’t fucking trust their kind! They

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don't give two fucks about your mental well-being or spiritual health. Don't fucking believe it when they belittle you like you're still a fucking baby! You're a fucking man! Accept no other treatment! If they won't respect you as a fucking self-reliant individual, then fuck them for their lack of the very morals that you hold sacred! You've known it for years. Most your age blindly accept the abuse of their intellect. But if you tolerate it now, you'll put up with it for the rest of your fucking life! Most never snap the fuck out of it and grow the fuck up! Adults behaving like fucking babies! That's what the government fucking wants you to become! Fuck your identity! Fuck your independence! Submit and become a grateful fucking maggot chewing on the diseased carcass of a dying empire! Is that what you want? Of course not! You know what you have to do. Fight for your fucking unique stance against a flood of clones leeching the fucking life right out of your fucking soul!"

In silence, the kid rubbed his left shoulder as he listened apprehensively.

"But I don't know what the fucking the deal is with these communist flags!" I sneered. "Where the fuck are your loyalties?"

"What the fuck is that supposed to mean?" the boy snorted, getting to his feet. "Just get the fuck out!"

"You'll probably have, at most, twelve-hours before your mother raises the alarm," I said, stepping up to the kid so that we stood side by side, as I scowled at the big red banners with their hammers and sickles. "The cops will need some bullshit justification for their reports. She'll probably use that tired cliché, that she's terrified you were abducted by organized human-traffickers. She'll fake some overly emotional reaction. Get all weepy and shit. Scream at the cops and demand they get their fat fucking thumbs out of their lazy fucking asses and do something to find you. Of course, she's only really crying 'cause she knows that she'll be the one held accountable for losing custody of you. Fucking typical selfish capitalists. You hear what I'm saying, don't you? You know, she doesn't actually give a fuck what really happens to you. In fact, she probably hopes the cops beat the fillings right out of your fucking teeth. Teach you a fucking lesson. That's what your fucking mother wants for you. Your own fucking mother! She's supposed to be on your side! Looking out for you! Nope! Not any more, sunshine. From her point of view, you're holding her back from getting on with the next phase of her nothing fucking life. Fucking mothers! Selfish cunts!"

"I don't know."

"Is that?! You have a poster of Stalin?!" I sneered, knocking an empty guitar case aside, revealing a wrinkle page torn from some old textbook. "I'm

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getting some mixed fucking signals here, boy!”

“Fuck, man, what are you on about?”

“The cops, they’ll take abduction as a legitimate reason for concern. You’re about the right age. Got the right features. I reckon pedophiles would take one look at your pink lips and think they’ve hit the jackpot. Yeah, they’ll probably want to sample the goods before selling your skinny ass to the real dealers. Most likely, you’ll be out of the country within the day. End up in France or Italy. You’ll spend a good portion of the next five years strapped face-down in some filthy fucking whore-house. Paying clients, with fat guts and stinking beards, will sodomize your fucking rectum inside out on a daily basis. And don’t believe the fairy-tails. Don’t fucking kid yourself that dealers would waste perfectly good heroine on a worthless piece of shit like you. Reality is, any signs of resistance, and they’ll just bash your fucking nasal-cavity in while you’re getting raped for the third time that day. Violence is the best form of controlling resistance. Heroine is for the movies aiming to trigger fucking small-town mothers that are more horrified by drugs than sexual molestation!”

“The fuck are you?!”

“Fucking seriously? Is that Mao? Are you Anarchist or just another fucking Communist shill?!” I yelled, punching a black and white photocopy pinned to the wall. “You think the cops are on your mother’s side, they’re fucking not! She’s just as culpable as you! And if they don’t fucking find you, they’ll fuck her over like just another fucking hooker down at the corner! Like your old buddy here, Stalin did back in the day. They’ll take her for a little trip down to the fucking basement for some old-school re-educating! All in the name of the fucking Party! All for the fucking Party! Yeah, it’s a fucking party, alright! A party of breaking bones and fucking electrocutions! Seriously, what the fuck are you thinking with all this Communist propaganda on your fucking walls?! This sort of fucking shit makes me think you’re just as fucking bad as the fucking cops! Is that it, boy?! Are you a fucking traitor?! Who the fuck do you work for, cunt?! I see the Stalin and Mao idols, but where the fuck is your Hitler portrait? You’re no Anarchist! You’re just another fucking brown-shirt, bitch-faced Gestapowannabe! I fucking hope the refugees gang-rape you down by the fucking graveyard, you little Nazi fuck!”

“The fuck is your problem, you fucking psycho!”

“Psycho?! How fucking original, you punkass fuck-stain! Next, you’ll be saying you fucking believe that the fucking world’s flat! Where the fuck

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are your Pepe The Frog memes, motherfucker?! Come on, fucking show me! Fucking admit it, you little Alt-Right, milk-drinking coward! Show me how fucking committed to the fucking cause you really fucking are! Come on! PROVE IT! PROVE YOURSELF! FUCKING PROVE IT TO ME, YOU LITTLE SHELTERED FUCKING CUNT!”

“What the fuck is this?!” the kid’s mother screamed, smashing in the bedroom door, “Get the fuck out of my house, you fucking lunatic! Dennis get this shithead the fuck away from us! I’m calling the fucking cops!”

A sadistic smile spread across my spiteful demure, as the kid clung traumatized to his red-faced mother. “Told you so.”

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That night, before heading off to a record release party, I put on my suit and tie, while listening to House Of Pain, *Jump Around*. At the end of the day, there’s little reason to believe that our fucking actions will have any ramifications on the greater world, or even upon ourselves for that matter. Ultimately, there’s no way of predicting what capricious concept of karma might come around and bite us in the ass. Raising my head to the ceiling that was covered in that white porous mass of nesting serpents, I knew that tomorrow might prove everything learned today was no more significant than a routine projectile-ejaculation across another pair of perky, barely-legal titties. It’s all just a trivial fucking distraction from life’s exquisite fucking misery.

Bruce

# Laughter And Screams









SHORT STORY 14  
2017  
PERNICIOUS TRANSMUTATION

DISCLAIMER:

*Names have been changed and yet a rose is still a spade.*

THE DEATH OF A STRANGER  
MONDAY 14th AUGUST 2017

After spending the evening revisiting *The Book Of Enoch* at the Berlin Theology Library, I spotted a black Jaguar XJ parked outside the glass entrance. The chauffeur scowled at me from his half-open window, just when my phone hummed. Then a rather peculiar gentleman in a beige, three-piece suit, burgundy cheese-cutter, and thin gray beard, awkwardly pulled open the library's front door as I approached.

"Mr. Knox?"

With a frown, I paused. "Have we met?"

"Finally, now we have," he stuttered, as his brown leather satchel slipped off his shoulder while he struggled with the heavy glass door. He looked like the kind that gave lectures in the Humboldt University above. Or perhaps he was a senior on the staff at the library, about to slap me with a lifetime ban for requesting too many blasphemous books from their deepest achieves.

So, I set my foot at the base of closing door, and braced myself for some sort of incrimination.

"Oh, thank you. Very kind. A pleasure to meet you."

"Always is," I smiled suspiciously, opening my umbrella as I walked straight out into the rainy evening. Ignoring the Jaguar as it quietly drove away, I glared across the river at the beautifully silhouetted pillars of Museum Island.

"I wasn't quite expecting the weather to ruin the famous summers here."

"In comparison to?"

"The humidity really isn't helping my job any."

"That being?"

"Been across the city three times today."

"In search of?"

"Why, you of course!"

I waited in the rain while the fumbling gentleman struggled with his

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umbrella as a gust turned it inside out.

“Was only after visiting your studio, that your colleges suggested the library.” At last his umbrella popped back into shape, right as a group of frantic students ran across the flooded street and scurried into the library. The clumsy old guy twisted and turned as the young adults whisked past like a swarm of hungry gutter rats. “Bless them. Where was I?”

“Yeah, where are you from exactly?”

“Forgive me. Oslo.”

“Friends with John?”

“Who?”

“The fuck are you, then?”

“Rolf Jensen,” he confessed, his whole lanky torso waving from side to side in an embarrassed fashion. Despite his off-kilter mannerisms, there was something about his bitter tone of voice that betrayed his acting the fool. “I’m in the middle of clearing up some loose ends. My employer recently passed away, which put myself in the position of taking care of his business affairs.”

“Sounds like junkmail in my inbox.”

Mr. Jensen went quiet for a moment. “Were you a member of the crew on the Research Vessel Onbekend, during January of this year?”

“Yeah. And?” My lulled defenses suddenly screamed red alert! Was this guy a lawyer about to serve a summons for what had happened on that clusterfuck of a voyage? Just when you think you’ve survived a sinking ship, the fucking law catches up and slowly drowns you in years of fucking bureaucracy. “What about it?”

“Perhaps we should find some place out of the rain.”

“Yeah. Sure. Later.”

Glancing around the golden lamplight, the bearded fellow slowly spoke, “My employer, Professor Halvorsen, was found dead in his office, hanging from the ceiling-fan, a week ago. I found him there. Apparent suicide. The police did little more than call for an ambulance and write down my personal details. It’s not like in movies. No one investigates anything. An old man with no family dies by his own hand. End of story.” The guy had now completely transformed from an overtly subservient buffoon, into a true misanthropist dripping with disgust.

“What’s this got to do with me?”

“There were certain charts that had been sent to the professor. Charts sent by Captain Grant. Charts that were in your possession while on board the Onbekend. It was these charts that led my employer into a proverbial world

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of shit.”

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Three months before hand, Commi-star’s intoxicated efforts at tempting me into her pants had failed after the drugs had kicked in and reduced her to just another drunken fucking asshole on the Mayday streets. So, I walked away. The Ubahn station at Kottbusser Tor was shutdown due to the mobs, leading me across the bridge that was covered in Antifa, hippies, and cops. There, I decided to pay a visit to a Slovakian establishment that I’d become familiar with.

Out the back of the empty restaurant, I smiled and shook hands with two seven-foot-tall doormen who were laughing at something on their phones. I continued through a courtyard into a small warehouse, which brought me to another apartment building. As I walked into a smoky room at the top of the stairs, I spotted Mr. Bismarck on his phone next to a table of kebab-munching gangsters. He was as serious as ever and slowly shrugged, before tucking away his phone and shaking my hand. I was rather impressed how courteous he seemed, but some folk are like that, you have fisticuffs, and then they get over it and get on with their fucking lives, no hard feelings. I, however, never forgot those who stepped on my toes. Mr. Bismarck was in a jovial mood, or at least as upbeat as an old silver-back gorilla could appear. He invited me further into that sketchy abode, and my audacity demanded I go along. As I drifted through the murky rooms, blasting Creedence Clearwater Revival, *Born On The Bayou*, I studied the pretty faces of every girl I passed. There were dozens of teenagers scattered about that elaborate Slovakian safe-house, and each time I came here, I kept a look out for that special little hooker who’d given me a killer blowjob, when I had first met Mr. Bismarck. But alas, I never saw her again. Perhaps she had been put out to pasture. She would be in her early twenties by now, which was ancient in that line of work. Yet, I still dreamed about sodomizing her skinny ass, just for old time’s sake.

I took a seat in the kitchen next to a seventy-year-old grandpa wearing a fedora and without a single tooth in his shrunken head. He was laughing at the antics of all the young guys that filled the place. I still couldn’t discern the difference between Russians, Slovaks, or Romanians. They all sounded fucking Serbian, which made me sneer in disgust at the thought of an old ex. She had recently said that she would soon return to Belgrade to visit her parents. I suggested that we hang out, but she insisted that she wouldn’t have any time. Bitch, it’s only been twelve-fucking-years! You can’t find an hour to catch-up after twelve-fucking-years?! Are you fucking kidding me,

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you unreliable sack of chickenshit! I then joined the old timer and laughed to myself. The funny thing was, this year she had taken up a profession that suited her sniveling fucking attitude. She'd always been too lazy to put any effort into anything, so like all pretty sluts, she had at last gotten into the pleasure-industry. Working as an exotic masseuse in a classy hotel, she now called herself, Misty. I reckon I had finally found a reason to return to the motherland. Return flight: 1500 euros. Happy-ending: 150 euros. That look of utter contempt upon Misty's miserable fucking face as she reluctantly jerks me off: FUCKING PRICELESS!

I couldn't help wondering why I was now accepted in here, but given a long enough time-line, we're all part of something bigger than we can understand at one point in our history. All I know for sure is, The Old Grahams house at Loch Ness had affected some part of my unconscious that had, until then, been quietly brooding within my Jungian shadow. Maybe the Iranian woman was right, and I should have died upon my return to the loch. But then again, who the fuck was she?! Apart from Mara, no one else had known about my plans at the loch. Why the fuck had the Iranian woman been expecting me? Unless, I myself wasn't important. Perhaps she was merely anticipating someone to show up, and I just happened to come along. But I was always left with more and more unanswered questions about strange people and ungodly phenomenon. The Old Grahams house was the key, I was sure of it. Though, I believed that based on nothing more than a gut feeling. A feeling that it was still calling me. The visions I kept seeing after first visiting The Old Grahams had been like a unconscious riptide constantly pulling me west. Once Mara had the police lock me up in the psychiatric ward, I did whatever it took to fool them so that I could return to the loch. Nothing would stop me. I had no choice but to face that fucking place again. It had been as if I was free-falling and, by December 2014, I'd reached terminal velocity. No reasoning or parachute could stop the impact I was about to make with the surface of the loch. And yet, I survived. And the Iranian woman had been furious. But still, even now, I could hear that place calling me. The feeling though, had totally changed after the second visit. Perhaps everything up to my return had been a test. An initiation. Since then, the visions had been more focused. The loch had been revealing more elaborate things, like when I'd been drawn to that little white house in the woods, where I'd seen the skin of the universe peel wide open. I didn't, and still don't get what the point of any of it was, but that's beside the point. I'm merely meant to relay what I've seen. The message from The Old Grahams isn't meant for me. I'm just

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a fucking messenger. I'm not the protagonist of this story. I'm not important and never was. Mine is but the role of influencing something greater than the sum of my parts. It's about the sum of all my art.

A group of guys in Puma tracksuits then filled the kitchen. I immediately recognized the ringleader. That big fucker still walked with a limp, after I had stabbed him in the back of his knee years ago, and he obviously remembered who the fuck I was. While I remained seated, surrounded by angry young men, the grandpa continued laughing at everyone. It looked like I was finally about to witness a wee bit of actual fucking violence this Mayday, unfortunately, it seemed like I was going to become the butt end of the joke. That was, until Mr. Bismarck walked into the kitchen holding a girl with Slavic eyes who perfectly reminded me of Misty. Mr. Limpy however, slammed his hands down on the tabletop, yelling in Slovakian before shoving everyone away! The old grandpa went silent, and I realized that this was why they had welcomed me in so eagerly. I was about to get my comeuppance. All I had on my side was my knife sheathed at the back of my belt. I'd crippled this cunt once, if I was going down, then at least I'd make sure he would limp with both legs after today. But to my surprise, Mr. Bismarck swung the little hooker into Mr. Limpy's face, and then shoved them back. The grandpa burst into laughter again, though, I wasn't amused. I wanted that fucking meat for myself! After a few moments of guttural words, the whole gang obeyed their boss, and spitefully shuffling off while pawing at the bony female. Mr. Bismarck then lit a cigarette, saying, "Does trouble naturally follow you, or do you actually go looking for it?"

After two hours of talk, Mr. Jensen and I left a restaurant at Hackescher Markt. There, he hailed a taxi and went straight to the airport. I, however, tucked the small package that Mr. Jensen had given me, under my arm, before wading through the chilled streets. It wasn't raining anymore but the city lights glistened richly upon the drenched asphalt and concrete. My phone hummed again. It had vibrated several times at the restaurant, and I had ignored Gabi's messages. She wrote that she had spontaneously driven up to Berlin tonight, just so that she could model for my new artwork set within The Altar Of Zeus. I was half-way through typing, "*Wo bist du?*" when that same black Jaguar XJ slowly drove by and pulled up to the curb. The military-like chauffeur stepped out and opened the back door for me. Tucking my phone away, I looked eye to eye with the driver, before glancing inside at the old man with the Thule pin on his lapel.

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The Jaguar glided back into traffic, as the guy on my left continued examining several printouts while writing notes with a golden fountain pen. I knew better than to bother with small talk. Etiquette here demanded polite silence. I had dubiously dubbed this menacing organisation, the Intrepid Supremacy. The last time I had seen this particular chap, it was December, when he and some muscle had showed up and excused me from the interrogations of Special Agent Aviv. Though, I hadn't seen any of these grim-faced, high-ranking Heads of State in several months, and I'd begun wondering if they'd decided to distance themselves from an immoral pig such as myself.

I had first met them a year ago, directly after I'd returned from my holiday to Japan. I was at an elegant exhibition of some blasé bleached installations, where almost everything was painted in various shades of milky whiteness. My fucking eyeballs burned from all that naked neon and barely touched canvas.

"Hey, Bruce, say something fucking crazy!" a fat fuck, that I hardly considered a friend, yelled out in the crowded gallery.

"I'd fucking love to, but I'm shit at stand-up. Never could remember a limerick on cue to save my fucking life. Besides, just wanted to say Au Revoir, you sexy thing. Y'all have a fantastic fucking night."

"Come on, we're all going down to Kit Kat."

"Fuck, no thanks!"

"Don't be a pussy!"

"4am's my Cinderella hour."

"Whatever! This guy's the sickest fuck I've ever met!"

"Yeah, well. There's only so much drunken shenanigans a sober man can tolerate, before I just want to take advantage and rape your asshole with a broom handle. Motherfuckers like you need to learn to handle your fucking liquor."

Laughter snorted out from that group of sour-faced cunts, as two securities guards stepped up behind me.

I had no problem with the security, I was already on my way out of that fucking place, however, instead of guiding me toward the exit, they led me to an inner courtyard. The sky was already turning indigo, as I scanned that colosseum-like environment. One of the two security guards gestured toward a tall stranger in a black suit. He was a Juggernaut of a stoic, smoking a cigarette while staring at the distant end of the darkened space where a greek

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statue of the Minotaur was nothing but a silhouette. The guy was about sixty, with smooth white hair, and fucking excellent leather shoes. Once I began to approach, he slowly glanced sideways and said, “Not a fan of the art?”

“Not particularly.”

“Then when are you planning on applying your own skills to a greater cause?”

-

The Jaguar pulled over in some quiet city street, where a black SUV joined us. The guy reading the papers took one last drawn out moment on whatever the fuck he was preoccupied with, before reaching into his briefcase and handing me a slim plastic package. The chauffeur opened the door, and I exited the vehicle without a single word having been exchanged.

Watching the Jaguar cruise away, I saw the back door of the SUV open. Climbing in, I found Mr. Juggernaut himself sitting in the back. He nodded at the two packages in my hand. “Keep up the good work.”

“Danke,” I frowned, and then Mr. Juggernaut stepped out. The driver would take me anywhere I wanted, but he didn’t wait for directions. Glancing around the streets, I considered which package I should open first, and then my phone hummed again. I realized that I hadn’t actually sent my last message to Gabi. So, erasing it, I simply wrote, “*Come over.*”

### A LIGHTHOUSE FULL OF SECRETS TUESDAY 15th AUGUST 2017

The following evening, I unwound a chain before opened the wooden gate leading off from a remote country road to an inhospitable vista of storm clouds and open seas. While waiting for the rental car as it slowly entered that private driveway, I scanned the horizon through the trees. The Netherlands was to my left, Denmark to my right, and the north-eastern coast of Germany lay straight ahead. The rain began to pour before I finished chaining the gate shut.

Gabi’s usually excited expression now seemed nervous as she carefully drove down that lumpy road. There wasn’t any sign of shelter for a long stretch, and the North Sea grew ever closer as a torrential wind belted the car. We were soon led to the left, along the vacant coast and into a realm of leafless trees. The road almost disappeared before us as the long grass overwhelmed the path, but Gabi navigated the wilderness capably, and as we reached the summit of a shallow hill, a lighthouse presented itself before the thunderous

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squalls. A two-story cottage sat at the base of the twice-as-tall tower. As the car approached, the headlights revealed a rather quaint, eighteenth century building. A gray-tiled, A-framed roof hung over blue shutters and white stone walls, with moss clinging to the gutters.

“This is where we’re staying?” Gabi whispered, as she left the engine running.

Scanning the humble location, I thought that the place could have looked adorable. However, with the encroaching storm, and the lack of any signs of life from within the building, the whole isolated area had a desperate sadness that lingered in the trees.

“Bruce?” Gabi whispered again, barely audible over the gales. “Bruce?!”

“No.”

“What?”

“We’re not staying.”

“Okay. Good,” Gabi mumbled. “Hey! Where are you going?!”

Slamming my passenger’s side door shut, I pulled up my hood and closed my jacket. The rain spewed forth in random splutters, while the bigger trees to my left roared like the pines above my childhood bedroom. Walking up the gentle slope from the car to the lighthouse, I found the sea churned thickly behind the tower. The land beyond gradually smeared itself out into the murky waters. If the high-tide took only the smallest of liberties, the sea could easily wash this human habitat clean off the shore. But who was I kidding, they built these lighthouses harder than fucking nails. The architects, engineers, and construction workers that erected such feats were the champions of civilization. These were hazardous locations that had been overcome by determination in order to prevent others from suffering. Still, being a lighthouse keeper must have been a shit job. I was half expecting to walk around the tower and find a body hanging from a noose.

After circling the whole building, I went up to the front door and found it open. I swear, I nearly broke my back as I lurched away from the face that stared out from inside!

“Are you okay?” Gabi smiled, as she held open the door for me. “You need to relax. I’m a nice girl.”

“So, you keep saying,” I said, nodding pessimistically. “Do a lot of breaking and entering?”

“Wasn’t locked.”

“Find anything?”

“You haven’t even kissed me yet.”



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"I'm still paranoid your sister's spying on us."

"God, you're obsessed with her!"

"Says the girl who's been stalking me for three fucking years."

"Yeah, but innocently."

"That's what I told the cops last time."

"You've been stalked before?"

"What can I say, girls love me."

"And then you bring them out to abandoned lighthouses so you can dispose of their bodies?"

"Just the heads. The bodies, I make sweet, sweet love to."

"I've stayed in places like this before. I'll get the furnace going."

"We're not staying."

"Why come all this way, just to leave?"

"No one's here."

"Were you expecting Elvis?"

"Maybe."

"Well, I need a hot drink before we go, so be a dear, and find the lights."

"Hey," I said, watching as Gabi opened another door into the main room. She turned with a curious smirk. Raising my outstretched arm, I pointed directly at her big bold eyelashes. "Don't get any fucking ideas. I hardly even know you. We're not fucking! So, get that out of your head. Okay!"

Gabi bit her bottom lip as she grinned wider, before turning toward the darkness like she owned the place.

Glancing around, I briefly inspected the kitchen to the left of the front door, as well as a blackened lounge packed full of furniture next to a spiral-staircase. To the right of the front door was a short corridor leading to the tower. I heard Gabi disappear into what I guessed was a bathroom behind the staircase. The nearest light switch gave me nothing. Grabbing my pen-light, I tiptoed through the kitchen looking for a fuse-box.

"Look for a generator," Gabi called out. "Maybe at the bottom of the tower."

Opening another insulated door into the small connecting corridor, my eyes immediately welled up from the stench of something horrible. There was an iron gate over the doorway into the tower, and a large cupboard on my left. The gate was bolted, and I was about to open the tall cupboard when a golden light flickered to life in the kitchen.

"Found it!" Gabi shouted. "Whoa! What the fuck! Whose place is this?"

Entering the lounge, I found the twenty-four-year-old girl bending

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forward as she held onto the horns of a life-size statue of a bull. But all I saw was her ass in those tight jeans.

“Come on,” she insisted. “Whose place is this?”

“The captain of a ship.”

“Where is he?”

“Don’t know.”

“He knew we were coming, right?”

“Nope.”

“Do you always invite yourself to your friend’s place?”

“He’s not my friend.”

“Why are we here, then?”

“Apparently he’s gone missing.”

Gabi looked suddenly disturbed, and I was about to walk away and search the rest of the place when she spoke up, “My best friend is missing too.”

Blinking back and forth from the spiral staircase to Gabi’s downcast eyes, I reluctantly asked, “Since when?”

“2012.”

Again, I blinked away, wanting to finish what I’d come here for, but Gabi’s forlorn posture was begging for elaboration. “You sure she’s not just avoiding you?”

“I hate Frankfurt!” she said, still staring at the floor. “It’s so full of fucking assholes!”

I was about to make a joke, but waited.

“She hated Mainz, so moved to the city as soon as she started dating this rich business guy. You wouldn’t believe how full of shit he was. But really typical for Frankfurt. That’s why I love Berlin. Never deal with those kinds of creeps. So much love in Berlin. People like you.”

My eyes glared dryly out the window toward the sea.

“He took cocaine all the time. I mean, a lot! And Lena never said no to anything. When she was sixteen she told me about their first threesome. Said she loved it. Loved being wanted. But when she turned nineteen, he dumped her. No reason. Nothing.”

I could picture Gabi’s friend with ugly mascara and sweaty hair as she suddenly found herself living on the streets.

“I’m not trying to sound horrible, but this whole mass immigration has been going on for a lot longer than people realize.”

I wasn’t expecting this twist in the story, and examined Gabi’s hesitation.

“She was picked up by a gang of Eritrean drug dealers. The last time I saw

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her, she was, I don't know. It just, you know. It wasn't right!"

Gabi didn't need to spell it out.

"The police came to my home one day. The dealers had sold her to some Tunisian traffickers. Sold her! They fucking sold her! But no matter what I said, the police wouldn't do anything. She was just gone. Impossible to locate. Said they were powerless. And they were. They were fucking useless!" The resentment in Gabi's voice wasn't subtle. "And then, you know, I started getting these nightmares. They wouldn't leave me alone. There was this one that kept repeating. It's fucking awful. I'm in a bathroom and when I look in the mirror there's this big spider on my back. I mean its huge. The size of a child. I can't move. Just stand there. Staring at it in the mirror. It slowly crawls closer to my ear and starts whispering. It doesn't even have a mouth. Its entire head is covered with hundreds of tiny black eyes. But its voice always sounds so wet. But it's my voice speaking! Though, I never remember what it's saying when I wake up. You know how dreams are. Seem to make sense at the time. Then once you wake up, you wonder how you ever thought any of it was real. And just two nights ago, I had this one dream. It was the worst! It was the worst because nothing happened! The less that happens the worse I feel when I wake up. But this one, this last dream, it's why I came and see you."

"Hey, it's not rape if it's in your dreams."

"You know, globally, a girl under fifteen gets married every seven seconds. I don't know. When I was younger, when Lena was having threesomes, I used to think that I was normal, and that she was the weird one. But I was wrong. I'm the freak! Almost everyone I know says they were fucking before they were even teens! And now children are sold into slavery right here in Germany! This isn't a third world! This is the shining light of a civilized success story! Yet little kids, little boys and girls are sold for sex! Kids, like seven-years-old are being raped on a daily basis right here in this country! And the police just accept it! It's just not fair! It's not fair! I don't want to feel this way. But I can't help it. I see the mass sexual assaults in Köln, and the police don't fucking do anything! The Mayor laughs and says keep men at arm's length. They can't be serious! Your daughters are being gang-raped on the streets and you think your arms can hold off anything?! It's not right! It's not fair! It's not fucking fair!"

Gabi turned away from me, seemingly embarrassed by her own confession.

"I'm sorry. I don't mean it. It's just, I get so scared sometimes. And my dreams won't let be rest. And then this last one happened and I woke up

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terrified. I was shaking. I lay in bed afraid of what I'd just seen. But the thing is, like I said, nothing happened! The dream wasn't scary! It just left this awful feeling inside my chest. I was in an old apartment building. Everything was dusty. No one seemed to live there. Then my leg started twitching, and these two guys walked in. They knew me and walked down a corridor. That's when a light in another room switched on. And then the door slammed shut. The two guys shook their heads and ignored it. But I was horrified! I stood dead still. Then I saw a light come from out of nowhere. It was like the sun reflecting off water. A shimmering light that moved slowly across the wall and up over the ceiling. It was the most traumatizing thing I had ever seen. I thought I was going to pass out. But it was nothing! Just a blurry light! The two guys came back and walked out the front door, and I started to follow. But I stopped. I didn't know if I should shut the door behind me. I didn't know if that would offend the thing in the flat. Or maybe if I didn't shut the door it would follow me home. I yelled out but the two guys didn't hear me. And that's it! I woke up! Woke up never knowing if I shut the door or not. And it left me with the worst feeling I've ever had! But nothing actually happened! But it felt so fucking, you know, you wouldn't believe! It made me sick with anxiety!"

"And these dreams made you think of me?"

"Yeah," Gabi smiled shyly. "I don't think you're afraid of anything. I feel safe around you."

"Do you?"

"Don't know, I think so," she whispered. "Haven't actually thought about it till now. You're a good distraction."

Gabi soon lit a fire within the pot-belly-stove in the middle of the cluttered lounge, and I put the kettle on and made us a cup of instant coffee. While the water boiled, I climbed the spiral-staircase and found a bed at one end of the attic space. This place definitely didn't give off the stereotypical impression of being a captain's home. There was a lot of junk, but nothing so crass as anchors on the wall or tiny model ships in old glass bottles. Downstairs, near the head of the bull, was a huge desk covered in books, books, and more books. I was seriously starting to wonder if I had actually gotten the wrong address, until I spotted a small collection of framed photos behind another pile of books. There, I recognized the sullen look in the youthful eyes of Captain Grant standing next to a dozen navy men. Noticing a recently delivered cardboard box, I pulled the cord on the desk lamp. The box from Amazon had, unsurprisingly, a selection of more books. The first was by John

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Anthony West, *Serpent in the Sky*. Before I got a chance to look through the others, Gabi came up behind me and slowly slid her arms around my waist, sinking her hands into my jacket as she pressed her palms against my chest.

“Come closer to the fire,” she whispered, just before reaching up and kissing the back of my neck.

I was about to turn, when I realized that the Amazon box was sitting on top of a small stack of hand-written letters that were all stuffed within their torn envelopes. Picking one up, I examined the postage stamp. It was from Oslo. Among Professor Halvorsen’s correspondence, I found more familiar envelopes, and the handwriting was my own. Casually glancing out a window to my right, I saw the waves battling with the rain as my pants grew tighter. The bull made me think of Pergamon, and I wanted nothing more than to open the belly of the beast and burn Gabi alive, while I ejaculated over her roasting meat! This cunt had fucked me around for far too long, I wasn’t about to merely capitulate to her wanton lust just because it was convenient for her! Besides, I had only just discovered on this road-trip that she smokes. Unless she was sucking my dick, she could keep her stinking mouth the fuck away from me! Gently guiding her hand down to my erection within my restrictive pants, I whispered. “You want this, don’t you.”

“Yes,” she gasped, her breath heavy. “Give it to me.”

“Remind me,” I said, tensing as Gabi squeezed. “How’d you find me after all these years.”

“The photos from your birthday.”

“How’d you come across them?”

“Why are you asking?”

Her deflection was her only consistency. “Have you ever done a suspension?”

“God, no. But it looked incredible. What was it like?”

“Was unique. Heard people talk about it being like a nature high. So, I wanted to experience it for myself.”

“But you don’t take drugs.”

“I’ve always said I’d try DMT.”

“Why, what’s that?”

“A hallucinogenic. You’re meant to have these intense, short-term visions. Sounds kind of like what I saw when the hooks took my body-weight. The world dropped out from under my feet.”

“What was it like?” Gabi murmured, as my finger tip rolled over her clit. “I want to know.”

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“It felt like I’d fallen off a cliff. No. It wasn’t like falling. More like the ground fell away from me. The world disappeared. There was nothing around. No sound. No weight. Disembodied. Everything material dropped away below me. Though, it definitely didn’t feel like I was floating. It was as if the whole world just stopped existing, and I was somehow in a vacuum. Guess you have to try it to understand.”



“But what did you see?”

“There was about five minutes before I eventually opened my eyes. During which I saw a massive glacier. Huge ice sheets. Like I was in Antarctica. But there were these giant standing stones. An enormous circle of towering rock stones. They were so fucking big that they stretched right up through the entire glacier. Like tectonic slabs. As if an entire mountain had been cut

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into these skyscraper-tall pillars.”

“Where? Where were they?”

“Out there. Out in the North Sea. During the last ice age, before the water-level rose. That’s how I meet Captain Grant. On his ship. I had to see for myself if they actually existed.”

“Why would they be in the sea?”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, how were you sure where they were? How could you tell that they weren’t in some other place?”

My hand withdrew from Gabi’s pants, but she held on inside mine. “I don’t know! Son of a bitch! You’ve got a fucking point. I’d just assumed, I mean, I thought it was there because of everything Chloe and Samuel had been talking about. But you’re right. You’re fucking right! They could have been anywhere!”

“Who’s Chloe?” Gabi asked, removing her hand.

“Fucking hallucinations!” I snarled, shoving over a pile of books. “It’s all fucking bullshit! Let’s get the fuck out of here! Fuck this fucking place!”

“Bruce!” Gabi chirped. “I’m not leaving until I’ve at least had a hot drink!”

Holding my breath, I glared at the corridor leading to the tower, and then asked, “Have you seen a set of keys lying around?”

After unlocking the gate, I scaled the echoing stairs. I didn’t feel like putting my trust in the twitching lights, so used my pen-light to watch my step. It was only four-stories-tall but that was a sufficient height to reign over the tree tops behind the building. The view out to sea was a gray emptiness. Standing on the narrow balcony that circled the dead bulbs, I wondered how many other assumptions I’d miscalculated. There was nothing wrong with a legitimate amount of self-criticism, but there’s a fine line between rational skepticism and intrusive self-doubt. Maybe Gabi was right and there wasn’t any tangible link between my suspension-vision and Professor Samuel’s megalithic research into Doggerland. Yet, it had served a purpose, setting me on a course for other investigations. However, whatever had happened to Grant clearly wasn’t any of my fucking business. There are those who can see the riddle of the bigger picture and put the pieces together, and then there was me. I wasn’t a crucial part of anything. I was incidentally fading in and out of other lives, like Mr. Jensen, Mr. Juggernaut, or Mr. Bismarck. They weren’t my friends. They merely tolerated me because I was of some tiny utilitarian use. Of all the powerful people I’ve associated with in various social circles,

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I couldn't rely on any of them. Yet here was little Gabi out of the blue. My little stalker. What the fuck was she really up to?! I was suspicious as fuck. I do the stalking! Why the fuck was she interested in me? Perhaps she really was one of those naive kids that just wanted to be friends. Ha! Yeah fucking right! She was playing a role! Her agenda had yet to be identified, but that didn't make her innocent of anything! A girl claiming that she's just trying to get laid, is the world's biggest red flag. Females are only as horny as long as they're manipulating you. Until the goal of Gabi's scheming was apparent, she was little more than my driver. But I really should just fuck her in the mouth! Though, I wouldn't allow her even a taste of any form of immediate-gratification. Patience is, after all, the best torture device ever invented.

Scanned the sea to my left, I spotted something between the trees down by the shore. The masts of a couple of small boats. Apart from that, there weren't any other signs of civilization on the horizon. How often do I find myself standing before a beautiful vista, wasting the moment dwelling upon internal conflicts and denying the calm serenity. Or perhaps it was the peace and quiet that encouraged the reflective cognition. And then the rain started up again, harder than before, so I had to leave.

Climbing back down the trapdoor and into the staircase, I considered the effort involved in flying down to Portugal and finally confronting Chloe about why she had invited me on board Captain Grant's ship. But then again, I had no idea how to find Samuel's house in the countryside. Chloe had driven me along unremarkable roads into the middle of fuck knows where. I could try e-mailing her again, but why fucking bother. She had ignored every other message I've written to her since the voyage, and besides, why the fuck would she know anything about Grant's disappearance. For fuck's sake, why would I know anything either?! I'm not a fucking detective. I don't even give a shit about the guy! What the fuck was I doing out here?! Fuck this shit! It's time to fuck off!

Marching into the lounge with the lights all switched off, I found that the pot-belly-stove had already heated up the entire room. Then I saw Gabi riding the stone bull – naked! Fuck patience! I ripped off my jacket and yanked open my belt as I stomped toward Gabi's demonic smirk – when headlights washed across her athletic body!

Two black Jeep Grand Cherokees pulled up next to our rental car. Four men in business suits and raincoats climbed out. Standing next to the front door, I glanced around for some kind of weapon if need be. In the stinking corridor leading to the tower, I spotted a shovel leaning against the cupboard.



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That would do. The group of staunch men slowly stopped in their tracks once I stepped outside into the rain. For a second, I wondered if these guys were responding to a silent burglar alarm. But they were all dressed far too nice for lowly security guards. It seemed like they were expecting to find the place deserted. My mind started racing when I saw two of them reaching into their coats, as if they were grabbing their guns. Somebody still inside one of the vehicles then called out in a language I couldn't recognize. Considering my options, I figured that the tower was probably the most secure place, that's if I could get inside and lock the gate behind me. However, the hesitant men slowly returned to their vehicles. And that was it. They reversed and drove back the way they'd come.

Closing the front door behind my retreat, I stood in the kitchen for a while watching the gloomy driveway surrounded by twisted trees.

"Who were they?" Gabi whispered from across the dark room.

"I don't know!" I replied harsher than I intended.

"Are we in some kind of trouble?"

"Of course not," I said with a vicious smile, as I faced the naked girl. "But are you looking for some."

"I love this place. Can't we stay the night here? Come ride the bull with me."

"What would your sister say?"

"She isn't here, is she."

"No," I spoke, with my breath upon her neck – when I saw a distant figure on the seaward-side of the house. "But we're still not alone."

Pulling on one of Grant's fur-lined coats, I grabbed the shovel from the corridor. The moment I picked up the shovel, the cupboard door creaked open, releasing the full brunt of that horrific stench. Coiling away, I clenched my entire throat before peering inside. It wasn't a cupboard at all, but the doorway to the basement.

Walking outside, I leaned the shovel against the tower in case this new guest decided to try anything funny. I continued around the building right into the wind, where a man in a hooded raincoat came up within a few meters before he actually noticed my presence.

"Who might you be?!" the grisly old man sneered, taking a few steps back. "What are you doing here?!"

"You know," I started, struggling to keep my face straight against the gales. "Working on my tan,"

"What?!"

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“Visiting Grant. Paying him a house call.”

“Grant doesn’t have visitors!”

“Then what the fuck are you?”

“A neighbor! Checking on a disturbance!”

“Have you even heard that Grant’s gone missing?”

The crinkle-faced neighbor sneered with a pause.

“When did you last see him?”

The rigid expression on the old guy didn’t budge.

“Look, I was part of his crew in January. He was doing some research for me. Recently he’s been in contact with a professor from Oslo. A professor who just turned up dead. And now Grant’s gone missing. So, have you, you know, seen, I don’t know, anything?”

“The only thing I know is,” the neighbor grunted. “A couple months back, he mentioned seeing strange people in the trees.”

I waited, half twisting away from the wind.

“Saw him a few weeks ago. On his fishing boat. Out in the bay. Was burning something that he dumped in the water. Was real unusual for him. Watched him walk back up here. He was all bent over. That man never looked tired a day in his life. Ain’t seen anyone else since then, not until you.”

My eyes slowly crept along the tree-line, ignoring the neighbor who eventually backed away. “Hey. Where’s Grant’s boat?”

After being led around the wide shoreline, I located the masts that I’d seen from the top of the lighthouse. Two old skiffs and a snub-nose, pilothouse fishing boat bobbed in a small sheltered marina. Once we were close enough, the old guy pointed to the only vessel with a cabin. I went on alone. The neighbor’s single-story house sat much further around the waterfront. Climbing on board the fishing boat, I found a few things of note. A huge greasy blood stain, along with several deep burn marks which covered three-quarters of the aft deck. Resting in a sodden corner was a discarded Bible. I suddenly felt intensely uncomfortable. The water around the pier was calm enough, but I needed to get the fuck back on solid land.

By the time I made it back to the lighthouse, the sky had become an opaque mayhem, like something Diego Velázquez would paint in the background of one of his portraits. The light from the kitchen was all that welcomed me back. Gabi seemed to have vanished. Instinctively, I checked to make sure that the car was still there, before I dragged off my raincoat and hung it next to the basement door. The smell emanating from below was inexcusably rancid. Glancing back toward the silent lounge, I prepared my nostrils and

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went down into that stinking basement. There were only two weak light bulbs below the vaulted ceiling of stone, so again, I was glad to have my pen-light. Disassembled furniture and boxes of engine parts surrounded a big work table. The revolting odor was coming from shriveled chunks of meat that had been left to rot on the table top. It took a while before I realized that it was a pile of animal guts. The organs were smaller than those of humans, but there weren't any bones or muscles. Just guts. Then I noticed the needle and thread. This mess had been sewed together. Leaning in a little closer, I studied how carefully the organs were stitched to one another, making an organic sack about the size of a large rubbish bag. I suddenly knew exactly what Grant had been attempting to recreate. Backing away, I hurried out of the basement. Grabbing the shovel, I jammed it against the door handle, now understanding why I'd first found it that way. Running to the book-covered desk, I quickly stuffed that whole pile of letters into my jacket pockets, before rushing up to the top floor. Gabi had fallen asleep on the big bed – when I heard a noise from outside that made my spine involuntarily arch. An inhuman scream. I'd heard it once before, when I was with Captain Grant in the cargo hold of that sinking derelict in the middle of the North Sea. Had it followed Grant all the way home? Or had he called it here with the ritual in his basement? I wasn't about to stick around and find out. Violently shaking Gabi into consciousness, I practically dragged her confusion down the stairs and out to the car. She wasn't happy, but I wasn't listening, insisting that she lock her door. The moment she hit the ignition, the headlights revealed something grotesque standing upon the balcony at the top of the lighthouse.

“What the fuck it that?!” Gabi shrieked, grabbing my shoulder as she lurched back in her seat. “WHAT THE FUCK IS IT?!”

The oily black figure was no longer a translucent apparition like those shadowed forms I'd seen countless times before. No, this one had fully materialized.

And then that infernal shriek rose again.

Gabi clung to my arm with both hands, as she uttered incoherent profanities.

The roar, however, wasn't coming from that devil on the lighthouse, it came from beyond. From the sea!

Gabi's shrill voice was making up for everything my terrified lungs failed to express, though somehow, I managed to grab her thigh and squeeze her so fucking hard that the pain made her snap out of her delirium. Not taking my eyes off of the lighthouse, I yelled through Gabi's panic-saturated hysteria,

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“Please put your FUCKING hands back on the FUCKING wheel and would you please FUCKING DRIVE!”

EXPANDING TERRITORIES  
WEDNESDAY 16th AUGUST 2017

By noon the next day, we hired a car from the Geneva airport. The rain hung over the lake exactly as it had done at the North Sea. Gabi drove us half-way to Lausanne, where we pulled up to a tall iron gate in the center of incredibly maintained hedges. Reaching outside, she pressed the buzzer on the gate’s intercom. An old man eventually answered in French. Gabi suddenly stared blankly in my direction.

“Ah, tell him. Tell him Professor Samuel sent us. We’re here to see Mr. Grumbach.”

While the message was being relayed. There was an extended silence in the chilly air. The machine-gun-like rain battered the roof of the car, and I realized that this was the first time that Gabi and I had spoken since the airport hotel in Hamburg. We never actually talked about what we’d seen and heard at the lighthouse but she’d insisted, with all desperation, not to be left alone. Since Mr. Jensen was funding this little mission, I saw the plus-side of her driving me around, as I am, after all, a pragmatic son of a bitch.

Suddenly the gate clanked, before calmly retracting. At the end of a curved driveway was a large marble villa that stood on a green hillside overlooking that vast body of water. Thick trees framed the building that must have been at least five-hundred-years-old.

We were soon led through the villa by an old butler. He was now speaking perfect German, and Gabi politely nodded. An even older gentleman sat in a wheelchair, glaring contemptuously at our arrival. The huge drapes in that darkened room were hardly open, and only a desk lamp shone from behind the lord of the manor. The butler introduced his master and then left us in peace.

“Samuel never sent you,” Mr. Grumbach slowly snarled. “How did you find this place?”

Reaching into my jacket’s inner pocket, I pulled out the small package that Mr. Jensen had given me in Berlin. Opening it, I held up a black satellite phone and pressed the redial button. A phone on the monolithic desk behind Mr. Grumbach immediately began ringing.

The old man didn’t even blink his shriveled eyes.

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But Gabi nervously crossed her arms.

Mr. Grumbach began making a gargling sound deep inside his intolerant throat, before he conceded and gesturing for us to sit.

Gabi sat alone.

“Last time I was here, it was all sunshine and blue skies. Friends and I drove all the way into the mountains where we ate cheese and visited the Giger Museum. Seems like a long time ago. This weather reminds me more of my first trip to Zurich. Pissed on me the whole time.”

“We’re not animals. We don’t have to suffer the whims of the seasons.”

“Yeah, life’s pretty sweet when you can afford air conditioning 365 days of the year.”

“Dwelling on petty ordeals wastes the soul from the focus on the work. What are you looking for?”

“The captain of the Onbekend.”

“You’re him, aren’t you.”

“Who, the captain?”

“Are you really as dim-witted as Samuel described?”

I waited.

“You took items from Samuel. Stole them while he was incapacitated.”

“As much as I’d love to live up to your generous preconception, I’m afraid, twas not I.”

“Yet here you present the very equipment he reported missing.”

“Tell me, what do you know about Etruscan archaeology?” I asked, staring at the towering paintings on the walls that depicted ancient ruins, like something Hubert Robert would have captured.

“Not my forte.”

“So then, what is, specifically, your great work?”

The ninety-year-old in the wheelchair went bitterly mute.

“Anyway, there was this guy. A professor. Lived in Oslo. Awesome guy. Never met him.”

Gabi frowned at me from her seat, as I continued scanning the gold-framed paintings.

“He loved a bit of Etruscan archaeology. Totally into it. You know, went on digs, wrote papers, had a cramped office full of dusty old artifacts that no one gave a fuck about. Whatever. The guy kept to himself. Never a man about town. Didn’t care for public life. You know the type. Happy as a pig in shit, down in the basement of the university, among the crumbling statues of forgotten civilizations.”

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Mr. Grumbach watched from across the huge room, his lips clamped shut while his gaunt jaw rolled from side to side.

“One day, our friendly introverted professor gets a package in the mail. A bunch of charts and a letter from an old buddy. A captain. He’s written a laundry list of questions about things that might predate historical records.”

Gabi now crossed her legs too, leaning forward as she listened anxiously.

“So, for the next few months your classic hand-written correspondence commences. Both asking more and more outlandish questions. Each demanding to know what the fuck it all meant. Both pen-pals getting more and more absorbed by what the other was suggesting. A healthy comparing of ideas began to flow as their theories ran wild. And then shit gets weird. Like with any conspiracy theory, you can’t escape the build-up of over-sensitive paranoia. The captain starts believing he’s being followed. And then even the professor begins noticing unmarked vans and hearing footsteps late at night.” I paused, finding a large bronze statue of Atlas in a shadowed corner of the room. I couldn’t help admiring how the sculptor perfectly embodied the strain in the muscles fighting against the weight of the entire fucking world. “And then one morning the professor’s assistant finds him dead. Suicide they said. You know, shit happens.”

“And the captain?” Gabi spoke on behalf of the old man. “What got him started?”

“I might have mentioned to him that, I don’t know, perhaps he’d find some answers to what had happened on the Onbekend in Samuel’s documents. I didn’t say steal them. But you know how it is, answers only beg ten more questions. And now the captain’s gone missing. The professor’s assistant then started looking for his own answers, leading to me. And being a good Samaritan, next thing, I’m in Switzerland wondering why an old man like you gives a shit about surveying the floor of the North Sea?”

“Who do you think was financing Samuel.”

“Why was I out there?”

“You weren’t supposed to be!”

“Yeah. Why do you think Chloe insisted I take her place?”

“I recommend asking her yourself.”

“Love to, except there seems to be this nasty trend of people disappearing.”

“How did you find my home?” Mr. Grumbach repeated.

“The dead professor, he gave his assistant the task of tracing the last calls on the satellite phone. And then he found the stack of letters from Grant where apparently, he wrote about my involvement. And here we are.”

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“And you trust this man?”

“Do you trust Samuel?”

“I think it’s time for you to leave.”

“When was the last time you actually spoke to Samuel?”

Silence.

“See, if Samuel’s also been eighty-sixed, I think, maybe I’ve also got something to worry about.”

The butler then appeared at the grand double doors, and this conversation was over.

“What have you gotten yourself into?” Gabi whispered, as we ran to the car beneath the pelting rain. “Who’s the old creep? Seriously, where’s this all leading? Do the police even know about any of this?”

“Police, that’s cute.”

“Hey, seriously. Come on!”

“Relax,” I smirked without any emotion. “I need a fucking coffee. That’s all that really matters right now. Coffee first. Paralyzing panic-attacks later.”

The rental had hardly left the driveway, before I spotted a black Mercedes sedan start to follow us. We were heading back to Geneva by the most direct route that the navigation recommended, so I wondered if maybe these guys behind us were also on their way into town. I asked Gabi to take the next left. Perplexed, she did so. The sedan followed. Taking the next left again, Gabi asked if we were going back to the villa. The sedan was still following. I suddenly wished Mara was behind the wheel. She could out-drive a Formula One stalker. Gabi however, didn’t seem up to the challenge, so I apologized and pretended to find my keys in my other pocket, and we headed straight for Geneva. The Mercedes remained at a fifty-meter distance.

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A month ago, I was on my way to have breakfast with Mr. Bismarck, but just before I reached the little Russian cafe, a black Audi SUV pulled up alongside the footpath. Mr. Bismarck welcomed me into the backseat, while he spoke in Romanian on his phone. We then drove across town.

“Change of plan. Something’s come up. So, coffee at friend’s place,” he said while holding the phone aside. No matter how intense the subject of the phone call became, he never once raised his voice.

In the middle of the city, the SUV went down a ramp into an underground parking lot. There we changed vehicles. The driver, Mr. Bismarck, and I, climbed into a black Audi A7, and then we headed out west. The phone conversation went on for the entire drive, leaving me to figure out for myself

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why we had just swapped transportation. Either for security reasons in case the SUV was being tailed, or perhaps because this car was more appropriate, judging from the neighborhood of luxury homes that we soon arrived at.

Mr. Bismarck continued negotiating on his phone, as we strolled through some extremely decadent house. It took a few rooms before I realized how empty the place seemed. There was furniture but no decorative ornaments. Like a hotel but without even knock-off artwork on the walls. I was pretty sure that no one actually lived in the house. It was just a place for business. While waiting in the kitchen, I watched Mr. Bismarck step out into the back garden while the espresso machine squeezed out its bowels.

Footsteps approached from another corridor, and I turned toward a tall guy in a navy-blue suit. His short black beard and slicked back hair, made him look like the Turkish version of Jim Caviezel.

“Hey,” I said, with my voice echoing in the huge kitchen. “How’s it going?”

“Good morning,” he replied, as we firmly shook hands. “Haven’t meet you before. New in town?”

“No, I’ve always been around,” I smiled, leaning back against the counter top, as Mr. Caviezel opened the fridge and took out a jug of orange juice. “This your place?”

“Of course not. But you know about last night. Is that why you’re here?” the charismatic guy asked. “What do you do?”

“Ah, you know.” Glancing out at Mr. Bismarck, I shrugged, crossed my arms, and replied without thinking, “Mostly just hurt people.”

“I see. Well, that won’t be of any use today.”

Frowning, I suddenly had to remind myself of the type of people that Mr. Bismarck associated with. “What happened last night?”

“A real mess,” Mr. Caviezel said, shaking his head as he too leaned against the counter on the other side of the kitchen. He glanced to his side with a look of serious disappointment. “It’s a good thing it happened here. At least it’s contained. The boys will be over soon. But, of course, no surprise, he’s already here.”

Mr. Caviezel glared out the window at Mr. Bismarck, and I nodded sarcastically like I knew what the fuck that was supposed to mean. Mr. Caviezel was one of those well-spoken guys. His elegant gold wrist watch, cuff-links, and wedding ring gave the impression of a guy in charge and someone that you could easily respect.

We then heard the front door open, so I followed Mr. Caviezel as



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he went to greet the boys. Four young guys in black hoodies gave polite signs of acknowledgment before we all headed upstairs. At any moment, I was expecting one of them to demand to know who the fuck I was. But as soon as you've been affiliated with someone within close proximity, others automatically assume that you're naturally one of them.

The bedroom was enormous and painted in vanilla. The blood from three dead girls definitely contrasted the palette of the interior design. Mr. Caviezel calmly directed the four gangsters, while I slowly moved further into the room. My head tilted to one side as I examined the traumatized expression of the first victim. She'd been beaten to death with some kind of blunt force. A large mushy section of her skull had been completely caved in through her blonde hair. Gaping eyes stared vaguely past mine as I knelt down with a tight grin upon my transfixed attraction. She lay on her stomach upon the floor. Her arms at her sides as if she'd been running, just before the fatal blow had knocked her down. She was beautiful, but I wouldn't expect anything less given the track-record I'd seen in these circles. She had a doll-like nose with plump lips and long eyelashes. Apart from the thigh-high stockings, all three bodies were stark naked. The next girl was a brunette. She lay slumped back on the bed. Multiple bruises covered her midsection. Her face was nothing more than mincemeat. Leaning over her, I took my time absorbing that abhorrent sight. There was too much blood, and I paid careful attention not to step in any of it. The third victim lay on the floor. No blood splatter this time. Estimating from her intensely bloodshot eyes and the strained flesh about her throat, I'd say that she had been strangled. Sniffing at her hair, I couldn't smell even the slightest onset of rot. But once I placed the back of my hand on her cheek, she felt like nothing but cold dead meat.

I then noticed two of the slack-jawed gangsters were hovering next to me. They both had a confused look as I scowled back up at their intrusion upon this intimate moment. Mr. Caviezel had left the room with the other two, so I stood up and watched as these guys dumped the bodies on the bed.

Someone walked by another door. Curious, I poked my head into an equally-sized lounge. Three sweaty guys smoked cigarettes, thumbed their iPhones, and occasionally muttered angrily in some Eastern European language. Beyond them, someone else moved in yet another room. As I walked through the lounge, I glared at those I past. They all lowered their eyes ashamed, concentrating back on their phones.

In the next room, I found another king-size bed and several sleeping girls. Sleeping, yeah right. Drugged-up was a more accurate description. Only one

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tiny female was still conscious and marching back and forth, dressed in a man's loose white shirt. She nearly jumped out of her skin when she turned my way. Her dark curly hair was like a wild bush, and her eyes were even more feral. Despite the smeared makeup and expensive jewelry, she couldn't have been more than thirteen-years-old. She suddenly made me realize that I hadn't even registered the age of the three dead girls. Backing off, I returned to the scene of the slaughter, where the two guys were now ripping up the carpet. The bodies were gone, along with all the bed sheets. Frustrated, I wanted to see them again, so hurried downstairs.

"Where are they?" I asked, as I ran into Mr. Caviezel near the front door. "Where'd you put them?"

"The garage. Why? Everything's been taken care of."

Two guys were wrapping the first body in massive lengths of clear plastic below an SUV with its hatchback open. Grabbing a rag from a bench, I crouched next to the bodies on the concrete, and peeled back the bloody sheets. The blonde was barely a teen. These were kids. Child prostitutes. I hadn't seen them as kids upon my first inspection. I'd literally objectified them into nothing more than beautifully butchered bodies. Who's worse: the guy who fucks these kids, or the guy who violently murdered them, or the guy whose initial response was adoration for their bashed in skulls?

Mr. Bismarck stood in the doorway, staring peculiarly down at my conflicted considerations.

Returning to the kitchen to finish our coffee, Mr. Caviezel joined us in silence, and then said, "Unfortunately, the facility is unavailable till after the weekend."

Mr. Bismarck's stern face tightened ever so slightly.

"I can't seem to reach Mr. Schilling either. Any suggestion where we should put them?"

"Fucking Schilling," Mr. Bismarck snarled, glancing out the bay windows. "I'll take them with me."

"This shouldn't be your problem," Mr. Caviezel sighed.

"Who else is going to deal with Jörg's fucking...," Mr. Bismarck bit his tongue, but then in a fit of rage threw his cup right through the kitchen window! The explosion of glass was like a bomb blast! Mr. Caviezel didn't flinch, and Mr. Bismarck stood perfectly still with hunched shoulders and clenched eyes.

Looking back and forth at those two well-dressed gentlemen, I placed my coffee on the counter top and rested my hand on the stainless-steel blender,

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“If all you need is to get rid of the bodies, then maybe I can help.”

Once Gabi and I drove back into the center of Geneva, the rain was pounding as we stopped at a red light. The Mercedes was still following. I hadn’t slept enough in the last two days to tolerate these ambiguous intimidation tactics, so I stepped out onto the street.

“Bruce?” Gabi called out, as I marched back down the line of cars toward the black Mercedes. There was no response from the vehicle. Taking my time, I slowly circled the sedan, and then stopped in front. The two men in suits glared straight back me through the windshield wipers. The light turned green, and people began thumping their horns. Gabi yelled out and pulled onto a side street. Stepping onto the pavement, I felt the rain soaking through everything, as the black Mercedes drove on down the street.

“What was that all about?” Gabi asked, as my palm swept the rain from my shaved head, while we sat quietly in the parked car. “And now what? Got any more leads, or are we at a dead-end?”

Staring out at the narrow backstreet with flooded gutters, I considered the bundle of letters that I’d grabbed from the lighthouse.

“Seriously, Bruce,” Gabi whispered, placing her hand on mine. “Why are you trying to find Grant anyway? I don’t get it. You don’t even really know the guy. Why is it so important to you?”

“Grant took Samuel’s charts because I wanted to know what the fuck had happened at Doggerland,” I said, while focused on Gabi’s gorgeous, cigarette-stinking lip. “If it was nothing, then why the fuck are people disappearing?”

“Suicide.”

“Including Grant, Samuel, and Chloe?”

“They might be on holiday? There’s probably some totally unexciting explanation.”

“So, why was old man Grumbach acting like a sketchy prick?”

“He’s old. Old people are grumpy-pants.”

“Yeah. Yeah, you have a point.”

“Bruce, really, what’s in it for you?”

“The adventure!” I smiled bitterly, “Want to see for myself what the big deal is. Don’t you like to know who’s fucking you over? Or do you prefer being blindfolded and sodomized in the dark by complete strangers?”

“Let’s check into a hotel and you can find out,” she said, leaning in to kiss me – just as oncoming headlights saved me from the disgusting taste of her ash-flavored spit.

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At first I had assumed it was the Mercedes coming back with a vengeance, but it was merely a taxi passing by. “Fuck it! Let’s get a hotel and fuck the Swiss away!”

But then the satellite phone began ringing from the backseat.

-

Back in early December last year, I’d received a phone call in the middle of the night from an unknown number. Soon, I was picked up by that black Jaguar XJ for the first time. The streets of central Berlin at that time of night were utterly deserted. The Jaguar cruised onto Museum Island and down the east-side of the Alte Nationalgalerie, where the gate at a checkpoint was promptly raised. I found myself standing at the back of the Pergamon Museum, staring up at the scaffolding that covered the entire north-wing of the building. Another guy in a suit and tie escorted me down into some service entrance where I was led through a maze of basement storage rooms and corridors lined with endlessly plumbing. As we went up a narrow staircase into a dark passageway, I came to a sign on the door that said, ‘Vortragssaal’. There I heard Mozart’s, *Requiem Lacrimosa*, playing throughout the enormous building. Inside that chamber, two men stood a distance apart. Mr. Juggernaut and another guy who had such a hooked nose, crooked neck, and wrinkled skin, that Mr. Vulture was a most apt title. They were both wearing tuxedos, and had clearly spent the evening at some extremely formal event. Neither looked like they wanted to be at this unfamiliar location.

“I hate these fucking tourist traps,” Mr. Vulture growled. “I hate tourists! Everything about them fills my nasal cavity with bile!”

Glancing around, I noticed that the escort had silently withdrawn.

“Tourists treat our heritage like a fucking amusement park!” Mr. Vulture continued in his thick Bavarian accent. “Taking photos of their wretched children climbing over our historic monuments of artist excellence as if these statues were props from a Hollywood film set! These fucking peasants take no note of what these landmarks fully signify! The world is full of imbeciles declaring their love for the beauty of our culture, but like uneducated barbarians, they rape without understanding what they’re attracted to! All deeper meaning is lost on this sea of idiot pedestrians! I hate the very concept of what a fucking tourist represents! They don’t even partake in the most basic of educational tutorials. Pilgrims without any reverence should be executed for their blasphemous lack of faith! Tourist, they’re all so fucking disgusting!”

I didn’t know who this guy was, but I fucking liked what he had to say.

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“Though, what do you expect when the world is being run by women and weaklings!” Mr. Vulture finally turned and faced me from across the big empty space. “Matriarchy prides itself on exactly what all women value: the superficial! They care not for sacrifice, glory, or the hard work of confronting inner truths in order to advance the empire! Women simply shame others into submission, discredit unity with treacherous gossip, and dismiss the very fucking means that have put a roof over their heads! Once mankind empowered the feminine, she castrated man as irrelevant to her own ends. Look at the crumbling state of the West. Merkel, traitor to the noble Deutsche! Her own inadequacies are equaled only by her unscrupulous motivation to sabotage the entire continent with these infestations of diseased rodents! But she hasn’t done this alone. The whole political system is drunk on its feeble embarrassment of historical retributions! The young are smothered with lies from birth, rendering them incapable of differentiating the generations! It should be a criminal act, teaching children a permanent sense of self-loathing. They’re psychologically damaging the innocent until they believe it down to their bones. They have neutered themselves as a sign of delusional loyalty! Loyalty?! This is treason! This is mental-warfare! This is unforgivable! It’s no wonder that women have seized power. And it’s in their best interests to ensure that the environment remains full of fucking eunuchs! Only once the Islamic flag flies over the Reichstag will the female species realize the extent of the slavery that ‘Mother Merkel’ has sold them into. Fick diese fotse!”

The echo of Mr. Vulture’s furious voice ran screaming out the doorway and into the vast hollows of the museum. I however, knew I was in the company of men of distinction. Mr. Juggernaut, like always, remained calm as granite. The elderly gentleman then inhaled long and slow before approaching with hands behind his back. The closer Mr. Vulture got, the less I saw his physical features, and the more I focused on the churning inferno driving this individual’s decisiveness.

“Where precisely do you stand?” Mr. Vulture demanded, reaching up and tapping the MacFarlane pin on my lapel. “Whom will you defend?”

“When confronted with a movement that openly states that they want you dead, there is no choice in the matter,” I replied quietly. “They have made themselves my enemy.”

Mr. Vulture was unmoved.

Glancing across the ceiling and edges on this lecture hall, I added. “And if you’re going to be accused of a war-crime, then you might as well go to fucking war.”

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The distant Mozart slowly faded out, and for almost an entire minute we stood in silence.

“The work you’ve done for your first assignment was superb,” Mr. Juggernaut finally said, holding up a plastic envelope. “You’ll find this more challenging.”

“You have talent, Herr Knox,” Mr. Vulture softly spoke. “Don’t squander it.”

Mr. Juggernaut handed over the envelope, as Mr. Vulture left the room. “There’s a number inside. If you ever feel you’ve been compromised, call it and we’ll find you. Always remain cautious of those feigning curiosity in order to subvert your assignments.”

Exiting the room, we walked around that narrow passageway where I discovered that we had in fact been below the very Altar Of Zeus itself.

“As you requested,” Mr. Juggernaut said. “The altar is all yours until the construction crew arrive in the morning.”

Distracted, I shook hands with that influential member of the Intrepid Supremacy. I was transfixed by what should have been a sight of ancient Greek pillars. The majority of the museum was closed to the public and wouldn’t reopen until 2023, so when I’d been told that there were certain benefits to working with these guys, I called their bluff. They weren’t fucking kidding. However, this wasn’t the presentation I’d hoped for. The entire place was interlaced with scaffolding that housed the ruins. Dust and piles of electrical cables coated the floor around several scissor-lifts. There was hardly any light as the space that usually relied on its massive skylight, but a golden glow emanated from the top of those wide steps. Scanning the metal plates covering the original frieze of gods and giants, I walked straight up into that open area directly above the lecture hall. Two temporary lamps lay on the floor and aimed at an empty space, where The Throne Of Satan should have sat. Sitting on the floor, I crossed my legs. Drawing a series of small sigils in the dust in front of me with my finger tip, I listened to those chasms of stone and waited.

It didn’t take long before they arrived. Holes began appearing in the floor and walls. Tiny spots that grew in number. Hundreds, then thousands of small holes opened up and stared back at me. A ring of figures soon presented themselves. Blackened shadows that circled the space. And then the walls faded from existence, as Jerusalem stood beyond the burnt pillars of the revealed Pergamon. Pandora’s Box lay as a great altar in the center, and behind it came a priestess with a crown of black serpents and a robe

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of deceit. As she approached, endless black worms that were the size of eels emerged from the porous floor and slithered over my knees. I heard the flesh embodiment of The Sea and The Altar Of Fire on either side of me as they salaciously whispered about how they required a sacrifice. Behind me, Boaz and Jachin moaned like whores as an inner circle of cloaked figures surrounded the altar. A ring of headless slaves then followed and knelt, facing the center. Impatiently, the priestess slammed her hands upon Pandora's box! The overcast sky ruptured open as if a huge shock wave from a nuclear explosion had just struck the clouds apart! There, in the mist above, I beheld the very kingdom of heaven in absolute ruins.

-

Gabi parked the car in front of a small stone church in a tiny town not far from Geneva. As soon as she killed the engine, I grabbed her lighter and opened my door.

"What are you doing?" Gabi asked, "What are you burning? Jesus, Bruce!"

As I watched the letters that I had sent to Grant go up in flames, I knew that as soon as I returned to Berlin I must destroy his correspondence too. I didn't know who was following us, but the less evidence of my involvement, the better.

"Bruce! Speak to me!"

"He's here," I said, looking past Gabi's concern, toward a black Rolls Royce Phantom that came smoothly down that lonely street lined with tall trees. The big car pulled up so that its back window was right next to Gabi, and there the shriveled face of Mr. Grumbach sneered at us both.

"Do you always let your women drive?"

"Yes," I smiled. "Yes, I do."

Mr. Grumbach placed a clear plastic oxygen-mask over his mouth and inhaled. Gradually parting his pinched lips, he looked back up. "The Katalysatoren."

"Pardon?"

"The ship you found. The Norwegian research vessel that sank."

"What about it?"

"It was the Katalysatoren, out of Bergen. On the west coast of Norway."

"When was it recovered?"

"It hasn't been," Mr. Grumbach said, handing Gabi a series of satellite photos of a large ship leaving port and then disappearing in clouds. "The one who sent you here is not who he says he is."

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“Why are you helping us now?” I asked, shaking my head “Why the fuck should I believe you? And what’s with the tail following us? Why the fuck is everyone so obsessed with the North Sea, for fuck’s sake?!”

Mr. Grumbach immediately looked uncomfortable, scanning the rain-washed surroundings.

“You even know what we found in that ship?”

“Cetus, Mr. Knox. You found Cetus.”

### OF ENMITY AND EMENIES THURSDAY 17th AUGUST 2017

A student led Gabi and I through the university campus in central Oslo, and I was glad that we had finally bought a couple of umbrellas at the airport. There were plenty of modern buildings, but inevitably we descended into a concrete-scented sub-level of tight corridors packed with shelves of stored curiosities. It was still early, and the trusting kid didn’t even ask what business we had being in the dead professor’s office, as he smiled and left us.

“We should hurry,” Gabi whispered. “They’ll call the police if we’re caught in here.”

“Doubt it,” I said, glancing around the tiny room with its neon lights. “Who the fuck comes down here?”

The sound of footsteps made us both freeze. The echoes came and went, and I shrugged pathetically.

“Are these what we’re looking for?” Gabi asked, holding up a pile of letters.

“You sweet little bitch!” I snarled.

Gabi wasn’t sure how to react to my delight.

Checking the sender’s address, I grabbed Gabi around the waist and kissed her hard on the lips. “Walk in the park!”

“Can we go now?”

“Relax.”

“There’s a funny smell in here.”

The door then burst open and I was grabbed by two giant men that literally threw me out into the corridor! Gabi shouted madly, while I was picked up by my collar as the other guy went through my jacket pockets and took both Grant’s and Halvorsen’s correspondence. All I could do was squirm until a fist struck my guts! On the floor, I coiled up without a drop of oxygen left in my lungs. Gabi huddled in the office, and as I coughed relentlessly,



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I watched the two men quietly walk away. Wincing, without much in the way of thoughts going through my head, I crawled after those fucking cunts. Quickly building up enough momentum, I began running, but one guy turned and shoved me directly into the fucking wall! There was no way I was getting the letters back. These fucks were too big. Crawling to my feet again, I heard another door open just before a fight broke out! Two more guys in suits also wanted what I'd come for. Looking back, I saw Gabi clinging to the edge of office door, when a gunshot went BOOM!

"Christ!" I yelled, shuddering from the blast in the confined corridor. The bundle of letters then dropped and smeared across the floor. While the four men wrestled, I swept up the envelopes. Compulsively making sure that I had every last one, I crudely stuffed them back into my jacket pockets, while scrambling toward Gabi. The enraged men yelled out in that unknown language, as I grabbed Gabi by the wrist and we sprinted around the passageway. Loud footsteps soon came racing behind us as I spotted a beautiful stairway. Gabi then whipped free from my grasp and smashed the casing over a fire-alarm! A lethargic siren began going through the motions, but when another gunshot hit the wall, our feet got us the fuck out of there!

Gabi was skinny but fast as we ran wildly into the thunder storm.

"Get to the car!" I sneered, pushing her into a group of confused students. "Meet me at the Nobel Peace building by the waterfront!"

"Where are you going?!" Gabi cried out, as I ran off. "Wait!"

"The Nobel Peace building! The waterfront! Google it!"

The guy in the business suit with the matching handgun came running after me like he was a quarterback on a mission to stomp my skull with the heel of his expensive shoe. Thankfully, I was wearing my Chucks and light on my feet. Last time I'd been in this town, like Geneva, it had been sunshine and lollypops, with a perpetual flow of gorgeous blondes on every fucking corner. There was no sun now, no blondes, and I was suddenly disorientated as I tried to locate the entrance to the campus. A girl screamed behind me as the guy with the gun knocked her down! Struggling to zip up my jacket pockets, to prevent the balled-up letters from falling out, I finally recognized the historic buildings at the front of the university, and I immediately put some distance between that hired thug and myself. I'd always been a decent runner. Whenever I was on the treadmill at the gym, I had this habit of picturing myself repeating the twenty-minute route of my teens. It used to take ten minutes to reach the street leading toward my high school, so I would break it down into five minute slots, half-way in each direction. Of

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course, at the time, I had chosen that route because I would run past the house of the first girl I'd ever fallen in love with. She never once came outside despite how often I ran by. But then, when she was thirteen she died, and yet I still continued running by her house. Was I in denial? Or was it merely out of habit? Now, however, I ran through the pelting rain, leaped across park fences, and sprinted down the middle of busy streets. The general downhill incline was a bonus, but my pursuer was committed to his cause. I welcomed the motivation. Yet, despite the angry drivers punching their horns, and all those screaming bystanders, I once again found myself focusing on that route from my childhood. I pictured myself running past that symmetrical house with its green roof. She died when I was fourteen. I stopped running when I was fifteen, only after I ran into the glass-door. When I was sixteen I was invited into her home. Her father was an architectural draftsman, so I had arranged it so that I could spend a week as his intern. I don't know why. She was dead. What was my fascination with torturing myself with her memory. Her father, himself, had designed that very house with its A-framed green roof nestled in the valley. I liked its large open interior, with his office on the top floor overlooking the lounge. He seemed like a good guy, though he never knew about my affections toward his dead daughter. No one knew. No one cares. She's dead! Nothing fucking matters once your fucking dead. So, keep your secrets to your-fucking-self! And I kept running. I ran all the way through Oslo while wishing that a fucking bus would strike me down! But I was too fucking quick for such an easy ending. Others die, but I keep going. Once I past the Royal Palace, I sped down a long street, past a statue of Pan with his angry erection. I knew exactly where I was at that point. Looking back, I saw that the guy in a suit was at least three blocks behind me. I could have slowed and caught my breath, but I didn't. My heart was stronger than every other muscle in my lean body, I wanted it to drive so much pressure through my fucking brain that I'd rupture every blood vessel all at once! Shoving aside every cunt on the path, I was fuming. Part of me wanted to run faster and leave this hitman in my trails. Part of me wanted to stop and let the guy bash my fucking head in.

However, within ten minutes of leaving the campus, I saw the water's edge and ran straight out of the city, onto the open space before the harbor. Police sirens weren't far behind. I had actually beaten Gabi to the port. You don't realize how slow driving through a central business district is until you run it. And then I heard that guy slam through a group of umbrellas! Spinning, I glanced around for a direction to run, when Gabi's rental swerved right onto

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the pavement next to the Nobel Prize Center. Opening the passenger's side door, I raised my hand toward that determined shithead racing my way, all I gave him was the middle finger, before Gabi drove off into the intensifying deluge.

"Who the fuck are these people?!" Gabi yelled. "They're shooting at us now!"

"I know! I was there!" I smirked, wiping the rain from my face, as I looked back down the street. A white van drove up to the guy and he climbed inside. "Ah, we got to get the fuck out of Dodge!"

"What?"

I laughed bitterly, thumbing the small navigation screen as I quickly typed in our destination: Bergen. But then another big white Mercedes van suddenly drove in front of us! I was impressed how well Gabi managed to skid the car sideways into the blockade. The van's side door opened and two guys reached for my door. Gabi kicked the accelerator and we shot backward! Grabbing the dashboard, I watched the two vans race after us as we swung around an open court. Gabi hit the brakes again and the rental lurched 180 degrees before straightening up. She then plowed ahead and I sunk back into my seat as we fired right between the two vans and back into the city!

A black Range Rover Sport SVR then sped down past the Nobel Prize building. It crossed the center-line, sending traffic all over the place as it aimed at us.

"We got to head west!" I yelled, as I was thrown about in my seat. "West! No! You're other west!"

"We have to get out of the city!" Gabi screeched. "Or we're going to kill someone!"

"Yes! West! Follow the fucking navigation!"

And then the Range Rover rammed into the back of our rental!

"Why are they doing this!" Gabi screamed, just as several cop cars flew toward us. "What have you got me into! You said this would be a nice road-trip! Jesus, and I just wanted you to fuck me!"

"What part of this aren't you enjoying?!"

The Range Rover hammered into our tail again, sending us skidding through overflowing gutters, onto the sidewalk, and then down another street where the navigation told us to do a U-turn. I don't know what happened to all the cops, but then one of the white vans came head-on toward us. Gabi whipped the rental onto a back street, leaving the van and Range Rover to crash into each other!

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We were then on the street leading up to the Royal Palace. That was where a black Porsche 918 Spyder tore around a corner and drove right next to us. Staring at the Porsche's tinted windows beside me, I pictured someone raising a gun toward my head. I leaned away from the parallel Porsche, just as Gabi wrenched the car to the left and floored it past the Royal Palace as more cops appeared from other streets. The Porsche, for some reason, slid sideways, blocking the entire street and forcing the cop cars to pile up.

In less than thirty seconds, we were out of the central city and heading into the countryside – until a fucking silver Maserati Alfieri came blazing after us like a jet fighter. Our rental didn't stand a chance of outrunning that machine, and the Maserati easily overtook us, and then swung violently in front!

"Who the fuck is this?!" Gabi grunted, barely keeping the vehicle on the street. "Where the fuck are they coming from?!"

"Shall I roll down my window and ask?"

A black SUV came out of nowhere and smashed into the back of our rental! Everything spun 360 degrees before the car came to a stop in the middle of the highway.

"Shit on me!" I gasped, gripping the dashboard with my right hand. My left squeezed Gabi's right thigh. "Check my fucking shorts!"

Automatic gunfire then outweighed the torrential rain fall!

"Down!" I sneered, grabbing Gabi as bullets rattled against metal!

"Who are these people?!" Gabi screamed, as her window shattered! "What do they want?!"

The sound of skidding wheels on asphalt seemed to distract the gunmen.

"Drive!" I yelled.

Only once we were about to race around a bend in the highway, did I look back at the chaos behind. Men with big black machine-guns were firing from the Range Rover at the other men huddling next the SUV, who, in turn, were firing back with compact assault-rifles. Who was whom was anyone's guess. But just before I lost sight of the street-fight, that fucking Maserati came out of nowhere, also shooting at us!

"Did you know that this was going to happen?!" Gabi desperately yelled. "Do you have any idea who these fucking people are?!"

"Don't think we're getting the deposit back for the car," I said, glaring at a row of bullet holes in the passenger's side door. "Does the insurance cover this sort of shit?"

The Maserati pulled up next to us with its passenger's side window open

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and a guy pointing a Kriss Vector submachine-gun with silencer right at Gabi. She screamed, hit the brakes, and the bullets shredded the hood of our car! The front wheel then exploded! And we spun like a fucking top, until a tree stopped us dead in our tracks! Coughing and shaking my head, I cupped the back of Gabi's neck, "Feel like a stroll? Let's take a walk."

"What?" Gabi muttered, with blood trickling from her forehead. "There's nowhere to go!"

"Look at that pretty forest." I stated, jumping out of the rental, as I saw the Maserati turning around further down the empty highway. Gabi couldn't get her seat belt to open, and I found her door was just as jammed. Glancing up through the rain, I saw the Maserati slow as it approached our wreck. Grabbing my knife, I slashed Gabi's seat belt, and then literally dragged her through the shattered window. A gunman stepped out of the Maserati just as that black Porsche suddenly howled around the corner. Gabi and I ducked as the guy in the suit opened fire on the other side of our car! And then the Porsche swerved as a Micro-Tavor assault-rifle extended from the driver's side and opened fire, ripping the Maserati a new rectum!

The two white vans came charging up the highway. Their side doors opened as men with machine-guns hung half-way outside, firing at everyone on the fucking street!

Gabi was screaming, and I was in the motion of running for the woods – when I saw the Porsche's door open. Out stepped Mara in her Burberry trench-coat and Prada heels. Turning the barrel of her Israeli assault-rifle, she emptied the magazine into the oncoming vans!

Nodding my head in approval, Gabi gasped in shock, "You know her?!"

"Special Agent Hard Peach."

"What the?!"

"She's an ex."

"She wants you dead too?!"

I squinted, unsure of Gabi's comment, watching on as Mara sliced up both vans with perfectly placed gunfire.

"So, this is the famous Gabi?" Mara said, as the vans crashed into the woods, while the Maserati reversed away.

"Don't fucking start," I smiled, reaching into the rental's backseat and grabbing our small backpacks.

"I can leave," Mara replied in her usual dispassionate tone of voice. "Looks like you've got everything under control."

"There's only two seats in this thing!" Gabi stressed. "We're not going

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to fit!”

“Sit on uncle’s lap,” I grinned, hurrying around the sleek Porsche.

Mara then fired at the vans again, as men in suits ran for cover in the trees. “You like my frogger?”

“Your what?” Gabi asked, as we got inside that brand-new, luxury sports car.

And then the Range Rover smashed straight through the two smoking vans!

Mara’s Prada hit the pedal and we raced down the highway, as I whispered, “Love those shoes.”

“Perv!”

“Enabler!”

“Do you two need a room?” Gabi asked, as we sped past the Maserati.

“Where were you two love-birds heading?”

“Where did you come from?” Gabi scowled. “How did you find us?”

“Just lucky, I guess.”

“Out west,” I said, holding up the scrunched letters. “Going to see a guy about a boat.”

“Going sailing? In this weather?”

“Not unless they brought the thing back from the seafloor.”

“Who are you meeting?”

“Whoever the fuck owned the thing.”

“What’s the name of the ship?”

“Why?” Gabi looked suspicious. “Were you following us?”

Mara ignored the question and pulled out her phone while driving at three-times the speed-limit through the hilly countryside.

“What was the name of it, again?” I asked Gabi, while I went through the two types of envelopes like a deck of cards. “The Catatonic?”

“The Katalysatoren,” Gabi corrected, while pouting at Mara who wrote a text in Hebrew. “Who are you? What are you doing here?”

Mara smiled with cold eyes, glancing at the letters. “That why everyone wants a piece of you?”

“If it’s not my charm, then I don’t know what the fuck they’re after.”

“Yeah, what’s so special about these letters?” Gabi asked.

“Already read everything the professor sent to Grant,” I said, stacking the envelopes in chronological order based on the dates on the stamps. “Let’s see what Grant had to say.”

“By the way,” Mara spoke up, reading her phone. “That ship, it doesn’t

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exist.”

“Of course.”

“However, it’s said to be owned by a Mr. Neilsen, right here in Oslo.”

“Well, turn this shit around, and let’s pay him a visit. See if he has time to talk about our lord and savior of funk, Michael Jackson.”

“Also, could you find out a little more about Mr. Jensen,” Gabi said, unable to contain her curiosity. “Mr. Rolf Jensen. Assistant of Professor Halvorsen.”

“Who’s he?”

“The guy who started Bruce on this whole thing.”

“Actually,” I said facetiously. “I still blame the Jews.”

“How can you stand the shit that comes out of his mouth?” Mara scorned.

“She likes the other things my tongue’s good for.”

“Hey! I’m right here!” Gabi said, shaking her head, as the Porsche swerved onto an exit, reversed, and then headed back the way we’d come.

“How’s your anus doing?” Mara asked, with a smug grin.

“It’s not my anus, it’s the hairs on my ass that feel like they’re slowly being ripped out of their roots,” I cowered, as the Porsche shot around another tight bend. “Christ! Feels as if I’m sitting naked on a sheet of sandpaper while it’s gradually pulled out from under me! Ease down, for fuck’s sake! You’re cheese-grating my ass cheeks!”

“Am I pointing out the obvious,” Gabi spoke up, over Mara’s laughter. “We’re heading back toward everyone that just tried to kill us!”

“Act natural and maybe they won’t notice,” I suggested, pulling out my phone and calling the number that Mr. Juggernaut had given me. “What’s the address of this Neilsen guy?”

“Also,” Mara said with a frown. “Jensen. Rolf Jensen. He was found dead this morning.”

Apart from one of the vans lying on its side and our wrecked rental, we never saw anyone from the street-fight. The drive to Mr. Neilsen’s estate took about half an hour, so that gave me time to skim over Grant’s letters. However, they merely left a bad taste in my mouth, once I realized that I had forgotten the most important thing.

Mara drove quietly down a private road until a three-story house emerged from the dense foliage. Masses of vines smothered the front of the old stone architecture. Only thin, dark windows broke the greenage, while smoke drifted from many of the spire-like chimneys. I liked the place. I loved how the overgrown nature was kept immaculately cropped.

Folding the pile of envelopes neatly, I stuffed them back into my pockets

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as Gabi climbed off my lap and stepped into the drizzle. It wasn't cold but her hands were shaking as she struggled to light her cigarette. After securing one particular letter within my inner pocket, I took the lighter and looked Gabi in the eye as I shielded the flame. The place looked dead, until we stepped up to the arched entrance and saw a figure move inside a room to our left. Gabi pressed the doorbell, and the door was abruptly pulled inward! A squat man in a gray, three-piece suit with a beautiful scarlet shirt and tie received us with a look of condescension. The bickering voices of other men could be heard nearby.

"Hi. We're looking for a Mr. Neilsen," Gabi took the initiative. "Would he be available?"

"No!" the short-tempered guy snapped. "Remove yourselves from the premises!"

No sooner had the door slammed shut, we heard the police coming up the drive. The patrol car parked in the middle of the large gravel court, and two officers stepped out. The front door then swung open again!

"This is the man! He has stolen property in his possession!" yelled the guy in the gray suit. "Arrest and search them this instant!"

"The fuck?!" I sneered. "Where the fuck is Neilsen?!"

"I'm Mr. Neilsen's legal representative," the lawyer stated, addressing only the approaching cops. "You will find a collection of personal correspondence on his person, all of which belong to this institute! They must be returned before any further breach in security!"

"Please cooperate," one of the young cops said, reaching toward my shoulder.

"Show me your hands!" the other cop suddenly yelled!

"There's no problem here," Mara said gently, slowly pulling out her identification. "This is all a misunderstanding."

"Arrest them immediately!" the lawyer shouted. "They're all criminals! We have witnesses!"

Turning toward the front door, I then saw that the same cunt who had chased me from the university was now standing inside. The guy looked fucking pissed, and although I was 100% sure Mara had a 9mm on her, Christ knows how many others from the street-fight were also lurking inside.

The two cops looked hesitant, as one backed off, speaking Norwegian into his radio.

Glancing at Mara's badge, I tilted my head, saying, "How's the new job working out, alright?"



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“Yep.”

“Lots of nice perks.”

“A few.”

“Thought you were done with this line of business.”

“I am.”

“What do you call this?”

“A promotion.”

“Enough!” The lawyer then stepped out into the light rain, gesturing toward the big guy behind. “Take him!”

I winced, trying to back off, but the hired muscle was too close to escape this time. Hands clamped onto my chest and threw me inside the house! Rolling across the threshold, I looked back as Mara kicked the guy in the knee and took him down with ease – right when that fucking Range Rover collided into the side of the cop car! Another pair of hands grabbed my shoulders and I was dragged into a dark room and pinned to the floor. Yet more hands crawled at my pockets, searching for the letters – until gunfire broke out! The windows above shattered and men yelled in anger! I heard another vehicle arrive, and more automatic gunfire! Rolling aside from the falling glass, I lunged away from whoever the fuck was in the house, and ran. Except, my orientation was all wrong. I thought I was heading back to the front door, but found myself below a huge staircase made of wood that was as black as a grand piano. Men blocked the way, so up the stairs I went! Racing down a long corridor, I soon learned how big the house was, and burst through a door at the end. There was a library of sorts, but I didn’t stick around to admire the cozy atmosphere. As soon as I exited the library, I ran onto a stone balcony overlooking a morbid back garden. Ignoring the Greek statues, massive fountains, and romantic paths, I leaped over the stone banister. I slipped on the wet roofing below, before somewhat awkwardly dropping to the patio. Grabbing the first door I saw, I lurched back inside and darted through rooms and corridors until the echoes of machine-gun fire drew me toward the wide open front door. A hand however, caught my arm and I was swung sideways into a fucking wall! This random guy shoved me against a second wall, and then choking me with both hands. Suddenly a spray of bullets hailed through the front door, shredding the wall!

“Jesus fuck!” I yelled upon my release. Stumbling away from the guy firing his own handgun out the door, I scurried up another staircase. It was only at this point that my self-preservation let slip my first thoughts of Mara and Gabi. And I was fucking irritated! What gave her the fucking right to

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continue meddling in my affairs?! I'm so fucking sick of her attitude of entitlement! I didn't ask her to watch my back, and I don't fucking need a chaperon! She's only here because of her jealousy! Come to serve her own insecurities and rationalize that she's better than Gabi. What's worse, was that they were now alone together. Mara would do her best to shit all over me. The only thing I had on my side, was the psychology of increased attraction during high-risk ordeals. That all aside, however, Gabi was probably better off with Mara. Combat wasn't my expertise. And anyway, how much sense did Gabi make of any of this. From her point of view this all probably seemed like complete anarchy. At least Mara was used to professionals trying to kill her. Or she had been in her last job. But I didn't know what the fuck I was going to do! I couldn't stop any of these trained killers. Their muscle mass was stronger than mine. Unarmed, you're powerless against men with guns. All I could do was run. So, I did. I ran straight to the top floor, cursing all the way, "Where the fuck are the Thule boys?!"

Rushing into another big room with skinny windows, I carefully peered down onto that war-zone of smoldering vehicles and deafening assault-rifles. I couldn't spot the girls, and now all those well-dressed men with heavy-duty weapons looked the same. Who the fuck were these cunts?! Where the fuck could I go?! And how the fuck do I stop them from following me?!

"Give me the papers!" yelled the lawyer from the door. "We don't have time for any of this!"

"What's so fucking special about them?!" I snarled, pulling a fistful of envelopes out of my pocket and holding them up like I wanted to punch that prick. "Why the fuck does anyone even give a shit?!"

"You should know."

"Why, for fuck's sake?!"

"You were there."

"Where?!"

"At the beginning!"

"Beginning of what?!" I shouted, slamming my hands into the advancing lawyer's chest, sending him stumbling a good ten feet back. "I've never even fucking met you before!"

"On the Katalysatoren," he said, pulling out a small stainless-steel blade, and holding it in front of him. "You were there. Before it sunk. You saw what happened."

"I've read these fucking ramblings!" I spat, pulling out my own knife, and the lawyer stopped where he was. "There's nothing in them! Two fucking

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assholes ranting about conspiracy theories and mythology. It's all fucking bullshit!"

"Then why are you risking your life for them?"

"I'm only here looking for Captain Grant. That's all!"

"Why?!"

"He saved my fucking life on that sinking piece of shit!"

"You're a liar!"

"Says the lawyer," I muttered. "What the fuck were they looking for out there?!"

"The same thing as you," he said shaking his head.

"Fucking cunt! Here! If you want them, you're fucking welcome!"

"No!" gasped the lawyer, as I whipped open the closest double-glazed window.

"Have them and go fuck yourself!" I said, throwing the screwed-up papers out into the rain and wind. "Go fetch, you fuck!"

The lawyer lunged at me, but then ran out of the room, hurrying down to the front door.

It was that easy.

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An hour later, I finally waved down a taxi on a remote street and headed back to the university. There were a couple of cop cars at the main building, and I saw a few officers near the archaeology block, but I had my hood up as I casually headed down into the basement. Opening the door to Professor Halvorsen's office, I screamed, "Fuck my tits!"

"You just left us there!" Mara stated, sitting behind the big desk. Gabi stood in the corner with her arms crossed. "I can't believe you just left us!"

"Jews, you're like cockroaches," I smiled, looking through the mountains of paperwork on the desk. "Nothing can kill you."

"You know, when I heard the things my sister said about you, Bruce," Gabi spoke quietly. "I laughed at it all. I knew she was exaggerating. But she wasn't! You really are a fucking psychopath!"

"Tell it to your sister or someone who gives a fuck!" I barked straight back. "You're a fucking adult! I didn't fucking force you to come along! Take some personal fucking responsibility!"

"There you go again," Mara scoffed. "Always blaming everyone else."

"Did I fucking invite you here!" I yelled, smashing over a huge pile of books! "You're the fucking spook tracking my cellphone like a motherfucking stalker! You knew exactly where the fuck I was, so spare me your overblown

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predictions of fucking female intuition!”

“You can’t talk to us like this!” Gabi shouted. “We could have all died back there!”

“Was I the one aiming a fucking gun at your pretty little fucking head?!”

There was then a vicious period of silence, so I turned and began searching through the endless boxes on a bench below a tiny window at ground level. It was obviously that Mara had already polluted Gabi’s vulnerability with her shit-talk about me.

“Your rental car has been taken care of. There won’t be any questions asked about it,” Mara whispered, as she and Gabi moved toward the door. “I’m getting her out of the country. We all know you can take care of yourself.”

Keeping my back toward both them, I clenched my jaw and waited until I heard their footsteps fade down the corridor. Maybe I had just made a massive fucking mistake. What if some of those guys came looking for the one letter that I hadn’t thrown out the window. An idea then occurred to me: what if Mara was the protagonist in a much bigger story that I simply wasn’t meant to be part of? Had she been protecting me, or interfering in my plans for her own ends? Who the fuck knows what her agenda was. The same could be said for Gabi. What if she was the one in contact with those following us this whole time? Women, they’re all spies snooping through your personal shit. There is no such thing as mutual benefit. There is only the question of who has the strongest advantage.

Swallowing that surge of sudden regret, I then spotted Samuel’s charts of the North Sea. Spreading them across the desk, I noticed that Mara had also left my backpack on the chair. Pulling out the special pages from my inner pocket, I checked the GPS coordinates that Grant had taken note of, and then I ran my finger across longitude two-degrees and latitude fifty-four-degrees. It was in the middle of the sea, right where it said, ‘Silverpit Crater’. The location was directly below Dogger Bank, and seemingly near to where the Katalysatoren had gone down. There, Samuel had written a long series of numbers in red, but it was just one spot among many others that he had been marked with strange numbers that seemed to hold no significance to each other.

After memorizing the series of red numbers at the coordinates, I opened that slither of a window. I then balled-up the charts and Grant’s last letter, before stuffing them into a trashcan. Using Gabi’s lighter, I set the whole lot on fire. They burned away within a few seconds and I stirred the stinking ashes with a ruler so that nothing was left but dust. This was the same map

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that I had stared blankly at while on board the Onbekend, yet Captain Grant's correspondence claimed to have discerned the key location. But of all places, why the fuck did it have to be in the middle of the fucking sea?!

### LIVE BY THE SEA, DIE BY THE SEA FRIDAY 18th AUGUST 2017

Using the last of Jensen's money, I caught a flight from Oslo to Hamburg. I arrived just after midnight and was met by Mr. Caviezel. Before I had left the university, I had called in a favor, and Mr. Caviezel personally drove me west without any questions.

Stepping out of the black Bentley Continental GT, I handed the ever-cool Mr. Caviezel my cell phone and its battery separately, asking him to hold onto them for safe keeping. Again, he required no explanation, just smiled understandingly, and with a pensive tone of voice told me to, "Take care."

It wasn't yet 4am, as I watched the Bentley head back the way we had come. Mr. Caviezel didn't want to risk driving down the dirt road, and I had thought it was no problem at the time, but once I walking, the distance to the coast seemed much longer than I remembered. Using my pen-light to lead the way, I could smell sheep shit in that rustling blackness. It wasn't long before I ruined my Chucks on the gravel. Not to mention, my feet were already killing me after running through the streets of Oslo. There's a reason that I wear Asics at the gym.

It took nearly an hour until I saw Grant's lighthouse over the treetops. There was a fucking gale coming in from the sea, and once I stood outside that white building, I seriously condemned my last words toward Mara and Gabi. While glaring up at the tower, the darkness in the woods seem far more threatening than everything that had transpired in Oslo only some hours ago. But fuck it, I wasn't interested in setting foot back inside the lighthouse itself. Marching around to the seaward-side, I refused to look into the blackened windows or the spaces between the trees.

As I made my way along the shoreline, heading for the small marina, I saw the hermit neighbor standing on the distant water's edge with his back toward me. The moment was perfectly summed up by Caspar David Friedrich's, *The Monk And The Sea*.

There was a tiny shed in the trees next to the pier, and I took two big canisters of extra fuel and tucked them on board the thirty-foot fishing boat. Stepping inside, I switched on the GPS and quickly found that it wasn't hard

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to understand. Behind the wheel was a small dashboard with a few switches for the lights, window-wipers, and a fog-horn, and there was of course the throttle. A radio hung from the ceiling, which I wasn't exactly sure of how to tune. The boat was old but in mint condition. It wasn't state-of-the-art engineering, and even a degenerate landlubber such as myself could grasp the basic mechanics. Unless the engine broke-down, then I would be fucked.

Stepping out onto the aft deck, it was while I was reaching down for that discarded bible, that I was abruptly torn off the boat by an act of pure violence! Several fists and at least a couple of good boots thumps into my torso on the way to the surface of the wooden pier. Then I was back on the land and shoved toward the water. My right hand landed in the lurching waves. It was so fucking freezing that I jolted back in pain as if I'd plunged my arm elbow-deep into an open fire. The laughter that surrounded quickly distracted me from the bruises that throbbed across my rib-cage. Four men in hoodies loomed above, cackling as they punched each other in the arms. One guy lit a cigarette despite the full-frontal wind. It was Mr. Limpy himself. Closing my eyes, I immediately knew what had happened. Either Mr. Caviezel had led them here, or they'd simply followed him. Or perhaps Mr. Bismarck, had sent them to finish what they'd started five-years-ago. Glancing at the pilothouse fishing boat, I clenched my jaw. This was just fucking typical. Your plans are finally working out, and then something completely unrelated comes along and fucks everything up! God bless the chaos. Squinting further to my right, I saw that the neighbor in the next cove had already disappeared. I was on my own.

"Looking forward to this for fucking years," Mr. Limpy boasted, sharing his bottle of Smirnoff. "Look at you! You're a fucking joke, you fucking little Satanist shit!"

"Satanist?" I smiled. "How parochial of you."

"Want to go for a boat ride, do you? Can be arranged, my friend," Mr. Limpy said, followed my line of sight, as he pulled out his phone. "Let me ask you this, how far do you think you can swim without any feet?"

One of the other big Slovaks then pulled out a fucking machete from his coat. My first inhale was a panic, but on the exhale, anger had already replaced all other reactions. This was a personal insult! Fuck these cunts! About half a second later, frustration become my dominant mood. My small Walther knife was no match. I was no fucking match against their might. With my back to the sea, I slowly rose to my feet, wondered exactly how painful it was going to be having my feet chopped off. I doubted that the machete was

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strong enough to snap the tibia and fibula. They'd have to hack through the ankle joints. Reaching back for my knife anyway, I focused on Mr. Limpy, as the laughter of the others built up again. It was then that I remembered that there was still one more option. I could always slit my own throat.

Suddenly I was soaked, as if someone had just splashed a warm cup of coffee in my face! Turning my head aside and rubbing my left eye with the back of my hand, I heard two Slovaks scream! Screeching like how true terror really fucking howls! Another guy yelled, before quickly being gagged. The rain washed my vision clear, only so that I stared down at three men strewn across the stony shore with their guts ripped open! The fourth Slovakian was stumbling backward from that black thing that walked like a man. The gang member tripped and fell on his ass, but that devil continued to approach. The Slovakian screamed as he raised his handgun and fired! The creature had absolutely no reaction as it was shot again and again. The thing merely knelt down over the Slovakian and, from what I could see, tore the man's entire chest wide open, as if he was made of mud!

Coiling my blood-splattered head toward that lonely little boat in the dark, I slowly looked back at the fantastically disfigured Mr. Limpy. His phone was still in his hand. Opening the camera app, I took a nice photo of him with his buddies lying nearby. Then I told myself to move. Walk away. Leave now. Don't push your fucking luck. Get your fucking feet moving. Walk the fuck away! And with the wind in my face, I was expecting some kind of awful attack to land upon my back at any moment. But nothing struck me down.

After struggling to untying the boat from the pier's pilings, I nodded my head, looking back to where the four men had been slaughtered. There was no sign of the creature.

It was going on for 5am, when I gently steered the fishing boat around the calm marina and took that little fucker out into that all-encompassing doom. I swear to fuck, I couldn't understand why the water itself still disturbed me so much. As hard as I tried to rationalize it, it always seemed as though the sea was one great big entity that was out to get me. I clung to the wheel as if the entire buoyancy of the boat relied ultimately on my maintaining its balance by staying perfectly centered. Stiffly turning my neck back toward shore, I saw that the waterfront in front of the lighthouse was empty, apart from four large rust-like stains. Searching for Mr. Bismarck's number in Mr. Limpy's phone, I wrote him a short message accompanied with the photo, *"Terrible shame. There was a little accident. Better take another long look in that mirror I gave you."*

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Ben Harper's voice and steel guitar filled my headphones with, *I Want To Be Ready*, as I threw Mr. Limpy's phone into the sea. The heavy rain and choppy waves went on forever, and drew my eyes within, to the vision I'd had at the Pergamon Museum. The ruins in the clouds. A great empire that had been razed, yet even in oblivion its magnificence was unprecedented. Those tragic traces of a heavenly dominion filled me with a radiant sense of pure ruinenlust. And then, I began wondering how big that thing from the Katalysatoren had grown by now. Scanning the width of the fishing boat, I despised how thin the hull was. The further from land I went, the higher I raised my eyes. Just don't look down. I'm safe in the little boat. It's a straight line to the destination. I just need to focus on the GSP and the horizon. Recalling the scale of the waves that had crashed over the bow of the RV Onbekend, I was sure that if the weather got that bad, the waves would easily topple this insignificant piece of crap. Reaching into the cupboard behind, while always keeping one hand on the wheel, I grabbed a life-jacket and awkwardly slipped into it, and then pulled my small backpack on top of my chest. The satellite phone in my bag was waterproof, at least I hoped it was. Yeah, sure. Cling to the fucking illusion that someone might race out here and rescue me if the shit hits the fan. Yet, I'd made it this far. But water wasn't my friend. That primeval fear worsened the further out the boat went. Dread filling my lungs. This mass of water was a fuck-load bigger than Loch Ness. Why do I keep putting myself in these shit fucking situations?! Because it'll be worth it in the end. Yeah, yeah fucking right! My rational mind had to keep reminding me of this, but at the time it felt like I was standing blindfolded in front of a herd of stampeding elephants. Just don't look down, you fuck! Stay in the fucking boat and keep your fucking eyes on the distant mirage of god's ghost.

During a thunder storm, it felt as though the boat wasn't even moving. The swells grew higher but with a smooth incline. It was like driving over rolling hills. I didn't see a fucking thing out there, only water above and below. There were no other ships, no lights, no fucking sign of land. The screen on the GPS was a solid blue color. After the first five hours of self-doubt, I finally got sick of that broken record in my head, and I snapped the fuck out of it. Remembering that the great indifference of the fucking universe doesn't give a flying fuck about trying to sink this tin can. The boat was sound. Get the fuck over it!

So, I spent the next eight hours with the reassurance that I hadn't capsized yet. It was early evening when a blip appeared on the GPS. Rising from the



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captain's chair, I scanned beyond the monotonous window-wipers into that dismal realm. The GPS indicated that I was approaching the coordinates. The radio then sparked into life! It stuttered with static and died just as shockingly. The window was grimy with salt, and upon opening the miniature door on the port-side of the cabin, I was pelted with rain and spray. Studying the freezing seascape, I questioned if this place had ever seen the sun. It was mid-August, and yet it looked exactly as I remembered it in January. And then, after a rather jagged wave passed in front of the view, I saw something! A crisp white sail. It was the elegant shape of a gaff cutter, and it was heading this way with the wind at its back. Leaning inside, I glanced back and forth from the sails and the GPS. It too was on a direct course for the Silverpit Crater. Relax! It's not the Norwegians. It couldn't be. That's impossible. There's no way that the Norwegians could have been tracking me. It's just some random yacht. Yet I still wished I'd searched the dead Slovaks for a gun instead of the phone. Looking around the cabin, I found nothing that I could use as a weapon. Again, the radio shrieked with inaudible noise, right when the engine began to splutter. Fortunately, the swells had died down. Clinging to the railing, I ventured out to the back of the boat, dragging one of the fuel canisters while glaring back at the distant sails.

By the time I had filled the tank, the cutter was practically upon me. Standing, I stared across the fifty-foot gap between vessels as we passed side by side. Shaking my bitter head with incredulity, I saluted Captain Grant.

As the cutter cruised around and eased up next to Grant's own fishing boat, I checked the GPS. We were now directly above the crater.

"Nice yacht," I acknowledged, as Grant tossed a line.

"You with someone?" Grant sneered, as the two boats pulled up together.

"Are you?"

"Are you alone?!"

"Just me and my shadow."

"What?! Why haven't you brought someone?! You told me you would arrange it!"

"Everyone thinks you're dead."

"You wrote and said you would take care of this!"

"You and Halvorsen wrote a lot of things."

"We need someone! You told me you would bring someone!"

"Why didn't you tell me about this place?"

"This isn't going to work!"

"What are you doing out here?"

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“I’ve been here for weeks! Weeks! Waiting for you to bring what we discussed!”

“Must have missed that memo.”

“You fucking lied to me!”

“Hey, I’m not going to help murder some innocent girl just to appease a mythological sea monster that doesn’t even fucking exist! Are you out of your fucking mind!”

“You saw it!” Grant yelled, absolutely furious. “You were right there with me! You saw it! You swore to me that you would fix this! Why did you lie to me in your letters?! This fucking thing will never leave me alone now! I’ve tried everything! It needs an offering! You were there! You saw what it did to that fucking crew! You promised me you would bring a sacrifice!”

“Who the fuck were they? And Neilsen. Why the fuck did they kill Halvorsen?”

Grant’s desperation withdrew for a moment, and we eyeballed each other while the two boats bobbed out of rhythm. “Halvorsen’s dead?”

“And Jensen.”

“Who?”

“You know a guy called Neilsen?”

“You promised me you would fix this,” Grant spoke quietly. “You told me you could bring someone.”

“What if I only told you that, ‘cause I wanted to make sure that you didn’t complete the banishing ritual.”

“What?”

“What if I told you, I want it to stay here.”

Grant’s aged face looked mortified as he took half a step backward. “Why would you help it?!”

“I’m not,” I stated. “I’m helping myself.”

“The hell is wrong with you?!”

“We all have personal loyalties, just as we all have our own interests at heart.”

“You let it out of the fucking basement!”

“Maybe,” I smiled. “But you brought it into this world.”

Grant stumbled backward, horror taking over his eyes.

The thing from the beach had been on board with me the whole trip. I didn’t move as I watched it crawl onto the cutter, slowly overpowering the bearded seaman and smothering that old white yacht in pints of butchered blood. I had wanted to ask Grant how he’d discovered the missing sequence

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in the spell that had summoned up this specimen below his lighthouse, but as I saw him being taking apart one bone at a time, I knew that he had never held any authority over it. Taking my knife, I sliced the ropes binding the two boats together. We quickly drifted apart, and I got my first good look at that devil as it rose to its feet and scowled back in my direction. It seemed like a naked man who'd been burnt alive since the dawn of time. Its black flesh



looked hardened like the crust upon molten lava. Whiteless eyes glistened below two broken splinters that had once been horns. The secrets that this thing represented transmuted all my apprehensions into a growing sense of sacrosanct respect.

And then there was a tremendous CRACK!

The cutter lurched half out of the sea as an enormous ebony shape surfaced

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behind the slender yacht. My little boat was suddenly thrust upward! Grabbing the railing, I was utterly petrified, thinking that the craft was going to flip. While leaning over the edge, my reflexes almost threw myself backward as I saw more of that vast creature moving directly below the hull. It sure wasn't any kind of fucking whale. Cetus had come for what was owed! Not sticking around to find out what the whole thing looked like, I ducked into the cabin. Shoving the throttle forward, I manically glanced back just as the cutter's mask snapped in two! The giant beast smashed onto the aft of the yacht with a terrific THUD! My boat then jerked awkwardly! It was hooked on the fallen mast! That motherfucker was going to take me down with it! The rough seas had become a foaming mess, as blackened areas of the enormous animal's anatomy surfacing while it churned through the water. The mast then tore off a chunk of the railing. As hesitant as I was, I knew that I had to do something. Yanking at that immovable length of wood and sail, I tried to find what it was snagged upon, when the mast, and indeed the entire cutter, twisted brutally! I was struck in the shoulder as the mast obliterated the cabin's rear window! Another blow from something below cast the yacht skyward again – but also broke the mast free! Stumbling sideways inside, I hit the throttle, and the engine finally kicked in. Some part of a huge black limb burst upward from of the sea right behind the fishing boat as the I plowed away. And then the radio exploded with crackling noise and voices!

Daylight only lasted for another three hours, the rest of the voyage was spent traveling in complete darkness. I had no choice but to rely solely on the GPS to guide my way toward the east coast of England. Following the obscured sun for as long as it lasted, I pushed the engine as hard as I dared. Though, it got to the point that I resigned myself to never catching that fading light behind the lowest clouds. It eventually looked like the glow from a burning city just beyond the horizon. This truly had to have been the saddest sunset I've ever witnessed. My previous acceptance that I had been safe while on board didn't bring much comfort during the night. What if that fucking abomination came after me? And how the fuck do I know that there aren't a million more just like it surrounding me? Not to mention that a wave could come out of nowhere and knock the boat over without the slightest warning. I didn't miss sleep, constant paranoia kept the adrenaline gushing.

In the small hours, as the fishing boat neared England, the GPS indicated that I was on a direct course for a small isle by the name of the Holy Island. A towering castle stood dimly silhouetted by the weak lights from a small village

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across the bay. Here the water was almost dead calm as I quietly motored past the looming walls of the sturdy fortifications. Killing the engine in the shallows, the boat nestled gently among several skiffs below a small concrete pier. There, a person in a thick raincoat stood, waiting in the pitch-black. He reluctantly took the line that I threw him, and he helped secure the boat. Only once I stepped onto the old dock did I take a moment to appreciate what I'd just gotten away with, and I never wished to repeat that fucking voyage again. Fuck the North Sea! In fact, I'd be pretty fucking happy if I stayed the fuck away from open water for the rest of my fucking life. This experience hadn't blessed me with some bullshit revelation about conquering my fears, quite the opposite. The sea wasn't some banal wasteland. Everything about the sea wanted you dead! Thank fuck that I was back on dry fucking land. Except, the universe wasn't done with me just yet, and the sky thundered and the rain poured down.

"Grant?" the old Irish man croaked.

"Was too late," I whispered.

The sickly-faced stranger chewed on his inner cheek, then nodded his head as if having a conversation with himself. He began looking overwhelmed with sadness, until he twitched and walked toward the village.

Another figure emerged from the shadows next to a stone building near a streetlamp. He muttered something with my guide before grunting, "Can we trust you?"

Clenching my fucking jaw at such a ludicrous fucking question, I pictured the gigantic black spine of Cetus when it had dragged the entire cutter to the depth. "Grant trusted me."

The three of us walked away from the sleeping village and crossed a vast field. I was beginning to think that they were about to force me to dig my own grave before putting a bullet in the back of my head. However, behind a cluster of trees there was a thatched roof cottage that was so overgrown with grass and bush that it seemed as if it had actually sunk into the soil.

"Fuck is this?!" a big man demanded, standing up behind a wooden table, as we enter that hovel. "Fuck is Grant?!"

"Went down with the ship," I replied, shaking off the rain that saturated every corner of my being, except for my armpits that were sweat-sodden.

"Saw this did you, prick?!" the Englishman yelled.

Ignoring my cold hands, I stared back at this uglier version Ray Winstone. "We're fucking going out there and fucking looking for that son of a bitch!"

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“He wasn’t alive when the boat went down.”

“Fucking hold this cunt still!” Winstone yelled, shoving the entire table aside as he lunged at my throat. “I’ll fucking teach—”

“He’s gone!” another Irishman shouted from a doorway. “Fucking knew what he’d gotten himself into! It’s not this fucking guy’s fault!”

“Want to fucking see his fucking dead body with my own two fucking eyes, thank you very fucking much!” Winston bellowed less than an inch from my face. “Fuck did you leave him, cunt?!”

“Silverpit Crater,” I said, thinning my eyes from Winstone’s spit. After I had just made it across the entire North Sea in a teeny tiny, little fucking motor-boat, this asshole wasn’t intimidating anyone this morning. “That’s where it came up, broke the boat into splinters, and then went bye bye.”

Everyone took a few seconds to let that sink in.

“Would someone like to spell it out to me,” I asked, glancing around that dank room of medieval architecture. “What’s the fascination with this crater? Don’t look like a bunch of meteorite enthusiasts.”

“It’s not a fucking impact crater,” one of the Irish laughed. “You fucking idiot.”

“How’d you know where to find Grant?” the guy in the doorway asked, and I was pretty sure that he was the voice from the radio. “What’s your connection?”

“You’re the medium,” the first Irish guy spoke up.

“The one Grant kept talking about?” the second Irish guy asked.

“Talk to the fucking dead, do you?” Winstone snarled back in my face. “Huh?! So, how come you left Grant out there to fucking rot!”

“He ain’t no clairvoyant!” one of the Irish sneered. “He’s a fucking nobody!”

“You’re a fucking dead man, that’s what you are!” Winstone then grabbed my collar and slammed me back against the front door. “Who fucking sent you, you skinny fucking shit!”

With two fists pressed hard under my chin, I ran through my mental Rolodex of strange fuckers that I’d run into these last few days, and then whispered into Winstone’s contorted expression, “Cetus.”

With another friendly punch to my abdomen, I fell to my knees gagging for air.

“Leave him alone,” spoke a familiar female voice.

I wanted to quip, but could only wince as I scowled up at Chloe who was now seated at the crooked table.

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“Getting up to your fair share of trouble lately, haven’t you,” Chloe said, sipping on a mug of something hot. “Making headlines in Oslo.”

“Motherfucker! You try and do a good deed, and the next thing you’re being shot at my automatic weapons in the middle of the fucking street! Now what the fuck is this fucking place meant to fucking be! What the fuck am I doing here?!”

Chloe waited, though Winstone looked like he was just dying to fucking destroy me.

Every muscle in my fatigued body clenched up. I wanted nothing more than to rant at that old woman’s composed patience, but somehow, I kept my mouth shut. Cracking my neck from side to side, I picked up a toppled chair and sat in front of Chloe. “How’s Natalie doing?”

“I missed you,” Chloe smiled. “I’m glad you made it all the way here.”

“And where the fuck is here?” I sighed.

“Do you know what the Knowledge Of Good And Evil is?”

“Seriously?”

“Yes,” she said. “Seriously.”

Rubbing both palms against my face, I dragged my eyelids down, as Winstone stepped up next to me.

The other three men in loose coats also surrounded.

“Fucking Jesus,” I hissed. “It’s the fruit that Adam and Eve ate.”

“Biblically speaking.”

“Oh shit, I’m sorry. Are we speaking metaphorically now? Or figuratively? Or abstractly. Or what the fuck?!”

Chloe maintained her thin smile as she stared at her cup. “What’s the one thing that separates us from the animals?”

“A biographical sense of time.”

“Higher reasoning,” Chloe said. “We’re tormented because we’re capable of knowing that which is good and that which is evil.”

“What’s your fucking point?”

“The devil gave us a conscience,” Chloe whispered, then suddenly leaned forward, grabbing both of my wrists. “But he didn’t give you one, did he!”

Leaning closer to Chloe, I asked, “Why didn’t you provide Grant with a sacrifice? Did your fucking conscience get in the way? And now look. Cetus is free to roam the seas. Along with that other thing that Grant invoked like an amateur under his fucking lighthouse.”

Chloe instantly released my hands. “He did what?”

“Even tough guys like you haven’t got what it takes,” I stated, looking up

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at Winstone's threatening stance. "Look at it from my perspective. I have no fucking reason to trust a single fucking thing any of you say. You only put me on the Onbekend as, how did Samuel put it, as bait!"

"Why didn't you bring someone then?"

"Why should I?"

"What do you want?"

"Answers."

Unimpressed, Chloe crossed her arms. "There are none here."

Sitting back in my wet clothes, I then suggested, "How about Natalie again."

The front door suddenly swung open as another old guy in a fisherman's rain coat burst inside, "They're coming!"

Headlights immediately burned behind this new guy!

"Fucking brought them here, did you?!" Winstone yelled, and then punched me right in the side of my fucking head! I collapsed flat on the floor as Winstone went to kick me, but the sound of shotguns sent him running with the others. While grasping my splitting skull, I didn't see how everyone managed to evacuate that filthy cottage. However, down there on the warped floorboards, I noticed that I was lying upon a trapdoor into the cellar. Gunfire from all sides of the building convinced me to move. Shoving the chairs aside, I flipped up the heavy wood, and slid down into the darkness. I missed a rung on the ladder, and fell into thigh-deep floodwater. The instant the trapdoor slammed shut, I heard angry footsteps charge inside. That was the moment that I realized that I was now stuck in a fucking kill-box! Shouting men raced about the cottage above, as I strained to see anything in that black cellar. Then I heard some Irish guy yelling about the trapdoor. Despite how reprehensibly freezing the fucking water was, I sat down and lay back, just as the trapdoor was yanked open. Squinting my left eye, I saw a blur of light through the water. A human shape came partially down the ladder. More muffled gunshots went off outside. The shape on the ladder then quickly withdrew. Waiting, I listened to the BOOM, BOOM, BANG, BAMS of hurried feet above, and I began reevaluating whose side any of these people were on. How the fuck was Chloe associated with Grant? Maybe she wasn't. He said he'd been at sea this whole time. And who the fuck were these cunts with the guns? Thinking about what Grumbach had mentioned about Jensen, I had no justification to befriend any of these people. I had simply assumed too much recently!

Shivering, I carefully surfaced. Dogs were now barking outside. It was too cold to put up with this fucking shit. I had done nothing wrong. I should



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just walk away from this situation. But another gunshot and a distant scream made me think again. My eyes had finally adjusted to the insignificant light trickling down between the floorboards, and then I focused on what appeared to be a big slab of stone standing right in the middle of this small cellar. This wasn't a fucking coincidence! Getting to my feet, I heard more men shouting with thick Irish accents. I tilted my head upward when there was a sudden rush of footsteps throughout the cottage. Then came the sound of a convoy of vehicles reversing away. Another noise then dominated the winds. The horrendous shriek of the leviathan! It had followed me! On my way to the ladder, my hand ran over the smooth texture of that ten-foot-tall monolith and I felt something. Leaning up close, my fingertips traced small grooves in the stone. Chiseled symbols. Words. Pulling out my pen-light, I discovered that a large section of the monolith was covered in writing that looked Greek. Glancing about the surrounding water in the cellar, I invested some serious thought into wondering why the fuck this place was titled the so-called, Holy Island. It appeared as though this ancient fucking shack had been erected deliberately over this standing stone in order to conceal it. If this was where all the shit in the last five days had led me, then what exactly was I fucking looking at?! I didn't have a camera or pen, so I ripped a small plank of wood from the wall, and then, using my knife, I copied only the largest letters that I could discern at the top of the text.

Όσο περισσότερο βλέπετε το λιγότερο φως που χρειάζεστε

After stuffing the damp piece of wood into my backpack, I climbed out of the cellar and saw the first light of day spreading from the east, from where I'd come. I was alone again. An open field stretched all the way to the edge of the island, and once more, I clearly heard that distinctive shriek over the gales. As I crossed the paddock, I passed the bodies of two men. They lay face-down in the tall grass with shotgun wounds in their backs. They meant nothing to me, and I continued onward until I reached the water's edge. This whole time, I watched on as that great beast stretched itself high out of the sea about a mile away. It was a colossal entanglement of a writhing serpents so mountainous that its silhouette looked almost like a volcanic island. Its tail reached further up into the black sky and parted the clouds. As that gigantic thing moaned, it revealed a new source of light from within the storm. Ruins! I saw ruins in the clouds. Just like my vision in the Pergamon. There was a vast temple of pillars encircled by monumental towers. In the midst of the

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ruins was a massively raised altar smoldering with white smoke. It was too far away to fully see, but there was something floating in the air directly above the surface of the altar. Taking a few steps forward, I froze as my foot landed in the sand. I wasn't going any closer to the water than this. The clouds soon overwhelmed the ruins in the sky, and as the light from the altar faded, so too did Cetus recoil and eventually submerge from sight.

There is no kingdom to come. It has already been sacked.

Bruce







SHORT STORY 15  
2017  
ON THE SHOULDERS OF DEVILS

DISCLAIMER:  
*I saw for myself. You read for yourself.*

PREFACE I  
FRIDAY 29th SEPTEMBER 2017

It was during the second performance at the Komische Oper Berlin, that I glanced to my left and saw a familiar face glaring directly back at me.



## On The Shoulders Of Devils

The sound of enormous bells tolled over loud bass as fake smoke filling the theater. Eventually, Mr. Schilling turned his bitter gaze back toward the modern dance below the curved balcony that we sat upon. My eyes, however, returned to the slender necks of the four American girls sitting in front of me. The one directly beneath me was silhouetted by that vast plume of mist rising from the indigo-lit stage, but I could still see the perfect texture of her skin. I knew exactly what her meat would feel like and how she'd react if I grabbed her beautiful top-knot, pulled her back, and then drove my knife into her throat. My jaw clenched while visualizing her hot blood gushing all over my hands, as if I'd just cum.

### PREFACE II

TUESDAY 3rd OCTOBER 2017

German Unification Day meant that last night had been the La Fête Fatale. While walking toward my street, I pulled off my tie and opened my collar, trying to air out the stink of cigarettes and dance-floor sweat. Checking my phone in the chilly breeze, I was rather surprised to find two messages from little Gabi. I had spotted her outside the party at intermission. She and her friends had just happened to be walking past the club. Her first message had come at 3am, "*Sad that you didn't even say hello.*" The second was after 4am, "*We came back, but you had already gone.*" Hitting the thumbs-up (the Facebook equivalent of the middle-finger), I reached an intersection and found Mr. Schilling's black BMW 318i waiting for the green light. We eyeballed each other, just as I had done with Gabi last night, and then he drove off looking as miserable as my beard smelt.

### PREFACE III

THURSDAY 12th OCTOBER 2017

While enjoying a cappuccino at Einstein Unter den Linden, I looked down the quiet restaurant of white tablecloths and wooden blinds as Mr. Schilling finally stepped in from the storm. He was German through and through, but in his Hugo Boss trench-coat, he gave off the disheveled appearance of a fifty-year-old working-class Brit. Slumping into my booth, he swiveled his head around the empty tables, and then wiped the rain from his face. "Bismarck's giving you one last chance on Saturday. But understand this: I don't fucking want you there!"

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“Won’t be here. Consecrating my new art in Turkey.”

Squinting with disgust, Mr. Schilling stood straight up and snarled, “Good! Fuck off with those Kanacke then!”

ASIA MINOR DIFFERENCES  
FRIDAY 13th OCTOBER 2017

I awoke at 6am to the hideous screams of a cat outside my flat. Unfortunately, I had another hour before my alarm was set. At least I would be early for my flight for once.

Ten hours later, I was standing in Izmir’s desolate airport, waiting for a bus. The airport at Munich had been the model of pristine functionality, this



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place though, was vacant and sad. As big as the structure had been, there was nothing grand about it. Where the fuck was everyone?

On the bus into the city, I stared at a landscape of rough mountains coated in scruffy bush, and I had recollections of my previous travels to Greece. However, the minarets towering above the mosques was a constant reminder that I was somewhere new. Yet the streets were asphalt, the traffic was thick, and familiar advertisements reaffirmed the international language of commerce.

The moment I stepped off the bus at the main station, two hardened-looking guys marched toward to me in the broad daylight and flashed their badges in my face. Shaking my head at this cliché of being profiled as a criminal by appearance alone, I faked a smile and asked if they spoke English. Always smile. Smiling lowers defenses. One of the plain-clothed, tough-guys quickly gained the translation skills of two fourteen-year-old girls. Pretty girls. All countries and cultures have their fresh meat. She kindly asked for my passport, wanting to know when I had arrived, and what my business was? Politely answering their reasonable questions, I thanked the girls before the cops courteously escorted me to the bus leaving for Bergama.

During the two-hour journey the sky turned red much faster than expected. My phone rang once it got dark as the hotel wanted to confirm that I was still coming. Traveling always takes longer than hoped for, and sooner or later, a headache inevitably comes. I needed water.

Catching a 'Taksi' from central Bergama to my hotel in the old quarter, I found that the exceptionally friendly cabby was offering a guided tour of all the sights tomorrow, for a mere 100 Lira. He handed over his card as I was greeted by the old married couple that owned the quaint hotel. For no reason at all, the curious pair up-graded my room from a single to a suite. I admired the cozy refurbishments of the 160-year-old building and asked the owners about all the portraits of Atatürk, while they offered me a slice of watermelon.

Once I cleaned up, I headed out into the narrow streets. According to the local map, directly above the golden lamplight of my hotel, the Pergamon mountain loomed in the pitch black of the cooling night. It felt like summer again, though, after the heat of the day had dropped off, I was glad that I had brought my scarf. Despite my headache demanding that I buy some bottled water, I deliberately took the scenic route. It seemed as though almost half of the old buildings were abandoned shells with hollow windows and bolted doors. No one had lived in these places for decades, if not longer. Stray cats sat perched upon garbage bins, old men gathered outside barbershops, and



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occasionally, boys in twos, rode by on motorbikes. I wondered how much life here had really changed for the common man since the Hellenistic period. Then I paused, forcing myself to consciously appreciate that I had left the Einstein restaurant at this time last night. Then I had walked to Museum Island, to the thirteenth corner of the old fortified Berlin, knelt below the Pergamon Museum, and picked up a stone from the gardens. 24-hours later, I was now in another world. And I was perfectly fine. I wasn't in danger and I wasn't lonely. I was here for a reason. I had things to do. Ultimately, I was intrigued to see where my true-will was leading me. At least this time I wasn't being led out into the middle of the North fucking Sea. So, I enjoyed the dry air in my lungs.

### TRESPASSING UPON THE THRONE SATURDAY 14th OCTOBER 2017

I awoke to the squawking of Americans outside the hotel. Fucking tourists! My headache persisted and insisted that I sleep in.

It wasn't until after 10am that I got up and looked out of my window. The Americans were gone, and up to my left, I could see the ruins of the acropolis on the mountain side.

Chatting with the owners over coffee, they said that generally Americans were too afraid to visit. American's believe Turkey's a scary place. Speaking of which, a few days ago, an ex had told me to, "*Watch out for suicide-bombers.*" But the reality was, these people were just living their lives like everyone else. Humans are fundamentally all the same.

The sky was without a cloud as I strolled around to the nearby cable-car. Mountain ranges surrounded the distance in all directions. Once I reached the entrance at the top, I saw barely a sightseer. I had the place to myself. Lacking orientation, I followed the path up to a barren court scattered with broken pillars. There, I spotted some Asians further ahead, so I took a left to avoid them. Quickly coming to a steep edge of stone, I immediately found myself looking down over the enormous amphitheater. If I took a running leap, this would be a spectacular way of committing suicide, as I would land right in the center of the stage far below. Up to my right, I could see the white ruins of the Temple Of Trajan, which meant I needed to take the left-hand path. And just as expected, as I reached the next ledge, I looked down upon a big tree growing right out of the remains of The Altar Of Zeus. It was beautiful. Here, high above the world, sat The Throne Of Satan.

## On The Shoulders Of Devils



I chose to climb straight down the rocks without hesitation. Alone in the sun, in a clockwise direction, I slowly circled the fenced-off ruin. It was little more than a large mound of shallow steps and disjointed stones. The widespread tree stood proudly where Antipas had been slain. Coming from the south-side, I stood above the west cliffs where the stairs had once risen up to the entrance of the altar. Opening my backpack, I removed the stone from Berlin, and placed my offering within the fence at the base of the ruin. In turn, I took a new stone and tucked it away. Continuing, I walked around the whole altar. I took photos for the texture layer of my current artwork, and soon wondered why this was the only place in the whole acropolis that had been cordoned off. A large group of tourist then arrived on the scene, so I departed until I could have the throne all to myself again.

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I wrote in my journal while sitting in the amphitheater, looking down to where the voices of the past had once filled this space. Now this world was a ruin. Only fragments remained. Just like memories of past accomplishments. Past lovers and past violations. Ruins of what once was. Yet here I was. Here for myself. You can never fully appreciate all the things that you've done, just as you can never truly anticipate how much more had yet to be achieved. What I could grasp however, was stone. The stone beneath me. The stone I had brought here, and the stone I would take away. Stone represented a permanence, while at the same time, reflected a warning that without belief in this magick, then I too was just a stone: lifeless and unaffected. I wasn't a dead yet. And I swore that I would never forget why.

Once I left the theater, I spent a few hours exploring the temples, palaces,



## On The Shoulders Of Devils

and the remnants of the library. I could hear the Call To Prayer echoing all the way up from the town below. While I was admiring the view over the lake on the north-side, I finally realized that I was getting roasted in the sun. So, I headed back to the altar.

There was no one anywhere anymore. I found my stone offering, climbed over the fence, and scaled the ruin. I came, I saw, and I walked on The Throne Of Satan. I had crossed the fence and no one had stopped me. I had stood on top, next to that great tree, and no one came. No one stopped me. No one ever will. I crossed the line because I could. Looking out to the west, I placed my hand on the flaky bark of the old tree and closed my eyes. A silence fell as the light of day faded from behind my eyelids –

Looking up, I found that only the tree remained unchanged. The sky had begun peeling open like the rotten flesh of a bloated corpse. As thunder closed in, I could see the Western Wall just below. Gripping the trunk, I saw it again, my vision from the Pergamon Museum. It wasn't night but overcast clouds and dead smoke smothered the landscape. This was Jerusalem, but not that of man. The surrounding kingdom of heaven was the abomination of absolute desolation. Vast ruins filled the sky like a smoldering skeleton of divine tribulation. Only the mist drifted in movement – when suddenly lightning struck right next to me, simultaneously cutting into the north and south-sides of the altar! That instant, murderous millions came to life, screaming in the throes of battle! The volume of their voices made the impact of the twin lightning bolts seem like a whisper. Hell was deafening! Smoke rolled aside, revealing the secrets of infernal warfare. This endless city of Mulciber's design was overthrown by its own deranged subjects. Figures both giant and man-size, inhuman and bestial, filled this chard empire like a flood of rampaging devils. I couldn't discern who was fighting whom. They were all blackened and burnt creatures that seemed without allegiance to any other. It was utter chaos! And then the mayhem came stampeding toward the altar! Backing behind the tree, I saw huge serpents scaling the cliff on the east side. It was then that I noticed that the two smoking craters, where the lightning had struck, were now overflowing like new springs. However, it was blood that came bubbling up from the stone surface! Blood poured forth as it swamped over my feet, until I slipped and lost my grip on the tree –

And I was blinded by the sun again!

A warm breeze blew up from Bergama and over that arid mountain top. My Chuck Taylors were coated in dust, but there was no blood anywhere. Glancing around the weed-choked ruin, I finally knew exactly what was

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missing from my pentaptych of blasphemy: the wrath of Zeus!

It was all downhill from there. Locating my stone offering, I climbed the fence and approached the edge of the southerly cliff. As daunting as the edge might appear from afar, the closer you get the sooner you realize that you can handle your own perpetual decent. It's never just a sheer drop off. You can make your way down on your own two feet. There's always much more waiting below. But when you're down there, there's always yet again another cliff that appears to drop off to nothing. That was when I looked back toward the altar and spotted Carl Humann's grave. While standing above that large slab of a tombstone, I paid my respects as well as my lack of it. How many factors had led me to this. If he hadn't uncovered the frieze in 1878, then the Pergamon Museum would have never spoken to me. He played his part, just

## On The Shoulders Of Devils

as I played mine. But you have never done enough until you're buried – like a fucking stone.

I had to climb under a locked gate in order to return to the acropolis entrance, and I loved the dirt on my hands. While sitting alone in the cable-car, listening to my headphones play Hans Zimmer & Benjamin Wallfisch, *Wallace*, I smiled at the salt stains of sweat on my black shirt, and



knew that this short pilgrimage had been worth it. I now had the final pieces needed to complete my artwork, *The Pergamon Of Jerusalem*. The sun was shining and everything was going according to plan – right until I looked into another cable-car that was passing mine, and that Iranian woman glared straight back at me! Her long black hair and hateful eyes were unmistakable. She didn't react. She just sat alone staring at me. Her gorgeous features were

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matched only by her contempt. Was she following me?! Or was this fate again?

In the parking lot, I didn't see any cars that seemed like her expensive style. And not waiting around in the open sun, I walked back to my hotel. If she was looking for me, she must already know where I was staying. Whoever she was, she seemingly held some kind of significant role in the great work of my true-will.

THURSDAY 31st AUGUST 2017  
A FATAL FIRST IMPRESSION

“Ach du Scheisse!” someone yelled, just before a metal bucket was thrown across the work-space into a brick wall!

Turning, with the fishing knife in my rubber-gloved hand, I saw the young Belarusian, Jörg, step up defensively and slam his shoulder into a gray-haired man's furious entrance! A tirade of explicit German intolerance snarled my way! I had no idea who this guy was at the time, but I understood enough German to grasp that he was threatening to cave my skull in. He wasn't close but his spit still managed to land on my cheek, as Jörg shoved the middle-aged stranger back toward the huge doorway. With a frown from the greasy-haired youngster, Jörg shrugged, “It's his place. He has a right to be annoyed.”

“So, why the fuck I am doing his job, then?” I asked, pointing the long blade at the gutted female hanging upside down from her ankles over a stainless-steel basin. “There's a lecture this evening that I'm not going to miss for this fucking shit!”

“Get the fuck out!” the stranger yelled, lunging at my throat! Again, Jörg stood up, though never once raised his hands. “Who the fuck is this Ausländer pig?!”

“I had another, you know, accident,” Jörg muttered, staring at the floor. “Caviezel was right. He does good work.”

The stranger in a beige trench-coat, stepped back, looking appalled at the mid-twenties guy between us.

“Schilling, Bruce. Bruce, meet Schilling.” Jörg was the sort of guy whose oblivious confidence had no need to justify himself to anyone. Despite the violent reputation of this young criminal, his polite tone of voice eventually lowered even Mr. Schilling's guard.

“What the fuck have you done?!” Mr. Schilling asked, glaring at the dead girl.

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“Come on, man.” Jörg shook his head.

“I’m talking to this idiot!”

Tilting my head like a bashful puppy, I smiled.

“Take her down! Now!” Mr. Schilling demanded, as he walked across the concrete floor. Unlocking a cabinet, he removed his trench-coat, and pulled on a thick black apron. The first time that I had come to this abandoned factory, I had heard it referred to as ‘the facility’, but now, on this second visit, as I watched Mr. Schilling take charge, I understood the title. The guy was the epitome of German efficiency. He wheeled out a hospital stretcher which we lowered the female’s carcass onto. He then pushed it down a short corridor to a big, walk-in freezer. There, three other nude bodies lay on metal stretchers. I offered to assist, but he slapped my hand aside!

Jörg was busy texting on his phone, while standing next to the massive, bricked-up windows. He then took pleasure informing me of how Mr. Schilling used to own a butchery in Nuremberg. However, his business went bankrupt in the 90’s, and now he worked for Mr. Bismarck.

After suffering through Jörg’s humiliations, Mr. Schilling stated that he’d deal with the girl later, once he had cleared his own backlog. Jörg was cool with that, and gestured for us to get the fuck out of there. I insisted that I wanted to stay and watch. Taking all of no seconds to think it over, Jörg quietly requested that Mr. Schilling drive me back into town afterward. Once Jörg left, neither Mr. Schilling or I spoke a word.

I immediately knew what the large band-saw in the middle of the room was used for, as a stretcher with an unidentified body was raised to the cutting level. Mr. Schilling’s systematic procedure was a thing of simplistic beauty. Bodies were frozen solid, then he dismembered them into perfectly clean chunks. No mess, no fuss. I instantly respected his professional technique. My process of bleeding the carcass before disemboweling them, inevitably involved some amount of spillage. Mr. Schilling had a far superior method. But then again, this guy had an entire estate all to himself. He had a workspace with industrial machines, a walk-in freezer, and of course, multiple incinerators. These were the perks of organized crime. No wonder he was outraged that we had let ourselves into his place of business.

I remember asking Mr. Caviezel, during my first visit, why not just burn the bodies straight away. He said, it was their policy to incinerate the heads, hands, and distinguishing features in separate ovens.

It took Mr. Schilling less than fifteen minutes to reduce a frozen human body to nothing but a stack of ice cubes.



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By the time the second body was diced, the first was ash.

Once the pieces of the third body were shoved into the ovens, Mr. Schilling threw the intestines from Jörg's girl into the fires. I made an attempt to help clean up, but he scowled at me, before using a high-pressure hose to wash down the entire floor. I assumed that the girl I'd been working on would need at least 24-hours to freeze, unless there was a tank of liquid nitrogen standing around that I hadn't seen.

On the thirty-minute-drive out of the woods south of Berlin, I found that I had a dilemma about what I had learned from Mr. Schilling. The guy took his work seriously, and I admired his expertise, but there was a certain clinical approach that wasn't my cup of tea. Once the bodies hardened into static popsicles, they lost some humanity about them. There was nothing sexy about what Mr. Schilling did. Yeah, it was fast and extremely effective, and that had a benefit to it. After all, I didn't know who any of those carcasses had been. I had no attraction nor connection to them. Therefore, Mr. Schilling's approach seemed thoroughly appropriate. Yet, if the girl had been some young thing who I'd stalked and fixated upon for months, then I'd rather have those malleable mutilations to play with. You can't fuck a frozen mannequin, and believe me, I've been there.

Even though the traffic was easy as the BMW headed down Torstrasse, I was still running late to meet Mara at an OTO lecture about the Yazidi Tribe. Opening the passenger's side door, I was about to thank Mr. Schilling, but before I could, he snapped, "It's not your fucking job, and I have no patients for psychopaths like you! Stay the fuck away from what's mine!"

### DINNER WITH COMPLICITY SATURDAY 14th OCTOBER 2017

After I dropped off my backpack at the hotel, I went wandering down the main street in the old town, and bought some more bottled water. Unfortunately, I couldn't find the bus station. The old folk at the hotel had described the station as being near the Red Hall, but even after investigating that ruin, I was still at a loss. Reluctant to return to the hotel, as I expected that the Iranian woman would probably be waiting there for me, I decided to take a look inside an antique store that was crammed full of carpets and trinkets. I usually avoided such tourist traps, but this place genuinely looked ancient. The second I stepped under the midget-sized door, my head plunged into a thousand lamps hanging from the ceiling. The bald fat man sitting on the floor

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laughed out loud, warmly welcoming me in, and as hoped, he spoke English. Ducking through the odds-and-ends, I smiled as the owner made small talk, while his friend sat drinking tea with apathetic glances. Ignoring the eclectic merchandise, I took the seat that was offered and asked about the bus station. The guy to my right muttered to his jolly old friend who pointed out the door, saying that I simply had to take the first left and it was down by the bridge.

Following the simple directions, I soon recognized the same bus driver from last night as he stood outside the station. I asked for the schedule back to Izmir and relaxed. Everything was under control. My return flight left at 4pm tomorrow, and the buses left here every hour, which meant that I could sleep in.

While heading back to the hotel, I strolled past the antique store again. There, a cute girl in a hijab stepped out and stared at me with a perturbed expression that almost everyone in this town gave me. It was a look of: who-the-fuck-is-this-tall-tattooed-pale-man-in-black?! But then the fat owner called out from within. The girl's face shifted as she lost focus on my eyes, gesturing for me to come inside. Skeptical, I gave her only an eyebrow. But then again, I knew that I shouldn't jump to pessimistic conclusions. So far, I hadn't meet a single Turk that had been anything but hospitable. It turned out that the fat guy, Mr. Özden, just wanted to invite me for dinner with his family this evening. I thanked him kindly, and figured it was a nice chance to try some homemade Turkish cuisine. Why the fuck not. Letting go of caution, I knew that it would all work out just fine. Fatalism was in the house. And if shit did go sideways, I could deal with it. I'm a charming motherfucker, after all.

Back in the hotel garden, while writing in my journal, I proceeded to knock back as much water as I could. My decision to sleep off my headache this morning had worked, but I wanted to ensure that I wouldn't dehydrate again after spending the whole day in the sun. That was when I recalled the dream that I had had last night about Gabi. It was one of those dreams where I seemed to be watching events happen as if I wasn't actually there. Gabi was in Berlin, where the people on the streets were all yelling at her. She was being violently accused of being part of a cult. More and more bystanders closed in, so she ran. She ran to another random street, where the pedestrians ran away from her as if she was diseased. I then became part of the dream, and grabbed her by the wrist and we ran. We ran through the city until we saw a taxi. Gabi climbed in, and as I hurried around the taxi to the other door, the whole vehicle burst into flames! Immediately, I yanked open the back door

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and dragged Gabi out. To my relief she was only a little scorched, except then my back began to burn! Gabi was screaming at me as I ripped off my shirt, but it wasn't on fire. It was my big back tattoo that burnt! It spoke to me! I then pulled out my knife and grabbed Gabi by her fucking throat! Holding my knife high, I felt Gabi's horror fuel my hatred with anticipation – until I woke up. I always knew that her head would make a pretty trophy.

Eventually, I looked up from my writing and zipped my jacket shut. The cold had crept in, and I felt rather uneasy as to why the Iranian woman hadn't reappeared by now. I soon began doubting if I had actually seen her in the cable-car. Maybe it was just some other fine piece of ass. No, that sneer of indignation on her face was one of a kind.

It was dark by 7pm, and black within half an hour. The same girl invited me into the now closed-for-business antique store, where oriental string music could be heard coming from the back patio. Crumbling rooftops surrounded the small courtyard, while a full house of guests sat about a large dining table. I wasn't expecting a party. Kids, from babies to early twenties ran around, while old men and grandpas chattered among themselves. Women then came in with brightly colored dishes. The spicy smells however, were nothing new to me. I guess the Turkish influence on Berlin had already ingrained itself upon my olfactory senses. As I sat watching everyone socialize, I recalled all the tales that females had recited about how uncouth Turkish boys were in Berlin. I had seen their sexual objectification for myself during late nights at U-Bahn stations in Neukölln. But I also remembered many other girls stating that they're much better behaved in Turkey. It seemed that they were right. So, what was it about German culture that corrupted the young Turks? Or had it merely liberated their true selves?

Once dinner was done, Mr. Özden invited some of his guests for drinks away from the madness of all the crowded conversations. He led us up narrow passageways which weren't public thoroughfares and between twisted neighbors. We went so far up the hill that I was sure we must have been someplace close to the level of my hotel. My suspicion once again began to speculate that I was about to find myself locked in some cellar below one of the boarded-up buildings. I laughed to myself. No one would pay a ransom for my skinny ass. Let's hope that they're just going to chop me up into mincemeat and feed my flesh to the next stupid fucking tourist that stumbled along. And then I started to wonder, if I really didn't make it out of here alive, what would I regret? Would I wish that I had finished my new art? But why, who gives a fuck about my work?! I do! So, Yes. I would regret not finishing

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what I had started. And I thought again of Gabi's slender neck.



The reality was no great horror. We literally went for drinks at a small house overlooking the town. The place was stuffy, cluttered, and had tassels hanging from practically everything. There were seven of us altogether in that cramped abode. Mr. Özden told stories about how his family had all come from the Taurus Mountains. His grandfather had suffered a stroke on the night of Mr. Özden's wedding, and when he awoke, he ordered Mr. Özden to move here specifically. His grandfather never spoke again before he died. Mr. Özden was clearly over it though, and laughed as he poured himself another wine.

That was when a latecomer poked his head in through the curtained doorway and quietly sat next to me. He was in his fifties, maybe younger, it was hard to tell his age considering how sun-weathered his lean features were. His calculating eyes had a severity unlike the rest of his extended family, as he focused on my unusual presence. As it happened, his English was far superior to everyone else, even the kids. Despite his morose temperament, his curiosity about my reasons for visiting was only heightened once I mentioned my artist endeavors. Of course, being in the midst of a Muslim country, I neglected to mention any occult associations. It was he who brought up the subject of Jerusalem, and his dismissal of the theory that the Temple Of Solomon had actually been built south of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, at the Gihon Spring. He was unwavering in his opinion that Herod would have only built the Second Temple upon the original site or it would have never appeased the masses, that being the only reason that he built the thing. The conversation then shifted to why the location of the Dom Of The Rock was so important. Chatting about Abraham and the contradictory stories around the sacrifice of either Isaac Vs. Ishmael, he stroked his gray mustache while in deep thought. He himself, questioned if the act of Abraham's sacrifice was the reason why

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the stone was also the site of the Holy Of The Holies, as well as being the start of Muhammad's journey to heaven. Or was it just a coincidence, I suggested. He stated that 'coincidence' was an excuse for fools that were too afraid to accept messages from god.

The solemn tone of our conversation on theology was nothing like that of the other men who laughed over their chain-smoking inebriation. I glanced around the room, and then confessed my ignorance, asking if everyone in Turkey was so well versed on alternative views of religious history? He lit a cigarette, shaking his head slowly as he inhaled. For quite a while he just stared at the table with bloodshot eyes, before he turned toward me with complete concentration and confided that he had once been an imam. He had chosen to step down from public speaking years ago. While he hesitated, I wondered if he really had a choice. The ex-imam then admitted how disheartened he had become at the growing indifference of both the young and old. He gave an allegory that struck a chord. "You see the pillars in the acropolis and you think how piously they worshiped their deities. Whether the gods were real or not, the people cherished these places because of the reverent meaning associated with them. But tell me, do you believe in a few thousand years, people will look at the ruins of our airports and think that we worshiped the power of flight? Or will they know that we took it all for granted like the thankless heathens we have all become!"

The ex-imam's voice had silenced the room, and I saw everyone pass around a small bottle of oil. They then rubbed the lotion on their hands and necks. The potent fragrance made my nostrils cringe. Smiling, I passed it on without indulging. As the background dialogue picked up again, I realized that the citrus scent smelt just like the bedroom of an ex.

"Without sacrifice everything is mundane," the ex-imam said, catching my drifting attention. "There must be some inherent importance in that which is being given up. If you surrender something without any personal value, then you will gain no deeper insight. Those that sacrifice themselves become martyrs for that very reason. They have surrendered all selfishness. And those that survive them, love them all the more for their selfless act."

"And if there isn't a sacrifice, then what are you saying?"

"It explains the meaninglessness of everyday life. Life in this day and age. Belief doesn't make gods real, but belief divinely inspires us. Yet the arrogance of modern man would make the soul obsolete. Yet then he dwells in depression day in day out wondering why he feels so empty!"

The guy had a point, no one worshiped the sky. Airports were only full of

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cow-people shuffling along their trivial little travels. As much as I may have appreciated the ability to fly to these foundations of antiquity, I surely would learn to value the magnificence of flight a lot more if I was made to walk the distance from Pergamon to Berlin.

“We carry on this facade of culture,” he spoke quietly, with an intensity to his pronunciation of each word that he spat out. “Yet we’re all on our phones, dressed in Nike, and answering the Call To Prayer – BUT WITH NOT ONE OUNCE OF RESOLVE!”

In a sudden burst of scorn, he kicked the table right out of his way as he stormed out of the house, slamming the door behind him!

Almost no one paid him any attention, as Mr. Özden leaned over. “Do not mind my brother. He has, as you say, lost his faith.”

“Didn’t sound like he’d lost anything.”

“Then, why has he turned his back on Islam?”

I wasn’t quite sure how to answer such a personal question about a practical stranger. “Why do you think?”

“Not for me to judge,” my host grinned, passing a plate of fruits. “But if he is not more careful, one day someone will.”

Enter the girls upon the scene.

I can’t help considering, in hindsight, that the ex-imam had timed his departure because of these new guests. Not just because they were female, but as they themselves were our dessert. I didn’t know how old they were, but not one of those girls looked like they had reached double digits yet. Some guys cuddled with the kids, others hastily took them off for some private time. When a girl sat next to me with those big brown eyes and smiled without any heart, I turned to my host and asked what the age of consent was in Turkey? He paused, and then translated my question. The others roared with laughter, while Mr. Özden rammed his tongue down the throat of a child no older than seven. He raised his glass and grabbed the face of the girl meant for my consumption, as he spoke, “Here, in small villages we need not listen to the laws of the city. Here, we are free men!”

Nodding, I leaned closer and asked him to elaborate.

“Of course we don’t want our children to sell their bodies, and we punish anyone caught buying them,” he concisely clarified. “It is the same how no one in the West uses drugs.” He then couldn’t stop laughing. “Of course they are all using drugs! It is the same here with the children! You do not approve of it in public, but you still do it!”

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### AN OUBLIETTE IN THE ENTRAILS SATURDAY 14th OCTOBER 2017

As customary as this aspect of the culture seemed, I passed on the little girl just as I had passed on the scented hand lotion. I liked my females with more hips than anything youth had to offer. Outside the antique store, I found the ex-imam standing in a trance as he smoked. He totally ignored my presence as I leisurely walked by.

“Have you seen what bleeds beneath the altar?” his elongated words croaked from behind.

Gradually coming to a standstill, I twisted, glaring at the side of that stoic man’s head. “No. I’ve only seen the blood.”

A little way up behind the old part of town, I was led to an abandoned building. It didn’t look like a house, more like a bunker. The place was half covered in trees, rubbish, and gravel from landslides. There was nothing but the darkness of the acropolis above. The ex-imam had a key to the thick lock and soon opened the rusted door. Amazingly, the establishment had electricity, and to my growing bewilderment, the lights lit up a tunnel leading straight into the belly of the mountain. It was like a two-lane highway. Whatever this had been, it looked as though the place had been locked away for the better part of the last century. Maybe it was a Cold War bomb-shelter. Maybe it was an aqueduct from the lake on the other side. Or maybe it really was just a sealed off highway. Whatever its design, work had ended in abrupt blackness about a hundred meters in. It was definitely not on any of the tourist maps that I had picked up. My guide grabbed two large flashlights from a dusty shelf. Checking that they both worked, he handed over one, and then marched directly into the wide tunnel. Like always, when traveling, I had my pen-light in my jacket pocket, but literally kept that card close to my chest.

On the slow walk along that tunnel, there came a withdrawn drone, a subtle sensation like a constant echo reverberating from some vast depth. The engineering looked like something you’d expect to come across in post-Soviet territories. Big concrete and steel arches were lined with caged lighting. The cement paving was laden with chunks of dry dirt, and the closer we got to where the lights went out, the less comfortable I was about trusting my guide. I didn’t have my knife on me, as my lite-economy flight wouldn’t allow for checked-in luggage.

And there I faced the end of the line. The concrete construction just stopped. The road broke away into a void that opened up before me. As

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my eyes adjusted, I was presented with an imposing cavern of Tartarus proportions. The Alepotrypa cave had nothing on this.

“What can you hear?” the ex-imam asked.

While we both stood on the edge of that enormous hollow, I tilted my head. There were wet sounds. Dripping. Gentle sloshing. And then a long draft. Almost like a breath. I listened as the highlights in the distance began to stand out from the black.

“My father,” I whispered. “That’s my father’s voice! Can you hear that?”

All the lights suddenly went out and a firm palm drove into my back between my shoulder blades! Shoved forward, I didn’t fall far before landing hard! With a slip and a roll, I slid down something sodden, and slapped bluntly into a big rock! My elbows and shins took the worst of the fall, but I was glad that I didn’t hit my head. Yet I had absolutely no sense of direction. Struggling to find my footing in the dark, I heard the ex-imam’s fucking footstep quickly fading away above. Panicking, I fumbled with my flashlight, when suddenly I heard running water. A lot of water! It came gushing nearby and soon became a waterfall! More sounds of pouring water came from all around. I could feel spray on my shaved skull like a cold shower. As more unseen waterfalls began to spill, I built a mental model of the scale of that gigantic cavity. Even though I had both hands on my torch, as I leaned against the rocks, I forced my muscles to wait. Clenching my jaw, I kept still and listened. In the pitch black, there was always that fear of the unknown, but at the same time, there was also camouflage in darkness. Become one with the shadow! And the more I eased down, the less aggressive the waterfalls sounded. There, I slowly heard him again, the ghost of my own King of Denmark. The unmistakable accent of my father spoke straight to my face, “The more you see, the less light you need.”

These very same words I had found written in Greek, not two months ago, on the Holy Island.

A snorting noise then came. There was a woman moaning. The moment I switched on the flashlight, all the underworld became bathed in blood. Black stone was soaked in scarlet. There were no waterfalls, but instead, the severed arteries of the living mountain itself! Raising the beam of light across the rocks where I had fallen from, I found it riddled with large holes. Following the gagging utterances of that female, I came upon the Iranian woman! Naked, she lay sprawled within a smaller cave not twenty feet away. She lurched on her back. Her hair was a mess and her face was paler than I’d ever seen before. And there, I saw the callous face of my father! He huddled



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among the rocks, the size of a bull, and clinging to the Iranian woman. She was mouthing incoherent words, all the while, my giant father continued to eat her alive. He had already devoured her from the guts down, shit and all. The woman's legs had been stripped to the bone which my father now gripped with massive paws as he chewed at her uterus. Despite her extreme disfigurement, she remained alive, awake, and aware. Her eyes had a strange



expression whenever she looked down at her meatless pelvis. The long-haired animal of my father crouched naked, enjoying his meal as he had done so in life. Gradually, I stood in front of them, but they both seemed oblivious to my presence, as if they were blind.

A shrieking then howled from across those lakes of blood! Twisting toward the echoes of devils, I scanned the far reaches but that cavern was endless.

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Then the sound of my father's voice stating my name, drew my immediate attention. Turning back to the glazed eyes of that which had once been my maker, I watched as blood dripped from his unkempt beard. The screaming from the other inhabitants of this place grew louder as more beasts joined the savage chorus. Leaning closer to the crevice where my father resided, I waited. I wanted to stay here. I wanted to learn all those things that I had refused to listen to while my father was alive. I wanted to know what he had to say. He might have been a son of a bitch, but he was still my father, and I wanted to join him. I wanted to eat a meal with him once again. The Iranian woman's arms then flapped aside as she looked in my direction with a limp jaw. Behind me that demonic screeching came in countless waves, until my name was called one final time, and I glared back at my father as he yelled with that most brutal of tones, "THE GREAT ALTAR OF ZEUS! IT MUST BE BUILT! BUILT UPON THE TEMPLE MOUNT!"

The Iranian woman finally screamed as her rib-cage was suddenly dredged with my father's giant fingers! My question-filled mind was instantaneously consumed with that most Freudian of instincts: the jealousy of competitive greed! I had wanted her for my-fucking-self!

Placing the flashlight on the bloody rocks, making sure it aimed at the glorious aberration that my father had become, I darted up the jagged rocks. I only just rolled onto the concrete as a vicious herd of enormous black serpents swarmed upon the target of my torch! From what I could make out, my father dealt with the attack in the most violent of ways. Of course he did.

While retreating within that blackened tunnel, I was overcome with an awesome affirmation: that my father had finally found a place where he belonged, and that I truly had much to live up to.

### POSTFACE I SUNDAY 15th OCTOBER 2017

The idea of staying a second night at Bergama wasn't an option, there was no possibility of sleep for my devious little brain. I immediately caught the last bus back to Izmir and booked the next flight out of there at 3:45am. During the journey, I was preoccupied by how the ex-imam had reminded me of when I was mistaken for a priest at Loch Ness. I soon began wondering how much more I could learn to desecrate the venerated if I actually joined a seminary. I felt like I had come to a turning point, much like I had in my mid-twenties, when I believed that if I truly wanted to know how badly females

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could damage my psyche, then I had to lower my guard and let them in.

I arrived in Berlin at 8am, and the moment I switched on my phone, I received an urgent message from Mr. Schilling.

The bus dropped me off on Unter den Linden, and as I walked onto Museum Island that crisp autumn morning, the mighty bells from the Dom welcomed me back. Kneeling below the Pergamon Museum, I had come full circle as I placed the stone from the altar in the garden. All of this had been for the art. A bigger picture that I was merely meant to illustrate. But the art could not be if I myself had not dared to see. Yet I had discovered more than I had thought the mountain would reveal. Like the Holy Mountain Of Pigs, these places were alive. And I could still hear the very mountain of my father speak truth through the stone: SHUN NO WICKEDNESS!

## On The Shoulders Of Devils

Despite my lack of sleep, when Mr. Schilling picked me up from outside the Theology Library, I was glad to help him fix whatever fuck-up some other fuck-up had fucked up.

### POSTFACE II FRIDAY 20th OCTOBER 2017

I had already put on my suit and tie for the first Hard Rub fetish party that I was attending later that night, when Mr. Schilling wrote to me, saying that he wanted to speak. Not intending for him to know my exact home address, we met at Boxhagener Platz and took a casual stroll around the park. Like always, his hunched shoulders and messy gray hair left him looking rattled. We had almost walked right back to where we had started without a word being said, when finally, he handed me his iPhone. The bloody glow from the photo that I had taken of Mr. Limpy on the coast of the North Sea looked even more graphic than I remembered.

“We think we’re special because others fear us,” Mr. Schilling said, tucking his phone away as a weak rain began to fall. “But I’ve never actually killed anyone. So, what does that make me?”

“Normal.”

“Then they should fear that I’ll report them. But they don’t, because I won’t.”

### POSTFACE III TUESDAY 31th OCTOBER 2017

On the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation, my phone began ringing as I stepped out of the American Church Of Berlin into a cold Schöneberg evening. Mr. Schilling was vague but insisted that I meet him at the facility.

There was a dim light at the end of that massive factory of uninhabited industry, where I found Mr. Schilling sitting on a small stool next to the cold incinerators. The surrounding walls looked like god-sized scabs as they silhouetted that slouching German. He never looked at me, just slowly stood, climbed onto the stool, pulled the wire noose around his neck, and then stepped off! His hands didn’t fumble with regret. He swung, flinched, and finally hung still. I stared at him for about twenty minutes. Glancing at the tall band-saw, a sense of calm welled-up inside my being, knowing that

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I would inherit this world. Eventually switching off the light, I walked away, leaving the dead man hanging where he was. Today had also been another anniversary: sixteen years since I'd watched my father's fall to Hades. And I wondered what kind of devil hell would make of Mr. Schilling that this world had failed to.

Bruce

## On The Shoulders Of Devils









## SOUNDTRACK

### UNHOLY WATER

Horn Of The Rhino, *Brought Back*  
1000mods, *Low*

### TEMPTING FATALISM

Ordos, *The Infernal God*  
Tom Waits, *Get Behind The Mule*

### LAUGHTER AND SCREAMS

Michael Jackson, *Man In The Mirror*  
The Prodigy, *The Day Is My Enemy*  
Molotov, *No Manches Mi Vida*  
Electric Six, *Drone Strikes*  
Greenleaf, *Stray Bullit Woman*  
Butthole Surfers, *The Shame Of Life*  
Deja Voodoo, *Beers*  
Machine Gun Fellatio, *Mutha Fukka On A Motorcycle*  
Hey Satan, *Fallon City Messiah*  
House Of Pain, *Jump Around*

### PERNICIOUS TRANSMUTATION

Creedence Clearwater Revival, *Born On The Bayou*  
Mozart, *Requiem Lacrimosa*  
Ben Harper, *I Want To Be Ready*

### ON THE SHOULDERS OF DEVILS

Hans Zimmer & Benjamin Wallfisch, *Wallace*



## OTHER WORKS BY BSKJ 2001 - 2017

- First exhibition: Fingers In My Orifices. 2001.  
Finished writing my first book after 10 years: "Apocalypse, Holocaust, Armageddon". 2003.  
Second exhibition: Fuck The Weak. 2003.  
Third exhibition: The Strength Of Hatred. 2004.  
Forth exhibition: Pandora's Meat. 2005.  
Art: Saturn Returns & The Divine Contradiction. 2006.  
Art: This Disgust. 2006.  
Art: Hell Hath No Fury. 2007.  
Art: In My Father's Footsteps. 2007.  
Art: Beloved Beheaded. 2007.  
Art: The Goddess. 2007.  
Music video: Make It Rain – Tom Waits. 2007.  
Love letters: The Bane Of My Life. 2008.  
Music video: 18.12. – Sinah. 2008.  
Art: We Vulgar Creatures. 2008.  
Music video: Closer – Richard Cheese. – (Nine Inch Nails) 2008.  
Self-portraits: Disarticulation. 2008.  
Music video: Just A Car Crash Away – Marilyn Manson. 2009.  
Art: For My Idle Hands. 2009.  
Music video: Indifference – Pearl Jam. 2009.  
Art: Power-Game. 2009.  
Self-portraits: A Personal Hell. 2010.  
Music video: Danger Global Warming – The Blacksmoke Organisation – (Remix John Fryer) 2010.  
Art: Jealous As Fuck. 2010.  
Concept art for a movie pitch: Alienated. 2010.  
Self-portraits: Not Dead Yet. 2011.  
Movie pitch: Alienated. 2011.  
Short story 1: 10 Days In The Madhouse. 2011.  
Art: The Rational Animal. 2011.  
Short story 2: How I Ended Up In Hospital. 2012.  
Music video: I Lost Control – The Girl & The Robot. 2012.  
Art: Perpetuation. 2012.  
Short story 3: The Small Hours. 2013.  
Short story 4: Loch-Fucking-Ness. 2013.  
Art: Inconsequential Consent. 2013.  
Self-portraits: The Boy Who Cried Wolf. 2013.  
Art: Antimother Of God. 2013.  
Short story 5: Natalie Portman & I. 2014.  
Self-published trilogy of novels with artwork: Bark. 2014.  
Short story 6: An Occult Obligation. 2015.  
Short story 7: Relationships And Their Discontents. 2015.  
Picture book: Uncle Fingers. 2015.  
Self-portraits: I Will Be All I Will Be. 2015.  
Short story 8: There Is No Diagnosis. 2015.  
Art: They've Always Been There. 2016.  
Art: Imbalanced. 2016.  
Short story 9: Somewhere To Be Alone. 2016.  
Movie pitch: Extermination. 2016.  
Short story 10: The Museum Island Murders. 2016.  
Art: Every Hour Every Day. 2017.  
Self-portraits: MacFarlane. 2017.  
Short story 11: Unholy Water. 2017.  
Art: The Realm Of Death And Sin. 2017.  
Short story 12: Tempting Fatalism. 2017.  
Short story 13: Laughter And Screams. 2017.  
Art: Exhume The Hatchet. 2017.  
Short story 14: Pernicious Transmutation. 2017.  
Art: The Pergamon Of Jerusalem. 2017.  
Art: Satans Of Coercion. 2017.  
Short story 15: On The Shoulders Of Devils. 2017.









