

THE SHORT STORIES OF

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Bruce Stirling John Knox

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Bruce Stirling John Knox

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SHORT STORY 16
2018
TO SEE A MAN ABOUT A GOD

DISCLAIMER:

I wrote this in my notebook while in Wales for a long weekend during mid-January 2018.

WHO THE FUCK DO YOU THINK YOU ARE
THURSDAY 11th JANUARY 2018

“I have no time for the likes of you! Get off my property! The Police are already on their way!” The brutality with which Telford slammed his front door was like a fucking sledgehammer shattering my otherwise curious mood! Rolling my jaw, I backed away, glaring at that little cottage in the blackened woods, wondering what the fuck had just happened?! Are you fucking kidding me?! This was bullshit! Another waste of my fucking time! I couldn’t believe it! Fucking typical! Fucking idiot! Of course there’s no fucking answers here! There’s absolutely nothing here for me! Understand this – nobody owes me shit!

ANOTHER PARTY, ANOTHER BOOK
THURSDAY 3rd AUGUST 2017

At a barbecue in a penthouse garden, I was greeted by friends and an amazing sunset over Berlin. While the shallow, political topics of conversation continued flowing with expensive red wine, the host pulled me aside. Malloy was an Irish chap, around fifty, and until that evening, I had no idea that he worked at the Stock Exchange. A year ago, at another summer barbecue, Malloy had pointed out that with a name like mine, I had to be a Protestant. I had never thought about it before then. And then a week ago, while at Yumi’s birthday, Malloy mentioned that I wasn’t just a Protestant, but also a Presbyterian. Trust the fucking Irish to focus on such details. While heading into the lounge, he recalled our conversation at Yumi’s drinks, and then he pulled out a huge book from the shelves next to his grand piano.

“That’s why I had this little get-together this evening,” Malloy smiled, handing me *The Red Book*, by Carl Jung. “Wanted to show you this.”

I spent the rest of the evening sitting at his enormous dining table,

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examining the scanned pages of Jung's gorgeous handwriting and unique illustration style. Guests eventually began asking what held my fascination, until at last, Malloy joined the growing number at the table and retold a story from years ago. During a business trip to Zurich, he had gone to visit the castle that Jung himself had built, Bollingen Tower. After speaking with someone who Malloy believed to be Jung's very own son, he was allowed the privilege of inspecting Jung's Cube. This was where the story had been cut short at Yumi's birthday, so I turned my full attention toward the host. However, much to my disappointment, Malloy merely joked about the cube in a trivial fashion, before boasting about how much the book had cost him. The American's then changed the subject to the weekend's softball game. Looking back at the illustration of a giant dragon, I considered my own artwork of the things that I had been seeing, before closing the heavy book.

CROSSING LINES AND SEVERING TIES TUESDAY 14th NOVEMBER 2017

A spontaneous road-trip had left me in Munich for the day, while Mara had business meetings with the German military bigwigs. I'd never been to Munich before and had somehow mistakenly pictured it as Frankfurt. Instead of skyscrapers, I found much older, traditional architecture.

After investigating the many churches in the center of town, I headed east, down Maximilianstrasse. On my way, I spotted the spires of another cathedral, highlighted by the low hanging sun to my right. While heading closer, a big black Ranger Rover drove toward me and suddenly pulled over. A serious, gray-haired man in a business suit with leather driving-gloves stepped out. He was one of the Thule boys from Berlin. Hard looking son of bitch. He handed over a small package, before bluntly informing me that my services would no longer be required and that all previous modes of communication had been terminated. Without another word, he drove off.

I shrugged and didn't particularly care. At the time, I hadn't even wondered why they'd suddenly changed their minds about my work, I just continued walking toward the church.

It wasn't until Mara was driving us homeward bound that it had occurred to me that perhaps the Intrepid Supremacy wasn't exactly thrilled that I was still spending time with the Jew. Conflict of interest? Maybe. Associates may come and go, but my own agenda remained.

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THROUGH THE LENS OF SELECTIVE DISTORTION SUNDAY 26th NOVEMBER 2017

I returned to the American Church of Berlin for the third time in order to join the praise worship at 1:30pm. I had been in contact with the administration via e-mail, who had recommended that I steer my inquiries toward Pastor Tim. He was a young guy from the States who was happy to chat after the service.

A much older Pastor led the modest congregation, and like my previous visits, I found his inoffensive tone of voice easy on the ears. I rather liked one of his little analogies about how ships weren't built to stay in the safety of the harbor where they would grow barnacles and rot, they must venture out into rougher seas.

After the gathering left, I had a long conversation with Pastor Tim, primarily addressing the question of Catholics Vs. Protestants. Beyond the obvious, Pastor Tim summed up the main difference being: *you've already been saved so live a good life, Vs. you must live a good life in order to be saved.*

The caretaker was locking up the church, so we caught the Ubahn together and spoke on a more personal level. He was here for his fourth year of Seminary with his wife and three-month-old. As the train reached my station, he handed me his card in case I had any more questions. I smiled and shook his hand, saying that I might indeed have more to talk about, like why half a dozen books weren't included in the Protestant Bible, and if he knew anything about Enoch.

He seemed to trust me, but I doubted how much I could really learn from a kid like him.

NON RECIPROCATING ALLIES MONDAY 27th NOVEMBER 2017

To my disdain, I received an e-mail from Chloe. My first impulse was I to delete it. But the thought of Natalie Portman's ass got the better of me.

So, Chloe asked if I would go to England, some place in North West Leicestershire, and see a guy about an omphalos – like I would know what the fuck that meant!

She promised not to interfere and she wouldn't be there herself, insisting that I would understand once I saw what they had discovered.

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Fuck that cunt!

I could still picture her surly fucking face as she let that prick Winstone nearly break my ribs with his fist.

Deleted!

ORTHODOX INCOGNITO FRIDAY 8th DECEMBER 2017

At my request, Mara organized a little chat with a Rabbi at the Shabbat Synagogue at Alexanderplatz. That evening we passed the police posted outside the entrance, and Mara introduced me to the friendly young Rabbi Nachum, he was about the same age as Pastor Tim. The men were soon led in prayer in front of the Torah niche, while the woman waited in a separate room.

It was the so-called *Day Of Rage*, after Trump had stated that Jerusalem was the actual capital of Israel. However, the armed guard looked as bored as he was irritated by the squealing toddlers running about unrestrained.

Everyone moved into a dining hall, where Mara and I sat next to the Rabbi's family. He was preoccupied with other duties, so I was introduced to the young Israeli guy sitting on my right. Dressed in business-casual, he gladly dispelled the idea that all Orthodox Jews only wore black like the Rabbi.

Later, once almost everyone else at the gathering had left, the Rabbi's young wife joined our ongoing conversation. She was outspoken about the important role of women in traditional Jewish life, and I couldn't help wondering if Mara wanted to argue tooth-and-nail with her. The Young Orthodox guy was a great source of knowledge, though he played it humble. The last topic I asked about, was what had become of the other eleven tribes? The Rabbi's wife briefly brought up the Ethiopian Jews, and then Mara made some comment about Lilith, which instantly made all the women burst out giggling about some old wives' tale. Ethiopia keeps popping up in my research, and I can't help but consider that it needs further investigation.

When Mara and I left the building, the Police had already gone. I never did get a chance to talk directly with the Rabbi, but they welcomed me back if I ever had any more questions.

HOW MANY DEGREES OF SEPARTION SATURDAY 30th DECEMBER 2017

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Early that morning, Pastor Tim introduced me to a member of the congregation who lived in a pre-war building right next to the church. Pastor Tim felt that Marcus could answer some of my questions in more detail than he was able. I hadn't noticed the old, balding man at the previous services. His place was full of classical paintings and ancient tomes. A warm spot on a cold winter's day. Pastor Tim didn't stay long, and once he had excused himself, Marcus and I shifted gear on the subject matter and went down the rabbit-hole of Genesis 5:21. When I told Marcus about the giants that I had seen in the forest of Romania, he thought I was joking. He then took a moment before suggesting that I talk to a guy who he had worked with in Saint Petersburg just after the Cold War. Marcus assured me that there wasn't any more qualified individual to discuss altered states of consciousness and divination. The guy was a bit of a recluse, which had nothing to do with his retirement. I was keen on having a chat with the chap, but wasn't sure about traveling to Russia. Marcus waved his hand dismissively. Getting out his address book, he said that Telford was as English as they came, and he had moved to Wales twenty years ago. Marcus seemed more than pleased to arrange a meeting, and began writing a letter by hand while I waited.

After I left his apartment, I strolled all the way into Mitte, feeling bothered by more than just the freezing wind. As hospitable as everyone had been with my questions, their answers only ever seemed to snowball into even more questions. And I had that nagging skepticism in the forefront of my mind, that you should never believe anything at face-value. But I had to admit, that I found confronting the authorities on the matter a far more engaging exercise than consulting online experts.

TO STUDY OR NOT TO STUDY WEDNESDAY 3rd JANUARY 2018

I received an e-mail reply to my inquiry at the Edinburgh Theological Seminary. They wrote a rather lengthy message, proposing various courses both on campus and online, long and short-term.

I sat staring at the e-mail for quite a time. How much could I learn? How much would I fail? The main problem that I foresaw, was my interest in the crossover of theologies. There were too many paths that led away from one monolith of belief. The more I spoke with men of faith, the further they led me from the mainstream understanding of religion. But how far was so far that I'd find myself listening to completely hysterical conspiracy horseshit?

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Though, the real question was, where were my own visions leading me, and did they even have anything to do with the parallels in these biblical works? Maybe this guy in Wales could shed some deeper insight. So, I booked a flight to the UK during a weekend that I knew I had all to myself.

WHO THE FUCK DO YOU THINK YOU ARE
THURSDAY 11th JANUARY 2018

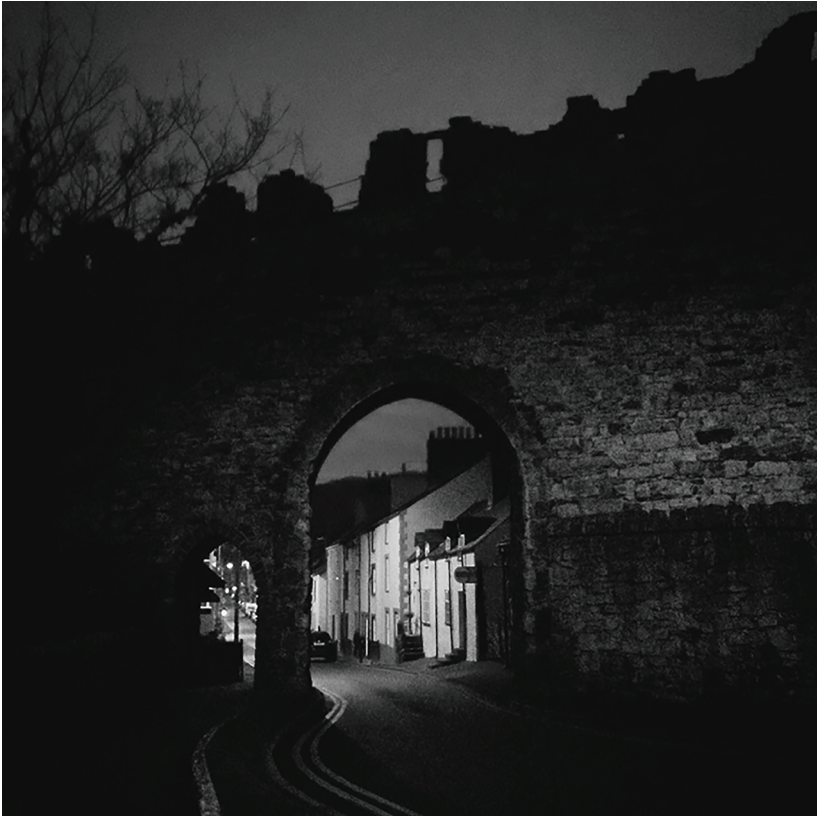


It was raining when I left Berlin for the two hour flight to Manchester, and it was just as gloomy on the two hour train ride to the tiny, medieval town of Conwy. I had forgotten how much I missed the smell of the sea and the sound of seagulls, and I watched the birds circling the castle turrets as they

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were silhouetted by the setting sun. My hotel was right in the middle of the walled-in old town, with my room overlooking the church tower. The place reminded me of a British version of Bacharach.

Enjoying the view from the waterfront, I decided to explore the entire length of the wall's battlements as night set in. I liked the black and white Tudor buildings, and heard a young couple mention that the place had been established by King Edward in the thirteenth century.



Once I bought some shortbread, I relaxed in my room until the church bell struck six o'clock. I was really looking forward to meeting Telford, especially after Marcus had mentioned his many adventures, which seemed far more exciting than most academic scholars ever got up. As I was leaving,

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I found the hotel's bar and restaurant was now teeming with activity. I liked to stay in nice hotels, but hadn't realized that I'd picked the social hub of this picturesque little town. Stepping out into the cold Welsh night, my previous belief was confirmed: British winters weren't anywhere near as bitterly freezing as Berlin's. Checking my phone for directions, I needed to follow the twisting road out of town, and at a brisk pace, I should be on his doorstep within five minutes. Heading up a hillside where there didn't seem to be any street lights, I marched through the pitch black, and soon spotted a small wooden gate below an A-framed cottage. A golden hue glowed within the dull windows, and as I pressed the doorbell, I glanced around the creepers arching above.

The door suddenly swung open and an old man with wavy white hair, held up the hand-written letter from Marcus, yelling, "I have no time for the likes of you! Get off my property! The Police are already on their way!"

FORTY YEARS IN THE WILDERNESS FRIDAY 12th JANUARY 2018

I awoke on my fortieth birthday to the smell of clean sheets and the squawks of hungry seagulls. The church bell struck eight o'clock, and I stared out of my window over the chimneys toward the nearby castle. Before crawling into bed last night, after having the smug knocked right off my face, it had occurred to me that I needed to provide Telford with a peace-offering. I required more than the hopeful promises of a third party. And just before I had fallen asleep, I believed that I knew what might just work. After all, I didn't fucking come here for nothing.

Over morning coffee, I began reading Blaise Pascal's, *Pensées*, however, was distracted by a tall girl who sat at the bar in a black bomber jacket with a big furry hood. It was her visible panty-line through her tight black pants that caught my attention. I've always taken a holistic approach to female objectification. It's not just about the tits or ass or face, it's about how it all works together. The whole meaty package. I liked her long, fake brown hair, big thick eyelashes, and, what looked like from this distance, to be a hint of a nose-ring. I caught her staring at me through the doorway into the restaurant, before she did that classic teenage pout and casually looked away. As Pascal says, "*Wretchedness. The only thing that consoles us for our miseries is distraction, yet that is the greatest of our wretchednesses. Because that is what mainly prevents us from thinking about ourselves and leads us*

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imperceptibly to damnation. Without it we should be bored, and boredom would force us to search for a firmer way out, but distraction entertains us and leads us imperceptibly to death."

The girl disappeared while I was reading, so I decided to wander down to the castle ruins and clear her lecherous image from my head. Apart from all the huddling pigeons, I had the entire place to myself. It was an impressive piece of engineering. The paintings by Turner, truly captured the daunting mood of the imposing walls. King Edward was long gone, but his imprint remained, just as the face of that female lingered in my mind.



While getting a coffee to-go, the chatty staff at the small cafe informed me that there weren't many old-school locals left. Most people that owned

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property here were well-off folk from out of town. I sat drinking my coffee in the sun on the waterfront, admiring the little fishing boats and yachts. All the street signs were in both Welsh and English, but even when I overheard stranger's conversations, I couldn't understand if they were actually speaking English. Fucking enunciate your fucking words, you mumbling fucking cunts!

Heading around the shoreline, I made my way up into the woods. Climbing the hill, I found a park bench in the sun surrounded by trees, the perfect secluded location to desecrate the meat of the young.

While warming myself in the hotel's small library, as I wrote in my notebook, a girl and her old granny sat in the armchairs next to mine. Not lowering my journal, I fixated on the girl's pale complexion contrasted by scarlet lipstick and her curly black hair. But it was this female's tight jeans and thigh-gap that drew me in, hook, line, and erection. Instantly, I pictured her screaming, bleeding, and suffering! I wanted to spoil that which presented itself as innocent. She was just another meat-insect. They're all playing the deceit-game. As too am I part of this mock-system: hide your lust, deny your hatred, and bottle-up your train-of-thought. The granny and girl didn't stay long, so I picked up Pascal, "*First part: That nature is corrupt, proven by nature itself.*" And I say, there is no fucking second part!

The sky was clear when I headed out of town for my second attempt at winning an audience with Telford. The way seemed totally different to how I remembered it from last night. I saw plenty of lampposts along the stone-walled footpath, and once I reached Telford's cottage, I realized that it wasn't at all isolated in the woods, but surrounded by other little houses. I noticed a lack of parked cars on the street, so assumed that Telford was the only permanent resident in the neighborhood. Without further delay, I rang his doorbell. No response. I rang again. I knocked. Nothing. So, I thumped his fucking door as my anger quickly returned! The silence utterly incinerated my fucking charitable offer of peace! I had come back for nothing! Shaking my fucking head, I walked away at a snail's pace. Fuming in disbelief, I stumbled along the road, eventually encircling the entire valley outside the old town walls. For random periods of time, I just stopped, staring at the trees, clenching my fists until the cold soaked through all my layers.

When I returned to the hotel, I was thankful that I had left the radiator warming my room. Defrosting with shortbread and the BBC, I was soon encouraged by the persistence of the seagulls to take my tired legs outside again before the last light of day fucked off for good.

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Strolling around the literal dead-center of town, I scowled at the graveyard surrounding the old church, and knew that this too was just another piece of cold dead stone. There was no god here. Fuck this place and fuck the righteous! It was too fucking freezing to walk down to the waterfront, so I headed back from whence I had come. When right then, Telford came around a corner of the church.

“What are you doing here?!”

“It’s my fucking birthday, I’ll do what I want!”

“My condolences!” And he marched on by.



I sat alone eating rump steak in the hotel’s busy restaurant, while Frank Sinatra, *My Way*, played at the bar – how fucking appropriate! As I chewed

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on the meat, I observed the youngest waitress with her plump ass bobbing about all the guests. I sliced into the steak and wondered if her meat would also go nicely with that delicious pepper sauce. So, I was forty. I liked that number. Yeah, I was doing just fine. As long as I kept myself to myself. Like they say: *manners maketh man and silence is golden*. I didn't need any fucking help, as long as I crushed my perpetually foul mood behind a '*mask of normalcy*', as Jeffrey Dahmer would say. I was perfectly fine. It was only meat that I was eating. Perfectly innocent fucking meat!

KNOWLEDGE AND CONVERSATION SATURDAY 13th JANUARY 2018

It was an overcast morning, but not too cold. I had slept in and missed the breakfast coffee, so sat on the waterfront with a latte to-go. During the course of listening to Tenzin Choegyal, *Lend Me Your Wings*, the tide gradually withdrew. The gusts of wind created choppy patterns on the water until there was only the mud left to look at. A blue-eyed crow then stepped right up in front of me. We glared at each other, with neither of us having a fucking thing to say. Like the tide, we both knew that we wouldn't be around for anything meaningful to happen between us.

By the time the album ended, I was frozen and felt only bitterness. Rolling up my headphones cord, I ignored the stranger that sat down next to me on the bench.

"Don't you have more important things to do with your time?" Telford asked.

"Deus vult, motherfucker!" I snarled, barely suppressing my hostility.

"He always was a bastard, wasn't he."

I wasn't expecting that from an esteemed theologian. But then again, at this point, what the fuck did I really know about this fucking hermit. He was just a waste of time, so I stood, pulling on my gloves as I walked away.

"You look like a malefactor," Telford stated abruptly.

"What?!"

"A criminal. With that mark on your hand. That snake tattoo."

Digging my hands deeper into my coat's pockets, I waited.

"Accusata, scusata," Telford muttered, slowly standing. "Tell me, you know what a theodicy is?"

My legs were half numb from sitting in the cold, and the wind began whipping at my face stronger than before, yet I grit my teeth and grunted,

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“Enlighten me!”

“It’s an attempt to justify why god allows evil to exist,” Telford spoke, still not facing me as he stared out over the water. “But tell me this, what’s the fundamental fallacy behind such endeavors?”

“The mistaken belief that any fucking god actually gives a flying fuck about your sorry fucking ass in the first fucking place!” I spat without a second thought.

Telford raised his bushy white eyebrows, nodding his head. “Walk with me.”

I needed another coffee, but thought fuck it, perhaps this old coot might have something worth listening to after all.

“So, Marcus tells me that you’re somewhat captivated by old Enoch,” Telford grumbled, as we headed up into the shelter of the town walls. “Enoch begat Methuselah who begat Lamech who begat whom?”

“Noah.”

“Who was special, why?”

“For his boat building.”

“Before that!” Telford sneered. “At his birth!”

“Wasn’t there something about him looking like a freak.”

“No!” Telford barked. “*“He is not like man but resembles the children of the angels of heaven.”*”

“Nephilim?”

“What does the great flood teach us?”

“God fucking despises us! That the flood was the fucking end-times! And we’re now living in a post-apocalyptic shit-hole!”

“What of Abraham, Moses, and Jesus?”

“What of the fallen angel that stopped Abraham from sacrificing his son?!”

“Blasphemy!”

“And?!”

“Who are you to make such divisive claims?!”

“Who the fuck was Enoch to set the precedent that angels could rape women?!”

“He was a great man! You’re not!”

“Angels rebel, fall, and fuck,” I said, watching the weekend folk mingle on High Street. “So, it’s hardly beyond the realm of possibility that yet another self-determining angel decided to piss on god’s plan and stop an essential sacrifice. And by doing so, Abraham’s descendants filled the whole

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wide fucking world.”

“Unless that was in fact god’s plan all along.”

“Unless he never had a fucking plan!”

“That is, if there is a god to begin with.”

“Whose side are you on exactly?”

“One must always test the comfort-zones of strangers if one ever hopes to attain the lengths at which they are willing to go.”

“In order to achieve what?!”

“Understanding why you’re here.”

“Who gives a fuck, I’m still fucking here.”

“You think traveling by foot is hard?”

I kept my mouth shut.

“You’ve come from Germany, haven’t you?” Telford spoke, as we continued slowly up the street. “Yet there’s a man, Herr Maier, in Würzburg, who knows much more than I. He’s working on a new Bible. A history of the gods, without favoring sides. Without good and evil. He takes the stance that ignorance is no excuse, just as weakness won’t save you when you’re lost in the wild. You could have stayed where you were. Travel doesn’t guaranty that you’ve actually experienced anything at all.”

“Gods? Plural?”

“Come now!” Telford grunted. “Surely we’re beyond this! Of course there’s only one true god. The Most High over all. Come on! Spit it out! Get on with it! What is it?! What is the one true god?!”

“The great indifference of the universe.”

“Beautifully put.” Telford and I then scaled the stairs onto the battlements above the upper gate, and headed to the highest western tower overlooking the entire old town. The seemingly frail old man then confronted me on top of the windswept tower with its broken parapets. “Now you must have heard of polytheism. There are many, many gods below the great one. And anyone who believes that any of these gods are purely good or evil, by nature or design, is a fool I shall suffer no further!”

-PHOTO

“If Noah was a Nephilim too, then we were damned long before Abraham. And if only the damned survived the flood, then we’re all Rephaim.”

“The children of the Grigori.”

“So, why the fuck was Noah spared?”

“Unless a fallen one had warned him too,” Telford said quietly, slowly looking away. “You see how that changes the context of later scripture. The

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Most High judged us as unworthy, and yet, a lesser god spared us, and to him we owe our gratitude.”

We both stood in the gales facing the bleak town of Conwy, while buzzard-like seagulls spiraled above the gray rooftops.

“You’re no Christian. What’s brought you to my doorstep?”



Bracing myself against the moss-coated battlements, I struggled to recall what my peace-offering had been. “What is it that the Sphinx, Göbekli Tepe, and Baalbek have in common?”

Telford’s pruned face remained ever miserable.

“What do you know of the apparent evidence of prehistoric civilizations existing before the last ice-age and that infamous flood?”

Telford just stood, waiting in the cold.

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“This time last year, I was taken on an expedition out into the North Sea. The professor in charge believed he knew the locations of megalithic sites lost upon the sunken area of Doggerland.”

Telford ever so slightly tilted his head.

“We found something out there. And a few months ago, I was back on the North Sea. What we had found, it had grown a lot bigger.” Turning, I was doubting that this peace-offering meant anything to Telford. While staring west toward the snow sprinkled hills, I changed the subject, “A couple of years ago, I was told to get some professional help. Was eventually worn down, and spoke to a psychologist. Figured it would be good to put the matter to rest: whether I’m sick in the head or not. Turns out I’m good. But now. I think I actually need some help. I seem incapable of decoding the things I see.”

“What kind of things?”

“Inhuman things,” I said. “Things I have no name for.”

“Did you tell your therapist about these things?”

“I wasn’t about to incriminate myself.”

“Are you unable or just unwilling to identify whatever it is that you’re seeing?”

“How do I know if they’re even there?”

“Has anyone else seen them?”

“What if they’re just symbolic?”

“Projections of the higher-self?”

“Manifestations of the unconscious?”

“Unless of course, they are indeed there.”

“I can see these things as clearly as any other memory.”

“Can memory make anything real?”

“Why the fuck do I see them at all?”

“The cursed third-eye.”

“Fuck my third-eye!” I snapped, thumping the metal railing, just as some tourists began climbing up the staircase. “I see them with these two fuckers! And they see me!”

“Possibly mild schizophrenia. Perhaps the early stages of Alzheimer’s. Hallucinations mixed with paranoid delusions only makes you just another overly sensitive little shit with too much time on your hands!” Telford scolded furiously. “If you’re seeing things that you know aren’t there, then go to a bloody doctor! Tell them the truth and get some goddamn medication! That, my boy, is my professional advice!”

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The family of tourists were scared off by Telford's outburst, and for a while I fought the urge to join them and get the fuck off that freezing tower. Shaking my head, I slowly muttered to myself, "You go out of your fucking way to change, to make things happen. You play an active fucking part in seeking fucking solutions, only to find again and again dead-fucking-ends that lead to absolutely fucking nothing! You're in control of fucking nothing!"

"If you see things with only these two human eyes, then I'm of no use to you," Telford spoke hoarsely, as he stepped closer. "However, if you can let down your bloody guard for five minutes, and admit that it's your third-eye revealing abominations, then perhaps, just perhaps, you might have something worth listening to."

"They seem like they're more than just meaningless brain-junk. They act as if they have their own interests. If they're merely products of my unconscious, then I should have discovered what they're trying to tell me by now. But if they're some external force, then I seem incapable of knowing what they want or what they're trying to tell me."

"Ever tried asking them?"

Shaking my frustrated head, I sneered, "What, with words!? With fucking words?! Our language is as inefficient as ancient fucking hieroglyphs! Everyone's so fucking confused over literal and figurative speech, that we're all left scrambling for our own bullshit fucking interpretations! Just like when Pastor Tim went on about viewing the Bible through the 'lens' of whatever the fuck we feel like! But which fucking lens?!"

We both went silent, as a couple of new tourists joined us on the tower. Telford then said, "Gates of ivory and horn."

Turning into the wind, I faced Telford.

"Which dreams matter and which deceive."

The tourists soon left.

"How much have you seen?"

"A fuck-ton."

"Ghosts?"

"Please!" I scowled. "Though, recently saw my dead father beneath the mountain at Pergamon."

"Sounds like you still need some therapy."

"Maybe," I conceded, as the first drops of rain fell.

"The problem with psychologies, as with philosophies," Telford spoke quietly. "Is that they tend to persuade with seemingly compelling ambiguities, until we convince ourselves that they have the one and only

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possible explanation for our situation. Without decent perspective, we're unable to discern which parts of different wisdoms are actually applicable to us as individuals."

"And how does one gain some perspective?"

"By looking for a third-person with an objective perception."

"Yet how do you find that third-person with whom to gauge your situation?" I asked, scanning the bay.

"Neither you nor I are without our own spin on the world. No one is free from external influences, from influences that affect you, and influences that you make," Telford said, stepping right up into my face. "Why should you trust me?"

"I don't need to trust you. I'm just looking to cross-reference."

"And what if you don't like what you find?"

"I already don't fucking like you!"

"Good!" Telford applauded with his thick gloves. "Now let's get out of this rubbish weather before I catch my death."

"About fucking time!"

-

A pot of Earl Grey soon started warming up my bones after I found myself in Telford's library-like den. We sat in two tartan armchairs in front of an ancient radiator below a cozy bay-window looking over the valley.

"Baalbek, Göbekli Tepe, and the Sphinx," I repeated, pouring myself another cup of tea. "The older parts of the engineering seem to be the more sophisticated sections. If Enoch says Samyaza gave man this building know-how, then ever since, we've just been making copies of copies. And getting worse over time. From Egyptian to Greek to Roman to the Renaissance, to even the work of Albert Speer."

Telford crossed his arms. "Are you trying to imply that the Nazis were divinely inspired?"

"Divinely, infernally, what's the difference?"

"I admire your lack of a moral compass."

"Seen their ruins."

"In this world or the next?"

"Man has an inability to maintain knowledge passed down. But if angels like Mulciber built the kingdom of heaven, then why, after the fall, is their empire in such disarray now? Have the gods forgot how to build?"

"Hell," Telford stated in a sinister tone, rubbing his hands in front of his face. "Hell is what comes from the emancipation of slaves. Their freedom

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equals chaos. Hell, it is a place of absolutes!”

Finishing my tea, I watched the old man rant, full of piss and vinegar.

“There’s something about hell. It impairs cognitive function. As if the very fabric of its reality is laced with narcotics that perpetually soak into all that reside there. Your very presence in hell brings out the base animal in us. It’s as though the reasoning part of the human brain simply doesn’t exist in that dimension. Christ, we all know what that’s like. We’ve all had tiny tastes of hell! Those times when a love affair ends! When our hatred gets the best of us! When we see red and no words of justification can tame our blood-lust!”

“You’ve actually seen it.”

“It’s an ego-causality-loop!” Telford snarled, looking away at a bronze statue of what I believed was Jupiter sitting, holding a staff, with an eagle at his side. “Once you’re there, you get stuck in constant viciousness. An inescapably pattern of thought. Time marches on, but you’re trapped in a relentless mindset. You learn nothing, and all your passions are ruled by spite!”

“Spite motivates you to do that which shouldn’t be done.”

“You speak like you know nothing!” Telford yelled. “What have you done?! What exactly have you, of all people on the face of the Earth, throughout the entire history of all mankind, done that’s so bloody important?!”

Clenching my jaw while glaring at my polished shoes, I asked, “How have you seen this place?”

Settling back into his chair, Telford crossed his legs, rearranging his position before speaking. “My eschatological work involved field-research abroad. Traveled extensively through much of the Americas. Investigated the Seven Gates Of Guinea. A voodoo passage to the world of the spirits. Mostly saw a lot of children taking too many substances and suggestions. Ended up spending a long time in Alaska. Lived closely with a family of Inuit. Studied under their shaman. Found him far more dedicated than those practicing voodoo, that’s for sure! He directly assisted my communications. That was, until I was struck down with illness. He said the spirits had overwhelmed me. I couldn’t argue. It was like drinking from a fire-hydrant. There was too much at once.”

“Ayahuasca, it’s a hell of a drug.”

That was the one and only time that I saw Telford smile. “Wasn’t until I spent time in Russia, north of Kazakhstan, that I made some serious breakthroughs. After years of following leads that went nowhere, I finally infiltrated an extremely isolated sect. A split from the orthodox church. The

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Khlysty. Not easy to find. Even harder to live with. Those people. Listen, those people, they've seen hell up close and personal. Those people, they understand the true function of all things!"

There was a drawn out moment of silence, and I watched the old man's eyes dart about while he seemed lost in vivid memories that haunted him something fierce. Eventually, I asked, "What did they show you? What did you see?"

"My third-eye saw that which was as awe-inspiring as it was beyond words. Ultimate unending dread. The realm of primordial potential energy. Where Greek Titans slaughter one another ad infinitum." Telford was leaning forward, gripping his armrest while slowly shaking his head. "There's an entire ecology in hell. It's just as disgusting as it is here in the corporeal world. Where the worse you are, the more powerful and hideous your manifestation."

Another pause, as the wind rattled the window frames throughout the cottage.

"The Khlysty had only a few rules about dealing with the beings that we encountered. There are three kinds. Those that have no idea that man even exists. Those that are aware of us but don't care in the least. And then there are those that know about us and have only contempt toward all of mankind!"

It started raining again.

"There's no hegemony, no one group dominating over all others. Not since the hordes overthrew the natural order. All successors have failed to maintain control over their fractured empire that continues shattering into ever diminishing tribes. They need the most unclean to unify them all, but he turned his back on them ever since they revolted against him."

"Most unclean?"

"There's no making allies with anything is that place. It's like you're standing below an avalanche that's a hundred miles wide. Nothing you say or do will make the avalanche your friend. It's an elemental force, and you simply do not matter!" Telford rolled his neck and cleared his throat, discarding the memories like a heavy blanket from his shoulders. "Besides, when you're there, in that place, in hell, you lack the very ability to even think your way out of the situation. It's like yelling at a photo of your past self and telling him not to do that which has really been done. You can't change the past, just as you can't change the mechanics of hell. It's a future that's already set. Hell is a future that's unavoidable."

"And yet here and now we can reason and resolve problems."

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“And yet we solve nothing!”

“Then what’s the fucking point of seeing the other side?! If this fucking knowledge is power, then why the fuck am I still a fucking idiot?!”

“Are you a practitioner of hierogamy?”

“What?!”

“Sexual interaction with the goddess.”

“Why bother if it’s ultimately futile in the end?!”

“Why not kill yourself and be done with it, with that attitude!”

“Not today.”

“We’re all damned,” Telford faded out. “So, why not commit atrocities.”

I agreed, though thought of Pastor Tim and his belief that instead, we were already saved.

“Ego-death, that’s all you can hope for in this life. The destruction of the subjective-self. Accept that you’re just a leaf adrift in the rapids. We have no influence and we experience nothing of consequence. The only meaning in life is the lies that we tell ourselves. Primarily that others gives a damn about our sniveling little existence! We’re all aberrations of the presupposed constants of the material cosmos! I am just another unidentified body in the mass-grave of time’s killing-field!”

“You’re right. Why don’t you kill yourself, then?”

“I told you, the only meaning is in ourselves. We are the Temple Of Solomon. The Holy Of Holies is inside of us!”

“Fuck off with that bullshit!” I snarled, kicking the radiator! Standing, I shoved the armchair away, looking for my coat. “I can’t spontaneously teach myself to build things like a fucking nuclear reactor! That knowledge isn’t fucking innate, you fucking useless fuck!”

“Have you read, *Moses And Monotheism*?” Telford calmly asked.

My beeline for the door slowly ground to a halt.

“Do you believe guilt is inherent?”

Sighing, I tensed my quadriceps, trying to stop myself from walking out.

“There’s always more than one way to tell a story about how to skin a cat.”

“You know, during my first chat with little Pastor Tim, he kept repeating the term, “*It depends on through which lens you use.*” It still fucking annoys me.” Turning toward Telford, I asked, “So, what doctrine warps your perception?”

“Way back in my youth, I was your run-of-the-mill theologian, but inevitably found too many inconsistencies. There was little thematic stability,

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making it impossible to measure and evaluate which recorded accounts were reliable.” Telford then waited until I had returned to my chair. “As I mentioned, Herr Maier has been compiling a new Bible. One which lacks such contradictory dilemmas by having the courage to include a pantheon of demonic divinities.”

“Who is this guy? And how the fuck would he have any more authority on the matter than centuries of religious holy men?”

“Just before the Battle Of The Nile, Napoleon managed to ship an entire load of secrets from Egypt back to France. After the thrashing that ensued from the British fleet, all records of that vessel were successfully lost. That’s just one example of the holes in documented history. These pockets of treasure, are nevertheless, tucked away in personal collections throughout the world. Herr Maier is in the fortunate position of being able to afford the luxury of gaining access to such precious resources.”

“The Rape Of The Nile.”

“And every other civilization!”

“How does he know what’s real?”

“How do you know what’s real?!” Telford shouted. “What have you learned?! What cathedrals have you built?! You’re a nobody, questioning a history that won’t even remember you!”

“Touché.”

“The Khlysty don’t just have visions, they help bring those things into this world!”

“How?”

Telford withdrew into himself. “The Jews no longer make animal sacrifices.”

Tilting my head, I watched the old chap, wondering where this was leading.

“How do you think the gods, or specifically the Jew’s Tetragrammaton, would feel about this?”

“Impatient.”

“Marcus wrote that you’re an artist. That you’re obsessed with these bastards of Elohim. But what were you doing at Pergamon?”

“Getting sun burnt.”

“Listen, do you know what the Jews think of Jesus?”

Shaking my irritated head at the way Telford constantly changed the subject, I said, “He was a prophet.”

“They hated him!”

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I loved how loud Telford yelled.

“A blasphemer! And if there’s one thing consistent in this world and the next, it’s our ability to inflict torment!” He then swung his left arm up above my head, pointing, as if to the back of the cottage. “Out there, up in the hills, in the woods, there’s a overgrown pit. About thirty-feet deep. Looks like an abandoned well. But no spring resides there. Back when this settlement was first established, the English dug this pit. For it is written in the Tel mud, *“Whoever mocks at the words of the sages is punished with boiling hot excrement.”* That is the eternal fate of the man named Jesus. And so too, the villages here would throw a sinner into that pit, where they’d proceed to shit upon him. Before pouring tar over the condemned and setting him fire! Do you understand?! There are risks involved, especially when you ask questions like, how do the Khlysty bring those things into this world!”

“No one gets out of here alive,” I stated angrily. “You either drown on vomit after years of cancer, or you choke on a suicide noose gone wrong, or maybe get half your face ripped off by a stray dog before the pack mauls you to death! There’s only a slim chance you’ll get the easy way out! Risk is unavoidable! And just when you think you’ve heard about the worst way to go, you discover how abject and ingenious humans really fucking are, like burning alive in boiling shit! It’s a cunt of a world, and we’re all going to die fucked! But until then.”

“Until then?”

“Desecrate.”

“Primitive.”

“I’m still no Antiochus.”

“Why would you wish to be?”

“To desecrate the temple with pigs blood.”

Telford tapped his chin with his fingers, before speaking again. “King Josiah foresaw the destruction of the first temple. He ordered the Ark hidden below the temple. He also wrote about giants. Have you been to Delphi? Or the Hypogeum in Malta, said to be built by giants.”

“Haven’t been to Ethiopia either, though I’m curious to visit the Chapel Of The Tablet.”

“You’re talking about the story where the son of King Solomon and the Queen Of Sheba moves the Ark to Ethiopia. And what then? For four-hundred years the Holy Of Holies was completely empty? If so, King Josiah had nothing to hide. Ridiculous!”

“Relocating the Ark isn’t as bad as moving an entire temple, like the French

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did with the Temple of Isis from the island of Philae before they flooded the area. It defeats the purpose of the site's sacred alignment. But when tradition replaces historical evidence, which becomes more important?"

"The idea is what's crucial."

"Tell it to the Palestinians."

"Ideas feed people."

"Until they're fucking starving to death!"

"Take a child who has nothing and wants only to hurt the world," Telford said quietly. "Give that child purpose and a sense of belonging, and he'll happily go hungry while staying loyal to the bitter end."

Silently listening, I leaned closer to the radiator.

"You know what you need," Telford whispered. "Something to look forward to. A cause to concentrate your energy on. Something to fight for."

"You mean a scapegoat," I smiled. "A Natalie Portman."

"How did you get interested in Enoch? Nobody reads that stuff anymore."

"I blame Loch Ness."

"Please!"

"The house there."

"You can't mean Boleskine?"

"Other side."

"You're not messed up with that Crowley lot, are you?"

"Thought you'd be into a bit of the old Gnostics."

"For Pete's sake, no!" Telford sneered. "They're again, predisposed to that whole good Vs. evil dichotomy. The Monad and the Demiurge. Though, the Demiurge alone is closer to the mark. There's just no such thing as a good god!"

"Tell me something I don't fucking know!"

"Like what?!"

"Like where is Dudael?!"

"If you're looking for it, you won't find it here. Dudael's not an actual location on the map. It's in that other place. That place you've already seen."

"Where? In hell? Well, where exactly in hell?! How the fuck do I find it?!"

"What are you expecting from me?!" Telford demanded. "You don't need a shepherd! You've made it this long with these visions in your life! You should have learned to decipher what they want from you by now! Stop playing the fool! You're an artist. Haven't you tried painting these things? You said it yourself, words are imperfect tools. So, visualizing these visions!"

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Have you heard of Christoph Haizmann? As an artist, he made a pact with the devil. I believe he took a pilgrimage to Mariazell for an exorcism. Is that what you want?! What do you want?! Spit it out! What the bloody hell do you want from me, boy?!”

“I want to meet Maier.”

“Good luck!” Telford shook his head. “Took me years to earn his trust the hard way.”

“Where is he?”

“Not going to happen. But listen,” Telford said, rubbing his hand over his mouth as he thought about something for a serious moment. “Talk to this guy, Emmanuel. He lives in Scanno, Italy. But he gets around. He’s a real French scumbag, no two ways about it. However, I found his own experiences with Merkabah mysticism both absurd as well as intriguing. He’ll talk to you, might even give you the guidance that I will not.”

“Why?”

“He’s a sadistic pig, to put it politely, but knows more than his fair share about the hidden history of the world. Herr Maier used him multiple times for various collection assignments. Just don’t mention anything to do with witchcraft. He adheres to his own form of orthodoxy. And we all have our sore spots, after all. He’s as strict with his rules as he is intolerant of those who won’t listen to him preach.”

“Sadistic and a pig! Now that’s my kind of people. But why, why won’t you help?”

Telford leaned back with a vile curl to his nostrils. “Because you don’t deserve it!”

I too sunk into my chair and stared at Jupiter, as Pascal’s words rang through my head, *“Tyranny consists in the universal desire to dominate, beyond one’s station.”*

“FOR THE LOVE OF CHRIST!” Telford screamed. “WHAT THE HELL IS THAT?!”

“You know, you’re probably right. I got to learn to exert better restraint over my words and actions. But you see, these things. I have no more control over these things than I have control over my own thoughts and feelings.”

Leaping from his armchair, Telford backed away, terrified of the wet hands and grotesque faces that smothered the bay window and pressed against the glass with violent teeth. Turning my head, I glanced at a massive centipede-like beast with legs similar to human arms crawling across the ceiling. Telford moaned in horror as that blackened creature slithered above. He never saw

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the second and third entity creep up from behind like the giant maggots that chewed on the face of Zeus.

“Hey, don’t worry about them,” I spoke in a despondent tone. “But I’d love to know exactly where I could find that pit in the woods, that you mentioned.”

“What have you brought into my house?! This isn’t possible! They can’t coexist like this!”

“Relax,” I murmured, glaring at my reflection in the window as more and more of those ravenous devils, great and small, filled the cozy little cottage. “The mind is a Pandora’s Box that shouldn’t be kept closed.”

WITHOUT ALEXANDRIA’S LIGHTHOUSE SUNDAY 14th JANUARY 2018

With plenty of time to spare in the morning, I joined the mass being held at the old Conwy church, before catching the train to Manchester.

On the flight back to Berlin, I recalled leaving out the back door of Telford’s home, and reaching the crest of that hill just before nightfall. The bricked-over remains of the pit were indeed covered with weeds and bush, but there was just enough space for me to kneel and pay homage to the decrepit altar of the defiled Yeshua.

Bruce

Bruce Stirling John Knox



SHORT STORY 17
2018
ADVENTURES OF A PSYCHOPATH

DISCLAIMER:

Nothing ventured, nothing gained. Nothing gained, so none of this mattered.

“She gave shit blowjobs, but I loved her pitiful expression when she knelt with her mouth wide open while I jerked off onto her tongue.”

“I loved spreading her gaping pussy, so I could watch her awkward smile as she looked away embarrassed.”

“What about you, Bruce? What’s your fetish?”

“Don’t know what the fuck you guys are talking about,” I sneered, from the backseat of that Audi SUV.

“What are you, vanilla?”

Glaring at the back of their heads, I knew that one day these tough guys would find themselves at the short end of a matrimonial-stick, wishing for even sniff of that sweet, innocent vanilla sex.

“So?”

“Currently celibate,” I replied.

“Fuck off!”

Watching the rain-swept streets, I ignored the two laughing Slovaks as we drove through the most eastern parts of Lichtenberg.

“I fucking hate girls with rape-fantasies!” I finally admitted. “I like to use pruning-shears and cut through their fucking ribs so I can literally fuck them right in the tits – till their fucking lungs collapse!”

Turning into a darkened parking lot, the driver asked, “What are pruning-shears?”

Jörg stood next to his black Bugatti Veyron, and had grown a scruffy brown beard since I had last seen him. Stepping out of the SUV, I shook his hand as he said, “How you doing, man?”

“Where’s Caviezel?” I asked.

The twenty-something-year-old tilted his head and looked around the surrounding apartment blocks. “Thing is, Mr. C, yeah, he can’t help you, man. You know, come on, you’re a scary guy. I’ve seen your work. The shit you think up. I don’t know, man. He said, he can’t do anything for you. You know how it is. I don’t know.”

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Rubbing my forehead in exasperation, I glared at the ground, and clenched every muscle in my back, trying to keep my voice balanced, “I’m just a normal guy. And he’s a —”

“He’s a busy man.”

“And I’m bad for business.” I understood the implications: even criminals didn’t want to be seen with me.

“Hey, do you want a lift somewhere?” Jörg called out, as I walked away from him and the two Slovakiens. “What the fuck, man?!”

I wasn’t sure what part of town I was in, but I didn’t care. There was nothing happening tomorrow, or this week, or the next. Perhaps I could wander all the way to Poland, and claim refugee status, seeking asylum from my fucking reputation. But knowing my luck, they too would tell to go fuck right off!

In the vast expanses of empty concrete between those cheap towering buildings, I noticed two teenagers in hoodies snarling at some other kid lying on the ground. They seemed like jackals gnawing at the scrawny bones of a gazelle caught out in the open. They never bothered with me. Not because I presented a threat to them, but because they sensed, deep down inside, that I wasn’t even fucking there at all. I am the hallucination of the hateful.

The sound of a glass bottle smashing, gradually drew my attention back to those predators as the WHACKS of fists echoed across the frosty night. One guy was now on his knees, clutching a bloodied face. The other was brawling with Jörg like a champion. Suddenly a drum-fire of running sneakers came racing around a corner as the wasted youth of East Germany rushed to the aid of their friends. Smiling enthusiastically, Jörg glanced in my direction, and then hooked his knuckles into the side of the kid’s jaw, knocking him out for count! The new arrives came from behind Jörg as well as outflanked my position. These hip-hop-infused, hopeless kids looked like they had just won the lottery this deplorable fucking Friday night. For as good at street-fighting as Jörg was, they outnumbered us by at least a dozen. Though, it came as no surprise when Jörg began laughing at this gang that began closing in. He then pulled out his 9mm. Correcting my posture, I faced my shoulders directly toward that dark-haired Belarusian. If he was going to shoot me, then I wanted it straight on. He couldn’t miss from this distance. But to my nauseating disappointment, as the kids all run out of there, Jörg just turned and watched them scatter. He didn’t even raise his weapon.

“Just because Mr. C’s an elitist asshole, doesn’t mean we all are,” Jörg shrugged, tucking his gun away. “Come on, I’ll buy you a whore and we’ll

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tag-team the bitch!”

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“Raped, tortured, and murdered, if not worse.”

“What the fuck could be worse?”

“Saw a girl with her arms and legs amputated so that she would fit perfectly inside a suitcase that a guy kept under his bed. He used her as a fuck-puppet for twenty-years. Fucking Austrians!”

The two men in suits suddenly went silent once they noticed my entrance into that deserted bar.

“Fuck are you?!”

“The fuck is this?” Jörg shouted, strutting in with his arms wide open. “Where the fuck are all the girls?”

“Not tonight, Jörg.”

“Not tonight? Not tonight?! I need it every-fucking-night!” Jörg’s famous temper was only ever one ambiguous comment away from going ape-shit. And just as he grabbed a bar stool, the taller guy in a burgundy suit, stepped closer.

“Friedrich’s girl has gone missing!”

The stool was in mid-swing, when Jörg went into slow-motion, and stared curiously at the body of some unknown guy, lying face-down in a puddle of his own blood.

That was when the phone on the bar began to ring.

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The four of us sat in a Lincoln Navigator SUV as we sped away from Charlottenburg. The whole drive, Mr. America continued listening to his phone, occasionally grunting and nodding his head. Jörg sat in shotgun, while Mr. Burgundy drove.

“Should be coming up on the next left,” Mr. America stated.

Right then, a black BMW 7-series cut across our path in the middle of Prenzlauer Berg, and we immediately followed it. Jörg glanced over his shoulder, staring back through his oily hair at me. He seemed to wait for some sign of acknowledgment. In that moment, his excited eyes looked his age. I remembered being that young, adamant about how the world worked, and yet, still anxious about my ability to handle the unknown. Turning my head, I scanned the empty streets, considering how little had changed in the last fifteen years. If I was truly fatalistic, then why did the uncontrollable still bother me? If it would all work out in the end, why couldn’t I just fucking accept it?! I was saturated in the ennui of ineptitude.

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The BMW soon pulled over and drove into an underground parking lot. We accelerated and made it inside before the gate closed. Then the breaks screamed! The three other men evacuated the SUV and sprinted across the private parking space at the shocked guy exiting his BMW! Resting my forehead against the cold glass, I sat where I was and watched the two guys in suits throw their target against a concrete wall, before Jörg kned him in the face! That's all it took for him to breakdown and beg for mercy.

Stepping over to the bleeding guy on the ground, I watched him cringe, muttering something in Deutsch. Mr. Burgundy held up a black Ralph Lauren handbag from the backseat of the BMW. Mr. America then pulled a set of keys and a phone from the German's pocket before Jörg forced him into the trunk of the BMW.

"You know that guy?" Mr. Burgundy asked me, as we all stepped into the building's elevator and unlocked the penthouse level.

"Look at this face," Jörg grinned at my reflection in the golden elevator. "He could make anyone talk with that expression!"

Mr. America's phone then rang as we reached the top floor. Answering it without a word, he quickly waved his hand. "Fuck's sake! Wrong place! They're on the move!"

Jörg pressed his ear against one of the two doors in the black corridor, shook his head, and then gestured for the keys. The other two were already back in the lift, and just dropped the keys and phone on the glossy floor before the elevator doors slid shut. Unimpressed, Jörg stomped over, snatching them up. He then gave me a filthy look. "Man, what the fuck is up with you tonight?! Seriously, spit it out! You want to fucking tell me something?!"

I paused as I was flooded with thoughts that I had temporarily managed to suppress, about how I was currently drowning in debt to the Finanzamt. But instantaneously, I knew such personal circumstances were as boring to others as relationship drama. "If I needed a shoulder to cry on, I'd ask your mother."

Smirking, Jörg opened the penthouse door and walked straight into bass-heavy sound of Nostalgia, *Homeostasis*.

Slowly making my way into that massive apartment, I disregarded the sounds of fists and the scuffling of heels on the polished floor. Instead, I headed directly toward the lifeless body of a teenage girl lying on a blackened dining table. Her face had been brutalized until it looked like little more than a mix of borscht and bone. The pool of blood surrounding the body was slowly soaking into her tight white dress and long, bleached-blond hair. She had a fucking excellent body, and as I placed the back of my knuckles on her

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slender neck, I found that her flesh was still warm. I'd fuck that. But then the landline began to ring. Walking through the darkened kitchen, I pulled on my leather gloves, and watched Jörg choke some guy under his boot in the huge living room. Picking up the ringing phone, I heard a casual German mumbled into my ear. Listening, I opened a drawer and plucked out a large Japanese steak knife. With a deranged frown, Jörg looked up from the gangster that he had stomped unconscious, as I held out both the phone and the knife. Licking his lips, Jörg chose the knife, saying, "Thanks, man."

Backing up, I made sure to step out of range of the arterial spray as Jörg slashed his prey's jugular from ear to fucking ear! Noticing the other two bludgeoned men nearby, I slowly handed Jörg the phone and stared at the three blood-soaked meat-mallets that lay upon another glass table top.

As we drove off in the BMW, Jörg grabbed a black device that was sitting on the dashboard. Switching it on, we were then blinded by a flashing blue police light. Jörg grinned, "We're unstoppable now!"

"Who the fuck is Friedrich?" I asked, straightening the blue light.

Jörg was about to laugh, when the trunk of the car flipped open while we were racing through the city! "Fucking cunt!"

The BMW swerved onto the sidewalk, and we both jumped out to find the owner of the vehicle crawling across the middle of the street, fifty-meters-back.

"Get him!" Jörg yelled, slamming the trunk shut, as I ran after that rabbiting motherfucker. This prick meant nothing to me, but he had seen my face. That was all the breakneck motivation that I needed.

He raced down a side street, his arms whipping at his sides as he ran into a small park. I could see the stairs to an Sbahn station, but the gates were shut. He darted across another traffic-island and slowed down. There, I realized that he wasn't trying to out run me, just lose the car. It then occurred to me that I probably wouldn't be able to handle this guy on my own. And as we ran into an open platz, he turned, glaring straight back at me. No longer the pitiful coward on his knees in the parking lot, he was enraged as he lunged at me! I only had inertia on myself and kept running. Slamming into him, my legs drove that piece of shit back into a lamppost! Something hit me from above and below, and then he shoved me the fuck away! He didn't stick around, and ran straight toward a line-up of taxis. Getting to my feet, I looked up, just as the BMW drove through the open platz like a bowling ball and knocked that cunt the fuck out!

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Soon, the BMW eased into a quiet neighborhood in Pankow, where Jörg nodded at a big mansion with only a few lights on inside. First thing first, he opened the trunk and used a tire-iron to beat the living shit out of the unconscious owner of the vehicle.

We then wandered around to the back garden, inspecting the modern windows, until we spotted movement on the second floor. Ecstatic, Jörg unzipped his jacket and stretched his shoulders. While I was wearing at least five layers against the cold, under his leather jacket, Jörg only had on a thin cotton shirt that was open down to his chest. There, a Russian Orthodox crucifix swung on a thin gold chain. I had no fucking idea whose house this was, and Jörg clearly didn't need my encouragement. He opened a sliding door, while I glanced around the overgrown gardens wondering what the fuck we were doing here. However, after Jörg submerged into the darkness beyond the drapes, I dismally remembered that I had nothing better to do. I could go home, but to what?!

The contemporary lounge was full of expensive looking furniture and one of the biggest flat-screens on the market. Jörg scurried up the stairs, and immediately the yelling of men was met with the impacts of human bodies pounding against the floorboards above my head. I didn't feel like being caught off-guard again, not without a blunt instrument in hand. So, I grabbed a post-modern candle-stand before scaling the stairs. To my surprise, it was Jörg who I found in a headlock from some Turkish-looking giant. Two others were sprawled on their asses, dazed and confused. With the candle-stand at my side, I stood patiently in the doorway as Jörg squinted at me and then gasped, "Little help."

Quietly walking into that enormous bedroom, I smashed my weapon into the side of the skull of the first guy sitting on the floor! Taking my club in both hands, I then battered the second casualty, before turning to the two men wrestling next to the window's pale curtains. The big guy holding Jörg backed up as I slowly approached, holding my bloody weapon toward his face. His dilemma was a painful one. Release the scorpion in his grip and face two at once, or hold on and get his head bashed in. Suddenly he released Jörg, but before he could reach me, Jörg pulled out his gun and shot him pointblank in the back of the head!

My initial reaction was to check that I hadn't been hit by any of that cunt's bodily fluids.

Jörg knelt over the fallen man and poked him with his handgun. The guy

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was still alive, despite a hand-size flap of this face hanging wide open. While his arms twitched, his only remaining eye blinked, though was drenched in blood. Jörg smiled, slapped the gunshot wound, and then stood up and left the bedroom. “Thanks, man!”

“The fuck are we doing here?!” I yelled, throwing the candle-stand into a wall mirror that exploded!

Jörg stuck his head back around the door-frame, pointing at a woman’s dress on the unmade bed. “That, that right there. That’s Galina’s.”

“The fuck is Galina?!”

With a coy expression, Jörg stepped back into the bright bedroom. “Look, I know I promised we’d get some tonight, but there’s only thirty minutes till she’s fucked! And we’re on a fucking roll here! Burgundy fucked off on the wrong lead, man!”

“And why the fuck are we here?!”

Crouching next to a bloodied man lying on the floor, Jörg turned him over. “The phone call at the penthouse, Pavel was on the line. You know Pavel, don’t you.”

“No.”

Jörg looked at the body before him. “Wait, you’re not Pavel.”

“Pavel?”

Jörg grabbed the other guy and rolled him over. “Where the fuck is Pavel?!”

“Seems like he’s not here.”

“This is Pavel’s fucking house!”

“And neither is this Galina.”

Utter silence filled the room, until Jörg eventually nodded his head. Anger then snapped across his face and he shot the two injured men lying below him!

Looking around the messed up bed, it seemed obvious that whoever owned the dress had had it torn off by a gang of rapists. You could still smell it in the air. Jörg started turning in frustrated circles, his gun still in hand. I was pretty sure he didn’t give a fuck about this Galina chick, he only seemed to enjoy the game of chasing after something with a time-limit. And as courteous as he had always appeared to treat me, I didn’t intend on ever finding myself on his shit-list. “So, let’s get this right. Galina’s Friedrich’s girl? She’s not here. But had been? And that’s her handbag’s in the car. Did you check what’s in her bag?”

“Still in the backseat.”

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And that was when another unfamiliar phone began to ring from Jörg's pocket. It was the phone from the guy stuffed in the BMW's trunk. Jörg answered it with nothing but grunts. Lowering the phone, he looking up and relayed the message. "We're meant to pick up the 'drop-off' and bring it back to Wenham's place."

"Whose place?"

"Let's go find out!"

-

With the blue light flashing, Jörg sped through the city in record time, and I made damned sure that my seat-belt was fastened tight. The handbag sat on my lap the entire journey into Mitte, but it wasn't until we parked on a street overlooking the Rudolf Virchow monument, that I opened the handbag and pulled out Galina's rose-gold iPhone. It was locked of course, and when I picked up the phone which had given us the instructions to come here, it too was pin-code secured. Unless someone called us with either phone, they were dead-ends.

"There!" Jörg grinned.

A black Mercedes drove up in front of the monument. Someone stepped out, glanced around, and then placed something at the bottom of the pillars below the stone statue. Once the Mercedes cruised away, we drove up. Being the taller, I jumped out and reached up, finding yet another fucking phone.

"Hey, exactly whose side are we on when we're in his car?" Jörg asked, as we both sat in BMW staring at this new phone, right when it started ringing. Jörg answered with his vague affirmations – but suddenly someone slammed into the side of the car, tore open my door, and threw me against the statue! Another two men grabbed and punched me in the gut! Collapsing to the concrete, a boot then clamped down on my face! On the hierarchy of hand-to-hand combat: there were Krav Maga experts at the top, then those trained in martial arts, then casual gym boxers, then drunken pub scrappers, then abusive loudmouths, and then there was me, just above sniveling weaklings. But after being pinned down for all of five seconds, I was released, once Jörg screamed at them with his gun out stretched!

More hostile cars rushed to the scene, as we raced away, while I picked gravel from my cheek.

"They're fucking Friedrich's crew!" Jörg yelled, punching the steering wheel. "We fucked up by taking this fucking car! They're going to think we're fucking responsible!"

Slowly shaking my head, this wasn't how I'd hoped this evening would

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pan out. However, this immediate bullshit made my financial concerns seem less of a priority. Anything was a welcomed distraction from the constant stress that had been depriving me of sleep.

“How we going to lose these cunts?!” Jörg shouted, frantically looking around the deserted streets of central Berlin.

“Hauptbahnhof.”

“What?!”

“There’s always cops outside the station.”

“You want the fucking pigs after us as well?!”

“We’re in a cop car, aren’t we?”

“Are you fucking retarded?!”

“Cops will help one of their own.”

Jörg didn’t look convinced, but thirty seconds later, we skid into the entrance at the north-side of the looming glass train station. The officers in body-armor just stared cow-eyed back at Jörg who leaned out his window, yelling at them in Deutsch. The moment our three tails raced up behind us, the cluster of twenty cops finally fucking reacted!

Jörg swerved the BMW around and sent the cops running as we accelerated between our pursuers. A blaze of blue lights, sirens, and gunfire then erupted in our rear-view mirrors.

“Okay, what are we doing?!” Jörg asked. “Where to?”

“Are you fucking kidding?!” I frowned, switching off the dashboard light.

“We have to find this fucking Wenham, and then hopefully this fucking the girl? I don’t fucking know!”

“But where the fuck am I going?! Come on, man! Where’s Wenham?!”

Exhaling hard through my nose, I cracked my neck from side to side. “This car. The guy in the trunk. It was his phone. He must know where Wenham is. Right?”

Jörg shrugged.

“Is he still alive?”

Again, Jörg shrugged.

-

After buying a chilled bottle of mineral water from some insignificant kiosk on a nondescript street in Gesundbrunnen, I emptied it over the twisted body in the trunk.

Nothing.

Jörg just crossed his arms.

Reaching into that bloody mess, I tried finding a pulse on his neck, and

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then his wrist, before saying, “Hey, give me his phone.”

“Why?”

“New iPhones use fingerprint recognition.”

“Yes!”

We drove off while I went through the contacts, and sure enough, Wenham was listed.

“Yeah, but what good it is having his number?” Jörg groaned. “Where’s he at?!”

“Text him in Deutsch. Tell him you’re lost and need his address.”

“That’s suspicious as fuck!”

“Then fucking text a bunch of people in his contacts! Ask if they know where he fucking lives! Jesus fuck! You have any better fucking suggestions?!”

-

In less than a minute, Red Scalp, *Mantra Bufala*, was playing on the stereo and we already had nine replies to the ten WhatsApp messages. I was shocked. So, that’s what it’s like when people actually answer their messages at the same time that they read them. Three of the replies had no idea what we were talking about. One responded was a, “*Fuck off!*” and five pretty much described the exact same directions to Wenham’s place. It would only take a couple of minutes and we would be in Wittenau.

“What if the girl’s not there?” I asked.

“Then we’ll politely ask where she’s at.”

“As long as we’re polite about it,” I smiled, appreciating that I’d gotten lucky so far. Recently however, my health insurance had restricted my access to emergencies only, due to my refusal to pay them since trying to quit. German health insurance in legalized extortion, never let any American-socialist-dreamer tell you otherwise! But hopefully though, tonight I’d get shot in the fucking face!

-

Pulling into a driveway next to several other cars, Jörg headed toward the front of an ugly concrete block of a building. The first two big guys we met welcomed us by pointing inside to a shitty glass entrance. The lift opened as we walked in the front door, and out stepped an little guy who snarled at us both. Jörg simply held up the drop-off phone, “We got it!”

Waving his hands madly, the small man glared at his wristwatch, ushering us into elevator, before thumbing the button and leaving as alone.

“Who’s this Friedrich to you, anyway?” I asked.

“Never met him.”

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Incredulously, I turned my head to Jörg. “What the fuck are we doing here, then?!”

“Man, you know, you’ll never be a successful businessman! But at the same time, you know, you’ll never be bored doing nothing.”

“What’s that supposed to fucking mean?!”

“You’ve got a talent, man. You’ve always had that,” Jörg said, looking out the glass elevator at the surrounding woods. “It’s just, fuck! You’re making shit no one wants to fucking see! So, you know, you’ll never be anything more than just another fucking shithead wasting your time on pointless shit.”

Suddenly it seemed as though the one guy who had had my six this entire evening decided that he would take a huge dump right on my fucking head with some hard-hitting facts of life.

“You think you’re part of something bigger than yourself, but you know, man, you’re not! None of us are!”

“No shit.”

“But at least, you know what. You actually have your art,” Jörg said, crossing his arms. “What the fuck have I got but this shit!”

Once the elevator reached the top floor, music came from an open door along the corridor. Jörg strolled inside the party at Wenham’s place, and as perplexed as I was by his rather accurate insight, I followed. I wasn’t sure what language anyone was speaking in that weed-stinking flat with graffiti all over the walls, but scanning the kids, I knew that none of them give a fuck who we were. A bunch of guys were playing X-Box on torn sofas in the lounge, and I somehow lost sight of Jörg in the crowd. It was the shrieking of a female’s voice that abruptly drew my attention. In the pigsty of a kitchen, a blonde chick was literally screaming into the phone that Jörg had delivered, and then she slammed it against the fridge! Some other guy then began smashing the cupboards with a baseball bat! The girl continued shrieking, but no one was touching her. Another guy held the phone to his ear and yelled something in Deutsch, before placing the phone under the path of the baseball bat!

The chick squealed again but this time euphoric. I spotted Jörg with an expression matching my own apprehension. The girl then made a meal out of another guy’s face before they marched out of the flat. As the girl strut by, I stared at her white dress and long pale hair – I had already seen her twin this evening. This wasn’t a fucking coincidence. This was Galina, and she sure as shit wasn’t being held against her will!

Suddenly I was shoulder-barged into and thumped against a wall! Spinning around, a hand grabbed me from another direction, however, this time Jörg

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shoved me away from some hostile cunt looking to pick a fight. Jörg then put on a shy act and laughed about a misunderstanding, patting my chest as he spoke. That was when the little guy from the elevator came yelling in a shrill pitch! Jörg was abruptly grabbed and thrown over the kitchen counter top! I too was swung into a group of kids! They pushed back, and I lunged at the attacking son of a bitch! In that moment, my confidence wasn't dissuaded by my conscious lack of skill, for I still believed in brute force, and that was all the violent faith that I needed. We collided and our claws clung on as we twisted in a wrestling match for about one second of chaos – until a machine-gun woke the fucking neighbors! Instantly, I was released. Ducking in confusion, like everyone, I saw Jörg firing an Kalashnikov into everything in all directions! He changed the clip and walked into the lounge where he shot any asshole still sitting on their fat fucking ass! I lost all respect for the guy who had shoulder-barged me, as I saw him frantically scurry out the front door. The little guy, however, was still shouting as he went up to Jörg with nothing but a pointed finger and balls of steel. Lowing the gun, Jörg laughed at this human-chihuahua. Either Jörg was out of ammo, or perhaps he just liked pummeling that squawking cunt with the stock of the gun. Stepping closer for a better view, a cruel smirk widened my lips. What more glorious a spectacle was there than that of one man beating another to death.

And then Jörg suddenly looked up. “Wo ist sie?!”

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Racing through the northern suburbs of Berlin, we nearly lost sight of the Toyota SUV Cruiser somewhere near Tegel Airport, until we reached one of those great lengths of perfectly straight road without any other traffic. While Jörg floored it, I had to remind myself that this was perhaps the only way to clear our names from any insinuated involvement. But then again, I wasn't entirely persuaded that we had actually incriminated ourselves. Besides, it felt like our so-called good deed came at the expense of anyone in our path. However, ultimately, it was the violence that kept me in the passenger seat. Whatever reasons Jörg may have had for trusting me, it was a golden ticket to a first-hand display of murder and mayhem. You got to take your sadistic pleasures where you can, before the misery of the world turns its spite on you.

We were driving through Alt Tegel, right on the tail of the Cruiser, when it took a left into a development of modern apartment buildings next to the inlet from the lake. Though, we just drove on by. Jumping out of the BMW, Jörg and I hurried on foot back to the private driveway, and watched Galina and the guy enter one of the new weekend retreats. Their driver in the SUV

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continued into the underground parking lot. For a moment, I considered suggesting that we just call Friedrich and tell him where his girl was hiding, and be done with it. But I had no intention of ending the evening's adventures anytime soon.

Jörg broke in through a dark window on a side of the three-story building where we thought we would go unnoticed. Unfortunately, there was a completely different couple sleeping upstairs. They awoke as the lights came on, while Jörg's walked in with his 9mm aimed at their bewilderment. Neither Jörg nor I had assumed that these modern homes had been subdivided in two. This couple were in their fifties, and as soon the husband raised his voice, Jörg grabbed a pillow and shot him through it! WHAM! The woman inhaled as if to scream, until Jörg shoved the bloody pillow over her face and spent his last bullet! BAM!

Taking a seat on the edge of the bed, Jörg's head hung low. While keeping my hands behind my back, I stepped up for a closer look at the burst skull of the husband. The last pumps of blood oozed out of the entry wound in his temple as I focused on his dilated pupils.

"Christ," Jörg whispered. "Look at this fucking place. All their fucking money, and yet here we are in the wrong fucking place, and now look at them. Where the fuck are we, man?"

He had that same tone of voice from the glass elevator. Maybe the late hour was getting the best of him, or maybe he just needed another line of cocaine.

"You know, man, I spend most of my fucking time in vast periods of isolation. Look at this shit. We live in this fucking city, but I can't fucking remember the last time I met a single person I gave a fuck about. You know, I've begun telling myself that I'm actually living in the remote mountains. I see people every day but I speak to none of them. Not really speak. All these people, they're not really here. Why fucking live in a city if I'm not interacting with anyone. Every-fucking-day, I'm just killing time, waiting for fucking nothing to come! It's all a wonderful waste of my fucking time!"

Crossing my arms, I pictured myself at his age, when I was standing next to my tall bedroom window, looking out over the inner city rooftops. I hated everything I saw. There had been nothing to look forward to, and even the idea of moving to Germany was still a long time away. My career had been floundering and I was years between significant others. It's a fucking miracle that I had made it through that time in my life.

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“I know exactly what built the fucking pyramids,” Jörg said, breaking the silence. “Idle fucking hands.”

He was absolutely correct. With so many years to myself, I had always been busy obsessively stalking females and personifying my disgust into piles of artwork. If I ever had an army of fucking slaves, I would build empires of mountainous tombs where I would mummify the trophies of my desecration.

“I live here and yet none of these fucking people know me. And look at what I get up to. Fucking people like Mr. C can’t fucking stand me. They know exactly what I’ve done, but they still fucking need me!” Jörg yelled, smashing a vase with his empty gun! “You know, Mr. C once said some shit like, *the most dangerous people are the ones that play within the rules*. Bitch, fucking just look at what I’ve done here! Don’t fucking tell me what’s more dangerous! Don’t fucking tell me anything!”

Pulling out his own phone this time, Jörg made a quick call. For a moment, I wondered if these were the kind of ‘accidents’ that Mr. Schilling used to clean up. If Jörg represented my past, and Mr. Schilling was my future, it seemed as though there was meant to be some kind of profound lesson that was screaming at me from the vale of self-defeating introspection. Or perhaps I was just as incapable of learning from my mistakes as I was unable to pity the lives I’d witnessed executed tonight.

While Jörg sat dwelling in contempt next to the dead couple, I climbed around the balcony railing to the adjacent apartment. There, I found myself standing alone, staring into the neighboring bedroom at some old-school doggy-style on a king-size. While watching the live porno, as I stood in the dark, I knew that I was invisible to those inside. It was decent show. The average-looking guy was going balls-deep, and the blonde cunt was pushing back and moaning like a pro. But then I saw Jörg approaching them from the bedroom door. It was too freezing for this peeping-tom bullshit, so I wrenched open the glass door! The roar of the slider, accompanied with a gust of arctic wind, shattered the fuck-fest. The guy shoved the chick face down as he lurched backward. But Jörg brutally slapped him about the head before knocking his feet out from under him! Galina screamed in terror once she laid her eyes upon me. Her voice alone was a greater turn-on than merely watching her rut.

Using wire coat-hangers from the dry-cleaning in the cupboard, I bound the lover’s wrists. The arrogant guy began arguing, until Jörg stuffed the prick’s own underwear into his mouth. However, once the Galina began

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to speak, Jörg and I both turned and stared at her. I couldn't understand everything that she said in Deutsch, but picked up enough to realize that her lover-man was actually Mr. Caviezel's little fucking brother! The blonde cunt knew that she had said the magic words as she watched the reevaluation run through our heads.

"What the fuck is this, the beginning of the second Trojan War?!" Jörg yelled, backing away. "For fuck's sake! Friedrich's on his fucking way here right fucking now!"

Galina shrieked her protest, while lashing out against her restraints.

"Friedrich's going to fucking kill you both!" Jörg said, shaking his head. "This was supposed to be some awesome resolution shit right here! We were going to be the fucking heroes! Not anymore, Jesus fucking Christ!"

Jörg proceeded shouting in multiple languages while punching holes in the fucking walls! I was impressed that he managed to keep his hands away from the proverbial Paris and Helen. It was when I saw the white dress on the floor that I was reminded of the faceless girl in the first penthouse, and I asked, "What was your plan exactly?"

The driver then came out of nowhere and tackled Jörg! The two men crashed into a dresser before hitting the ground, where the bodyguard had his eyes dug out! Jörg crushed the two orbs in his fists before he unleashed his frustration upon the blinded man!

The naked lovers looked petrified at the relentless aggression that poured out of the young Belarusian, while I quietly repeated my question, "How'd you think you'd get away with all of this?"

-

As the BMW left Alt Tegel, a procession of five black cars raced toward the modern house that we'd just evacuated.

"They're not going to be happy about this," Jörg said, shaking his head with a slight smile. Paris, sat in his underwear up front, while I was in the back next to the female-cause of this evening's conflict. Jörg then punched Paris in the balls! "If this doesn't work, I'll personally hold you down in front of Friedrich, and watch my friend here, skin you alive. And he's not very good at it. But he's fucking persistent!"

"You take me back to Friedrich, and I'll tell him you both raped me! I'll say it was Paris who stopped you!"

Jörg wasn't having any of that, and the BMW skid into a dangerous sideways slide! He kicked open his door and dragged Paris out. Sucker-punching Paris, Jörg shoved him into the trunk with the dead owner of the

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vehicle. Jörg then ripped open the door next to Galina. Grabbed her by the face, he whispered into her manic resistance, “You speak one more time without being asked a direct fucking question, cunt, and my slap-head buddy next to you will indeed fucking rape you with a fucking knife in ways that will make you unable enjoy a dick or bare a fucking child – ever!”

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With the blue police light on, we sped across the city, back to the penthouse where we’d first acquired the BMW.

Once all four of us stepped into that silent apartment with its gigantic windows, all that we found on the dining table was a smeared puddle of cold black blood.

While Jörg kicked the shit out of Paris, I checked the rest of the place, making sure there wasn’t anyone hiding. What I did find, however, were the three meat-mallets sitting in the kitchen sink.

“Fuck this!” Jörg screamed, flipping the entire dining table, and it BOOMED upon the polished floor! Despite their hands being bound behind their backs, the two lovers took the opportunity and ran! Stepping in front of the exit, I was slammed into by the couple! Balance, however, was on my side, and with one hand each, I pushed them over onto their asses. Jörg then yelled out, “Let’s just dump these two fucks on Mr. C’s doorstep and let him sort out this fucking shit!”

“He’ll fucking kill you for knowing too much!” Galina stated. “I told you, I’ve been working on this plan for months! This is the only fucking way to get out of this clean!”

“Then what the fuck happened to this, what did you call it, this ‘scapegoat-body’, then?” Jörg shouted from the other room. “Why the fuck is any of this shit my fucking problem?!”

“Pavel’s continuing with the fucking plan, you idiot!” Galina stated.

“Why the fuck are we here, then?!” Jörg screamed at the top of his lungs. “Why did we come back here?!”

With a mocking sneer, Galina yelled back, “You drive like a fucking pussy, that’s why!”

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Even a cop with his sirens on wouldn’t have been excused for driving as recklessly as Jörg did from then on. Cutting across the pavement and scraping against parked cars, we lost both side mirrors within two minutes.

“Once we get there, give Pavel my handbag. That’s why it’s here in the first place, to identify my body. Then we’ll call Friedrich. Tell him that you

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two fuck-ups almost saved me, but ruined the exchange, that's why the plan changed. You'll be in the clear. I'll say that some unknown asshole is going to kill me on the waterfront if Friedrich doesn't come alone with the cash. But he's only going to find the dead girl. And then we can all fuck off and get on with our fucking lives!"

"Where the fuck are you two love-birds going to go?" Jörg asked. "I mean, why the fuck didn't you take the first flight out of town?"

"We're staying right fucking here!" Paris said defiantly. "This is my fucking home!"

I'd never been to the Müggelsee before, and from the wooded west bank, with the first clouds of Saturday morning lighting the horizon, it looked more like an ocean than a lake. Paris had already made a call on the drive, telling Pavel to wait for us, and we found him standing next to a Mercedes van with two other men on the edge of the water.

Once Jörg and I stepped out of the BMW, we suddenly found three men pointing handguns at us.

"Chill the fuck out, would you. How'd you assholes forget this shit?" Jörg laughed, holding up Galina's black handbag. "You know, I'm supposed to be taking this legend to see some strippers, not fucking around in middle of fucking nowhere with you ugly cunts!"

Dumping the handbag on the gravel, Jörg and I stood still while we were frisked.

Complaining in a moan, Pavel continued to babble on about bullshit, while the other two gang members opened the van and pulled out the scapegoat-body. Picking up the handbag, Pavel's groaning changed to confusion, as he pulled out three meat-mallets. Yeah, there had been another last minute change of plan. Jörg then grabbed one of the tools as he ran at the two preoccupied thugs – and smashed in both of their skulls!

Taking a mallet myself from the shocked Pavel, he surrendered like he didn't give a shit about what was going on.

It wasn't until I opened the trunk of the BMW and glared at the two lovers, that I realized it had only been six years since I had been the one who found himself trapped like this by the same criminal organization.

"Please, it's too cold in here for her. Please!" Paris pleaded on Galina's behalf. He did seem genuine about his affections. The things we do for women. But for what in return?! Thinking of my painting from 2006, *What Have I Learned?*, I wondered how anyone ever imagined that they would find

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enlightenment down the holes of whores.

After tossing the three new handguns on the dashboard, Jörg took Pavel's phone and gave Friedrich another call.

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Pavel sat in the passenger's side, while I was in the back again, as Jörg drove through the woods. This time the icy corpse of the bleached-blonde, scapegoat-body was lying on my lap. She was so pretty without a face.

"Man, why the fuck are you wasting your time with fucking criminals like us?" Jörg suddenly asked, through the rear-view mirror. "You have a actual talent, something away from all this shit."

Glancing out the window, I stroked the dead body's belly as I recalled, "This evening, before I met you, I went to the kino with a friend. She told me that a friend of ours, who just moved back to Japan, has been diagnosed with a brain tumor."

"Ah, he's fucked, then."

"And you know, I'll hear more and more stories like this soon. Watching others drop off one by one. Yet I'll still be here."

"Not if you keep hanging out with people like me."

"Hopefully."

"You fucking stupid?!"

"You know what my retirement policy is: suicide or prison."

"Man, that's a weirdly optimistic pessimism," Jörg laughed. "Why don't you have any faith in yourself, if you actually think you'll live that long?"

"Fucking coward!" Pavel quietly interjected.

The BMW immediately came to a full stop! Jörg then yanked Pavel out into the middle of the tree-shrouded street. Pavel had only a tired expression of impatience – until Jörg shot him in the chest! The gun continued firing until Jörg's finger clicked upon an empty magazine.

Leaving Pavel's carcass on the asphalt, we drove on. Jörg cleared his throat before speaking again, "You're like, the only guy I feel like I'm honest with, man. You know, when was the last time you had a serious heart to heart with a fucking girl? They don't want hear about your fucking personal problems. You open about anything like that and they instantly see it as a fucking weakness! All conversations with chicks are only ever a show of power. Which, you know, leaves all relationships fucking empty! Man, I fucking hate fags, but sometimes, you know, I think they might actually have more meaningful connections. Seriously, is it any fucking wonder that all the great thinkers were those fucking man-boy-loving Greeks!"

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There was an inconsolable despair to Jörg's voice, reminding me of a week earlier, when it was Mara upon my lap. She believed that I had abandoned her on her birthday. Abandoned her by not going to the Staatsoper ballet, and by refusing to accompany her to Amsterdam. It was the desperation of true loneliness in her voice. But in these utterly self-deprecating times of alienation, I found that I was in no position to offer any comfort or reassurances to anyone, or even myself.

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Heading through the city, Jörg resumed my playlist, and Lowdrive, *The Last Stand*, was as loud as the car was fast – until we were crashed into from the side! The van from the lake had caught up with us! I guess Jörg hadn't quite beaten the shit out of the last two gangsters. Putting his foot down, we sped ahead of the van, only to spot headlights coming toward us. The assholes in the van must have called for backup. The on-comer swerved and stopped in the middle of the street, and out stepped two guys with HK416 assault rifles and opened fire! The BMW's windscreen shattered, as Jörg screamed, "Jesus fucking Christ!"

The BMW drove straight through one of the gunmen while the other blasted into the side! Clinging to the dead girl, I kept my head down, checking that I wasn't shot. "The fuck was that?!"

"Fucked if I know!" Jörg yelled, sweating with anger. "I'm going to fucking kill these assholes!"

Another unknown car roared out of a side street and punched into the BMW! Jörg struggled with the wheel and we were sent down a new street while being rammed into from behind! Yelling outraged, Jörg slammed on the breaks! The two cars behind crashed into us as Jörg twisted around in his seat and fired two hand guns through the rear window into the following drivers! Glass fragments rained over my shoulders as I shielded the dead girl below. Jörg then raced off leaving the two cars behind. Laughing, he was excited with the distance we made – until a Hummer drove into us and the BMW was wrecked upon an immovable lamppost!

Having already being lying low in the backseat, the abrupt impact wasn't as bad as when I was dragged from the car and thrown into an SUV. A black bag was pulled over my head as my wrists were bound.

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Soon, my hood was removed and I was shoved to my knees, finding myself in the private courtyard of a single-story mansion. As my restraints were cut, I scanned the open space. It was full of vehicles and dozens of Slovakian

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gangsters. A granite sky hung beyond the towering trees, and I estimated that we were somewhere just out of town. A sixty-year-old guy with a face that commanded fear, slowly stepped out onto the front porch, inspecting his guests before he approached. Jörg knelt to my right, the faceless blonde lay to his right. To my left were the two lovers, shivering in their underwear and still with their hands tied.

“Look at these two!” the old man condemned, looking down his nose at Jörg and I. “Did Luca Signorelli foresee this when he painted the, *Deeds Of The AntiChrist!* Though, who has the worse influence here?”

It didn’t take much to work out that this was Friedrich in the flesh. Stepping sideways, he stood over his treacherous woman and watched as she trembled. Paris however, scowled at me with conspiring eyes.

Turning, Friedrich barked at Jörg, “Prove yourself!”

“You can’t kill him,” Jörg stated, while still glaring down at the cobblestones. “He’s Mr. C’s brother. It’ll start a war.”

I was rather amused that Jörg would even care about preventing a greater conflict.

“I don’t have a brother,” came a familiar voice from the big house.

Turning my head toward Paris, I saw him cringe, and I immediately understood that it was Jörg and I who had been the ones taken for a fucking ride. Mr. Burgundy stepped outside along with Mr. Caviezel, and they both looked fucking livid.

“*“The artist who complacently represents what is reprehensible, vicious, criminal, approves of it, perhaps glorifies it, differs not in kind, but only in degree, from the criminal who actually commits it,”*” Mr. Caviezel quoted Max Nordau into my ear, before dropping a heavy machete in front of Jörg. “Make them suffer!”

Jörg didn’t move, he just kept his head down where he knelt.

Fine! Picking up the tool, it was oblivious what needed to be done in order to correct this predicament. So, I walked over and hacked off the head of the would-be Paris within a matter of seconds! Galina vomited a shriek of epic volume upon gulps of hysteria at the sight of her lover’s slaughter. She was still kneeling with her hands tied behind her back, when I turned my fixation upon her. With a shove from the sole of my dress shoe, I sent her backward, and then I drove the long blade into her belly! Her screams never seized. Discarding the machete and my coat, I rolled up my sleeves before digging my hands into her guts and ripping out every inch of her bowels! Her voice went even more shrill once I stuffed the severed head of her Paris

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into her hollow cavity! Now she could permanently keep a part of him inside of her. Stretching out a length of her slippery intestine, I wrapped it around her throat and proceeded to strangled that cunt with a hatred for all those things that I could never change! My jaw clenched as tight as the noose, until that female went limp, and finally the membrane of the ligature broke open, spraying her own shit across her dead eyes!

Stumbling backward, I caught my breath above the butchered lovers. It took some time before I realized that everyone, except Jörg, had retreated to their vehicles and were slowly driving away.

Washing my hands in a freezing puddle, I saw Friedrich glaring at me from the house and then quietly closed the curtains with a broken heart. His withdrawn face suddenly took me back to my childhood. Our next door neighbor was an old guy who had been alone since I was born until his death in my teens. There was also a neighbor across the road who lived alone. He too died in isolation. Further up and over a hill there had been yet another old man but with one arm. He had always lived in a state of disheveled decay. His house was falling apart and his entire property was full of piles of trash. As kids, we had shunned him. My brother openly despised his lack of self-respect, and my parents told us never to bother him. But there was something about his condition that disturbed my timid childhood. It was the idea that perhaps it wasn't his lack of an arm that had brought him down to this sad situation. Our other neighbors had both limbs, and still, the great indifference of the universe had eaten them alive. Eventually, they had all become the insect-shells of their former selves, hardened by years of habit and rejection, until one by one, they had each died alone.

“What do you want?” Jörg whispered from his knees.

Standing tall, I extended an open palm to Jörg. Silently looking down on this deeply troubled kid, I waited until he caught a hold of my hand.

“What the fuck are you waiting for, you sickfuck! We're not friends! I don't need your fucking help!” Jörg lunged to his feet, grabbing my collar as he screamed with bloodshot eyes, “WHY THE FUCK ARE YOU STILL HERE?! WHAT THE FUCK DO YOU WANT FROM ME?! SHOW A LITTLE FUCKING RECOGNITION, FOR FUCK'S SAKE!”

“What's the devil's shadow to himself?”

Jörg gasped with exhaustion and backed away. “What did you expect from this evening?! What, huh?! What?!”

“Planned on asking Caviezel for a part-time job.”

“Why?”

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“Only working on, as you put it, my own worthless shit.”

“Should be fucking happy, then.”

I bit my tongue. After I had returned from Turkey last year, I had assumed that I had earned the responsibilities of Mr. Schilling’s former position. But obviously I was wrong, and Mr. Schilling had been right about everything.

“You’re always working on something. It’s fucking disgusting. So, what are you really planning?”

This time, I backed away, turning to leave. “Putting some serious thought into giving up my worldly possessions, joining a seminary, and becoming a Presbyterian priest.”

Bursting into laughter, Jörg wiped his tears with his forearm, “Possessions are the best! Especially owning people! Why be a fucking saint when you could be rich as a fuck!”

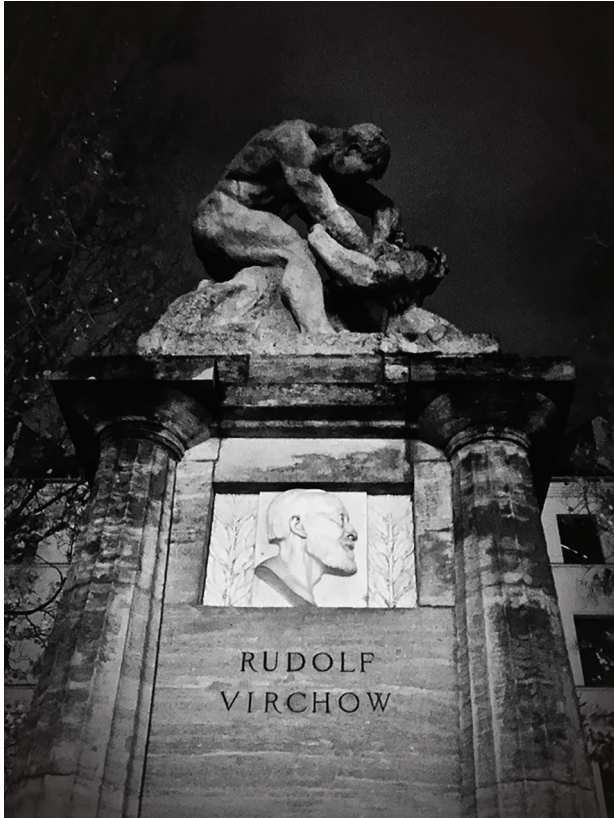
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That morning, after ignoring my bed, I met Mara for coffee before we visited a retrospective exhibition on Gianni Versace.

Over sushi that evening, we romanticized about returning to Japan. It was just talk after all. Why discourage Mara’s expensive holidays, extravagant ballet performances, and precious birthday plans. All that friends really want, are team-mates in the self-indulgent game of humoring their whimsical fancies. So, I laughed and joked and played the part of good company. Jörg was right, there was nothing gained from telling others about your failings. But he also had cocaine keeping him going. I merely had cortisol produced by the shame of understanding that I’d soon be living in destitution. I also knew, however, that I’d gone hungry before, I could do it again. And a line from Nailbomb echoed through my head, *“Don’t need sympathy. Smile it’s nothing but teeth. I’ll keep my integrity. Even if I have to sleep on the street.”*

Bruce

Bruce Stirling John Knox



SHORT STORY 18
2018
THE CURSE OF INCOMPREHENSIBLE CAUSATION

DISCLAIMER:

I was never technically meant to be there, so officially I wasn't.

In the silent black and white CCTV footage, three men moved about a long concrete section of what looked like a wide industrial corridor. The bearded men had already dumped a pile of crates and duffel-bags next to a wall of endless electrical conduits, when they abruptly stopped in their tracks. After glancing around their dimly lit environment, the three soon continued with their labors. Less than ten seconds later, they reacted to something off-screen. Suddenly they all shuddered! The closest man grabbed his head, as he immediately began backing away below the camera. The guy in the middle took a few steps toward the distant third man – when they both lurched and spun 180 degrees as if reacting to a loud noise in the confined space! The first guy came running back into frame, heading in the opposite direction, his arms flailing about as he looked back toward the camera with an expression of absolute horror! The middle guy then ripped open one of the crates and pulled out an AK-63. Quickly loading the weapon, he began firing in the direction of the camera. The third man, however, watched patiently as the guy with the gun advanced below and beyond the frame of the footage. Gunfire continued flashing off of the dull surfaces. Something then bumped the camera, and the last man on-screen fell backward! Scrambling away, he ran for this life, sprinting into the distant darkness. The gunman never reappeared.

Mara had made good time, as, like usual, she had pushed the speed-limit to the point of reckless endangerment while we raced through a light rain below a frigid sky. She looked cozy behind the wheel of the rented Mercedes, as if she was tucked warmly into her bed. I, however, was still dwelling on the conversation from last night's Passover dinner, with the extended family of Mara's boss. I had been seated across the table from the host's second-cousin from Austria, and we had had a rather lengthy discussion about artistic influences, and whether art is secondary to survival or if art gives you a reason to survive. I had mentioned to him how I had just finished my picture book for *Uncle Fingers*. He seemed impressed and asked about how I was marketing it? I then discussed the futility of pleasing an audience, especially

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when you haven't got one. He wasn't convinced, saying that if your work was of quality, then there would always be those who would appreciate it – a delusional sentiment that I've heard a thousand times before. I then told him about a conversation that Mara and I had had a month ago, where she stated that I simply spent too much time on my art instead of focusing on my career. She claimed that it was her mother speaking through her. The second-cousin looked genuinely appalled. But I had agreed with Mara. And after this year's lack of studio work, and now that part 2 of *Uncle Fingers* was done, I had decided to take an extended break from art, and reevaluate my future in Berlin. Yet, as I watched the traffic thicken on that cold French highway, the second-cousin's counter-argument nagged at me again. Was life worth living without my art? Could I seriously just stop working on what was ultimately a waste of my time? And what would I become without my art? It was then that Mara spoke up in a disgruntled tone, "You had one job!"

Wincing, I thumbed the dashboard, changing the radio station until, *Мальчик, ты снег*, by Луна filled the car. While Mara softly sung along to the melancholic Ukrainian, we drove past the pitiful city of Calais.

From a distance, the complex was wide, flat, and fenced off with both wire and leafless trees. In the gloomy midday light, it could have been a factory surrounded by morbid farmlands. At the first checkpoint, where the armed guards asked for our passports, I zipped up my jacket, expecting to be ejected from the car. Instead, however, the gate opened and we were ushered inside. Keeping our passports on my lap, I watched on curiously as we dove down a ramp into an underground tunnel where we came to a second checkpoint. This time there were several French soldiers standing around with rifles in hand. Sharing a silent glance, Mara and I waited again while our passports were scanned. The guards soon returned our documents along with new plastic ID cards. Mara looked just as surprised as I was by my authorization, but we said nothing as the soldiers directed our rental toward a parking space.

With our digital ID cards clipped to our lapels, Mara and I were led by two soldiers through a series of passageways, until, at another doorway, we were checked, frisked, and passed through a metal-detector. Once we secured our phones and my knife in a locker, we were each handed a plastic folder. Mara just shrugged at this point. I had assumed that she'd only been summoned here for some unimportant matter of routine. She had told me nothing about her abrupt call of duty. As close as we were, I respected her professional boundaries, even if she didn't condone my own personal privacy. The last time we took a road-trip to Munich for her work with the military, I had

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entertained myself in the city. This time, though, I was already somewhere that I shouldn't be, but I figured that if I really wasn't meant to be here, someone would tell me to fuck off sooner or later. Until then, I'd ride on the coattails of Mara's clearance for all it was worth.

Sitting in a small office, were three men in cheap suits with ugly ties. Mara and I were both dressed smartly in black and white, and it was obvious that the three intimidated men were abruptly unsure of how to welcome us.

"Bienvenue, Special Agent Mara!"

Smiling, she asked if they spoke German? Apparently English was never an option.

The first guy stepped up, mumbling as he shook our hands.

I stepped over to the two soldiers by the doorway, and kept my mouth shut. Opening my folder, I flipped through the printouts consisting of floor plans, mugshots, and photos of a huge amount of blood! Without moving, I glanced at the three guys fumbling through their words with Mara. Going over the next couple of A4 photos, I admired that blackened puddle upon the concrete, until I spotted a severed human hand. Skimming through a few more pages, I came to a set of photos displaying an array of assault-rifles, as well as crates stuffed full of sacks. It was the electronics extending from the bags that made it clear that these were homemade explosives – a fuckload of explosives! I quickly became aware that I definitely shouldn't be looking at this sort sensitive material.

A knock at the door announced the entrance of a messy-haired, six-year-old chap, wearing brass-framed glasses and a tweed vest. "Oh, hi! Apologies, for my lateness. Hastings."

Shaking his soft, British hand, I kept quiet. With the posture of a ninety-year-old, he looked like he had just woken up, and he even had a crease on his forehead from where he'd been sleeping.

"Everything's running behind, you know, long weekend. But could have been worse, huh. I miss anything?"

No one else joined his nervous laughter, as the three paper-pushers led the way out of the office. Mara and Mr. Hastings made small-talk, while two soldiers followed me. It didn't take long before I got completely disorientated in those hospital-like corridors. I wanted to gain Mara's attention and suggest that I wait for her in the car, but everyone continued through more and more guarded double doors, until we all packed into a room with the only light coming from a two-way mirror that was looking into an interrogation room. Four other men already stood inside this observation room, but no one shook

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anyone's hand. It was hot in that cramped space, and the arguments broke out before the door had even closed. Though, honestly, angry Frenchmen will never sound as hostile as snarling Germans. But when push came to shove, it was Mara's voice who eased the clashing personalities of egoistical authorities. And just then, the door into the adjacent room opened. Everyone grunted and twisted their shoulders toward the two-way mirror.

Two French soldiers in balaclavas brought in a man dressed in gray overalls with a black bag over his head. The prisoner was handcuffed and chained to a metal chair that, like the table, was molded directly out of the floor. The uniformed men exited the room, before a middle-aged guy in casual clothes entered and sat opposite the prisoner. The words were in French, calm, and without reciprocation. The prisoner made no signs that he was listening or even alive.

Another light soon came from the second interrogation room. There, an identical procedure happened. However, this prisoner flinched at every sound, and lurched when he was shoved into his chair. His breathing was anxious and loud over the speakers. A different interviewer joined the second prisoner, who was more than willing to blubber and answer anything asked. I couldn't speak a lick of French, but I could tell that the prisoner had a strong accent of something not French.

Because of the language barrier, my fascination with this situation quickly ran out, and was accelerated by the lack of oxygen in that stuffy observation room. Tapping Mara on the arm, I excused myself and stepped out into the corridor where three pairs of soldiers stood at different doorways. Sweating, I yanked off my overcoat, unable to imagine how Mara kept hers on while remaining in that fucking sauna. But I guess it was her job to remain cool at all times. Without a chair in sight, I leaned against a wall while flipping through the folder again. Beyond the bloody photos, there was a series of pictures of torn clothes as well as body parts lined up on a stainless steel bench. The piece that really caught my attention was a large fragment of a human skull. It was about the size of your palm, and beneath the wet black hair was some kind of tattoo. Going back over the folder, I was disappointed that I couldn't find a better photo of the scalp.

A door then opened to my left, and I only looked up once a shrill voice yelled at me from a distance! To my surprise, the pitched squawks came from a tall, athletic-looking black guy. His tailored blue suit and tie, as well as his patterned shirt and brown polished shoes, gave him that famous French styling that everyone else in the building was lacking. Two of the armed guards

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standing nearby, started closing in on me before that squeaking giant slapped my chest! I'm tall, but this guy was easily over seven-foot, and his cologne smelled fucking amazing! He continued with his antagonistic shrieks, as the guards moved in even closer. Again he thumped my chest, sending me back against the wall! Monsieur Michael Jordan was practically shouting at me an inch from my face, as he grabbed his own ID card and waved it about with his flamboyant demands.

It was Mr. Hastings who stepped into the corridor to my defense. His French was perfect, not that I could fucking tell. "Terribly sorry, he needs your visitor's pass. We're meant to wear them at all times. They're old fashioned that way. Without a shadow of a doubt, you Israelis must have much more advanced systems of identification. All your biometric-security, and all that."

That's when I realized my ID card was folded up inside of my coat that was hanging off my forearm. My fault. Everyone eased down once I smiled bitterly and revealed the plastic pass. The soldiers returned to their station, and the big guy flared his nostrils at me before entering the observation room.

"That's an unusual name. I mean, for an Israeli."

"Is it?"

"What branch, I mean, where in Germany are you based?"

"What branch of what?"

"Oh, ha! Very good. Apologies. Not supposed to ask. This whole business isn't, you know, my field of expertise."

"And what is?"

"Behavioral psycho-therapy. But it's really my PhD in Arabic that caught someone's attention."

"Someone?"

"No clue as to whom exactly."

"So, this isn't your day-job?"

"Oh, heavens, no!"

"Who's position are you covering for, then?"

"Your guess is probably more informed than mine. With the Easter weekend, and the fact that the incident's already been prevented, it means this kind of situation isn't exactly, how should I put it, the qualified personnel's top priority."

"No shit," I said, as we strolled along that dull labyrinth.

"Don't you find it troubling, how many terrorist attempts the public simply never hear about, because of the diligent work of counter-terrorism organizations? Pity really. Good people deserve recognition. Still, I guess,

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like last week, when people like Arnaud Beltrame are killed in the line of duty, the public do show an outpouring of solidarity. Perhaps it's better the general population aren't exposed the true extent of the danger that faces them, or..."

"Or?"

"Or nothing."

"What did these two do?"

"Attempted."

"Allegedly."

"Haven't they already debriefed you?"

"What do you think they've done?"

Mr. Hastings paused and took a step sideways with a smile. "Makes sense. I mean, why would they tell me all the details. Of course not. Who am I. No top-secret-clearance for the new lad on the job. Fair enough."

"How many of these things have they brought you in on?"

"Just this one!"

I wanted to suggest a high-five, but my lack of sleep decided otherwise.

"At least they weren't successful. Or else I'd have been thrown head-first into the deep-end. Although. Had they gotten away with it, I wouldn't even be here."

"Why not?"

"Well, because, you know. If they'd blown up the Channel Tunnel, then I'd still be stuck in London."

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It wasn't long before a group from the observation room were transported to a new compound by white vans, where a large service building was surrounded by another tall, chain-link fence. Once inside, we headed through an underground network of storage compartments, until we were finally walking along a two-story-high passageway that twisted and turned past rooms that sounded like they contained diesel generators. Mara eventually glanced back in my direction. Smiling, she merely tilted her head as if to say, *Having fun?*

I had stupidly assumed that my holy-fucking-shit-what-the-fuck-is-a-piece-of-fucking-shit-like-me-doing-in-a-fucking-place-like-this expression, would have caught her attention, and perhaps she'd suggest that I wait outside until this business of national security was taken care of by the actual professionals. But nope. So, fuck it! I would see where this ride was going, but the moment boredom sunk in, I'd jump ship like I gave a fuck!

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There were more soldiers in balaclavas guarding a meekly lit service tunnel. The widely spaced emergency lamps cast deep shadows within the walls that were ribbed with thick metal pipes and cabling. With that damp smell of concrete, and a hollow drone filling the place, it made me feel as if we were taking a casual stroll into the bowels of a nuclear reactor.

Monsieur Jordan was impatiently leading the way. He stopped at a junction and we locked eyes. The bruise he'd left on my chest retained our growing animosity. It was always a strange sensation when another male crossed that unspoken line into physical conflict. Some huge part of your animal-brain wants you to go tooth-and-nail at his fucking throat! While at the same time, there's a sense of acknowledgment that another sees you as a credible threat, and finally you'd put your mettle to the test. Of course, I was very well aware of the reality that Monsieur Jordan could easily roll me up into a spitball and slam-dunk my lanky ass in a trashcan. But from my experience, as long as I stood my ground, I never needed to even raise my fists. By controlling myself and not becoming violent, I could keep violence at bay, and thus, fend for myself.

After we followed a parallel passageway, we came to several free-standing spotlights and a forensic team dressed in white coveralls. Most of the group was interested in the crates that had previously housed the explosives, however, I saw something far more arousing further along. There, I came to the bloody death scene of the third suspect. The photos had failed to capture how fucking enormous the mess was! The floor was soaked five-meters-wide, but the thing was, the blood also coated the walls, pipes, and right up over the distant ceiling!

A forensic guy stepped over to me while I was still staring upward, and I asked him, "What kind of bomb can do this to you?"

The Frenchman shook his head.

Nodding, I patted him on the back, "Ah, the French."

"I speak English," the guy replied quietly, pointing to the wall next to him. "But there was no detonation in here. There is no evidence of an explosive device, and look, there is no damage to anything. The equipment is fine, the walls are all intact. There is not even any burns or smoke residue. And none were found on the remaining body parts either."

"Then what happened to him?"

"Isn't that why you're here?"

Indicating with my tippy-toe, I questioned with the gesture if I could walk across that sheet of dried blood?

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The wrapped-up forensic guy shook his head.

“Spot something?” one of the suits from the observation room asked, as he slowly approached.

“Yeah,” I smiled, turning toward the bald Frenchman. “Where the fuck is everyone?”

Immediately, the forensic guy backed off to do his work, while the bald guy sneered and muttered to himself in French. Correcting his language, he looked me in the eyes, “Things are, how you say, up in the air, since France expelled four Russian diplomats. I’m sure you understand, with all the tension over the poisoning in England. And now with this, everyone is reluctant to trust anyone. Though, why you Israelis were recommended, that, that is unclear to me. Is it not your Passover? Perhaps you can enlighten me, why are you here exactly?”

“What can I say, nothing better to do.”

“Ah, yes. Hush, hush.”

“So, what’s way down there?”

“Why of course, the Channel Tunnel itself.”

“What do you think happened here?”

“You read the briefing,” the middle-aged Frenchman said, before he sighed and stared down the endless passageway. “Only an idiot would think they might actually flood the tunnel. Engineers built this place better than that. Far too deep for a bomb to be of any effect. But, perhaps, maybe if a fire were to spread, the smoke could kill far more than a flood ever would.”

“No, no, no,” I said, pointing at the shiny surface of all that blood right next to us. “What happened here? To this sack of shit.”

“You play with matches, as you say.”

I waited.

“This place,” the Frenchman spoke softly, “Many souls have been lost here. And I don’t even mean during the war.”

“What do you mean, then?”

“I mean, I wouldn’t be caught down here in this place,” he whispered, glancing up to the ceiling. “Something killed this man. And I believe, personally speaking, that this, all this, wasn’t, and couldn’t have been done by another man.”

“That’s what I’m asking, what kind of weapon can cause this?”

“You are not understanding my meaning!” the Frenchman stressed. “His conspirators, they know what happened. But the one who witnessed the death, he refuses to speak. He saw something unholy down here. And he

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wouldn't be the first.”

Before I got a chance I ask more, Monsieur Jordan walked up and loomed over us with a sullen scowl toward the far reaches of the passageway. He spoke in French, and then, he and I were left alone.

“What is it you do?” I asked, without looking at him. “What’s your job?”

“On whose authority do you deserve such answers?!”

“As Gerry Spence once said, *“I am for me, as you are for you, the only authority.”*”

“What do you think you are achieving by being here?!”

“Killing time.”

“You think that’s funny?!”

“Not at all. And I also don’t give a flying fuck about this fucking shithole! Or these terrorist fucking cunts! But you’ve obviously had a pretty fucking serious breach in your precious fucking security, which explains why you’re sulking like a pretensions fuck who can’t keep his shit together! So, if you want me leave, then fucking spit it! And then it’s adios, motherfucker, I’m out of here! You’re welcome to clean up your own clusterfuck, you ungrateful prick!”

“What is going on here?!” Mara suddenly interjected. Everyone in the passageway was staring at us. “Don’t we have a job to do?! Can we please get on with it, without this childish bickering?! Remember who you are and why exactly you’re here! Don’t forget that! And if I need to remind you, then you won’t be invited back, ever again! Is that understood?!”

“Yes, ma’am,” Monsieur Jordan reluctantly grunted.

Turning away from Mara, I clenched my jaw at her message meant for me.

“Is that understood?!” she repeated.

“Abso-fucking-lutely!” I sneered. “See you back at the fucking car!”

On the drive from the Tunnel, I sat alone in the back of a big white van, staring across a soaked landscape toward the city of Calais, and then I focused on something out of the ordinary. Leaning over the driver’s seat, I pointed and asked, “What the fuck is that?”

The driver murmured in French, and I just smirked with a cringe.

“Go, go over there.”

The driver might have not spoken English but he definitely knew enough to refuse my directions.

“Go! Los! Vamanos, Vamanos!”

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After exiting the fenced-in compound, eventually the van turned down a remote side road between vacant fields where we passed random men in hoodies standing in the middle of the asphalt. Cautiously, the driver navigated through those on the street, and I noticed that he locked all the doors. More and more groups of black men with pink eyes leered at the van as it cruised closer to what I realized was one of those sprawling refugee camps that I'd seen on the news. An unnaturally colorful slum, was a more accurate description. The stench was something film crews failed to capture. The further in we went, the more trash coated the street. Hundreds, if not thousands of limp tents of every shape and size spread out into the drizzle, while masses of hunched men stood around doing nothing but enduring the miserable weather. However, slowly they turned toward our approach. The driver started shaking his head and yelling in French, when about fifty men with metal clubs came from our left! The driver panicked, and I was seriously doubting that the van had bullet-proof glass. Reversing, the driver quickly swung the big van around, but due to the piles of garbage, the road was too narrow, and he needed more time to turn around. He was screaming at me the whole time, and I didn't argue. Suddenly the van was swarmed with slapping palms, and yelling men! The driver's own voice was overthrown by how loud the mob was. He was fucking terrified, and I couldn't even see where the fucking road was anymore. With my own heart-rate pounding, I gripped the back of the driver's seat and yelled into his ear, "PUT YOUR FUCKING FOOT DOWN!"

And thank fuck, he did, and we pushed straight out of there! Bodies, like rubber balls, tumbling off the van! In another moment we were out of the camp and back upon the open road again.

The mob's attack must have lasted all of five seconds, but once we were free, I grabbed the driver's shoulders and stated with an exhilarated grin, "Jesus H. fucking Christ, they're a friendly fucking bunch, aren't they! "

Something then smashed into the rear window, shattering it!

"Sacrebleu!" I screamed. "They come in peace!"

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Back at the interrogation complex, I was led by a pair of soldiers down more clinical corridors until they opened a door into a forensics' lab. My escorts waited outside while I glanced about the large room devoid of life. "Hello? Bonjour? Anyone?"

"Qui?"

"Hey, hi, how's it going?" I smiled, as a young woman in a lab coat,

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poked her head around a corner. She was sitting at a work station, still typing on her laptop, as I approached. “Sorry. Do you speak English?”

“Of course,” she said coldly, sitting next to an array of test-tubes full of blood. “How can I be of assistance?”

“Yeah, I’m looking for...” Opening the plastic folder, I pulled out the photo of the dead man’s scalp. “This.”

“Certainly.”

On the other side of the lab was a short hallway to a small morgue. The lab girl opened a refrigerator and removed a metal tray containing several sealed plastic bags, placing one of them on a stainless steel table. We both pulled on latex gloves before she opened the bag and placed the fragment of human skull in front of me. Picking it up, the bone felt icy through my gloves. The blood-coated black hair was frozen stiff, making it tricky to part the strands.

“So, what do you reckon happened?” I asked, leaning away from the girl’s curious inspection. “Extreme anxiety attack and he just went pop?”

“The Lead Medical Examiner has already left.”

“Sure, but what’s your opinion?”

“I’m not a trained coroner.”

“Fuck’s sake, you French are worse than the Germans. You’re free to take a guess and give it a wild unprofessional diagnosis just for my own entertainment, aren’t you? We’re just talking casually here. Making small-talk. You’re career’s not on the line. So? What do you think did this?”

“The extensive damage to the entire body is consistent with explosives, but the lack of trace-evidence makes it appear as if he had been killed by a pack of animals. There are even lacerations on a few bone segments that appear to be from claws. But wild animals can’t cause such instantaneous destruction. It’s almost as if he was spontaneous torn apart.”

Placing the piece of skull on the table, I asked, “Torn apart by?”

“By the hand of god.”

After thanking her, I left the assistant to store the evidence. On my way back through the lab, and while keeping on the latex gloves, I grabbed one of the many test-tubes, and slipped it into my coat pocket. There were security cameras in every corner on the facility, so I walked with a purpose, aware that someone, if not the lab girl herself, would notice my shifty fingers.

The two soldiers escorted me back to the interrogation rooms. There, Mr. Hastings was standing outside, reading some papers. “Thought you were at the scene of the crime.”

“Yeah, it was fascinating for all of two seconds,” I said, as the guards gave

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us some space. “So, I take it these guys were from one the nearby refugee camps.”

“No, not at all,” Mr. Hastings frowned. “You have a copy of the report in your hand, you know.”

“Everyone keeps saying that, but what part of French do you think I understand?”

“Oh, dear lord! You weren’t given an English copy?! What’s with all this disorganization?!”

“Tell me about it, I’m not even supposed to be here!”

“Well, these terribly disturbed chaps are all from Qatar.”

“Thought they only funded terrorism.”

“Seems like they’re getting their hands grubby on this one.”

“You okay?” I asked, noticing the old guy’s aggravated mood.

“Ah, stuff it,” he said, folding his arms. “Been told by the higher-ups that we need to immediately end all questioning. Seems like these two have some powerful friends. Their representatives are on their way here presently. It’s just frustrating, you see, not being able to get to the bottom of it. And once they’re out of here, I’ll never find out.”

“Let me get this right. The guy who actually witnessed the death of his buddy is still tight-lipped as fuck?”

“That’s one way of putting it.”

“Give me five minutes alone with him.”

“I don’t like the sound of that!”

“Just want to ask him a couple of quick questions. Just talk. I’ll be polite.”

“I can’t. Monsieur Jordan made it very clear not to let anyone talk to them while he’s off site.”

“Fine, then. Let’s just wait for him to get back. How long do you think until they’re lawyers get here?”

“What do you want to ask him exactly?”

“You’ll see through the mirror.”

“I’m not sure.”

“Trust me.”

“But Monsieur Jordan said no.”

“Aren’t we all on the same side here?”

“Yes, but, I don’t know about this.”

“It’s why I’m here, isn’t it?”

“I guess.”

“Give me five minutes, that’s all. I’m not busy, and he’s not going

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anywhere.”

“But they’ll be here any minute.”

“So, let’s fucking do this!”

“We don’t even know if he speaks English.”

“Let me try.”

“Why bother?”

“If he won’t talk, then it’s just a waste of my time, and that’s all I’m doing right now anyway.”

Shaking his head, the apparently honorable old guy, slowly lead me through the empty observation room to the side with the first interrogation cell. He opened the door, saying, “For what it’s worth.”

The neon lights bleached everything, and once the thick door was sealed shut, I felt like I was in a sound studio with insulated walls. The suspect was still seated and chained with the black bag over his head. Placing my folder to one side, I sat and rested my elbows on table, as I examined the guys subtle movements. I knew there were cameras behind the mirror, so I paused before I spoke. “Went to my first Passover dinner last night. The subject of kosher food came up in conversation, which led to the topic of pigs. I know it’s a bit of a broken record when people try convincing vegans how delicious pork is, but the thing is, when I think of pigs and what’s not kosher, it’s Hanukkah that always comes to mind. You know, spilling pig’s blood on the temple. Such a simple weapon, and yet such a great desecration. So, last night, I suggested that pig’s blood should be used instead of pepper-spray against Muslim rape-gangs.”

Reaching forward, I pulled the bag off the bearded man’s head. Squinting, the handsome young guy in his mid-thirties found that I had already emptied the test-tube upon the table top, and a large pool of blood lay between us. All he did was slowly lean backward.

“Pig’s blood,” I continued. “A weakness that both Muslims and Jews share.” While still wearing the latex glove, I slowly began running my finger tip through the blood. “Your pal, the dead one, the guy you saw get killed in the tunnel, what happened to him?”

Silence.

Pulling my hand away from the blood, I revealed the symbol that I had found tattooed on the dead man’s scalp. “And what does this mean?”

A mumbling sound rose up from the prisoner’s throat until it erupted into a high pitched scream! Thrashing in his chains, he lost all composure and began bleating in Arabic just like his horrified partner in the other room. The

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door suddenly burst open! Sweeping my gloved palm through the puddle, I deliberately sprayed the blood across the hysterical man's lap. Monsieur Jordan charged in with soldiers, and I was dragged out of my chair and pinned to a wall! The screaming prisoner was unchained and hurried out of the room within seconds! Yelling like usual, Monsieur Jordan grabbed my folder and threw it in my face as he ranted at me in French – until I raised my blood dripping glove. The massive man thrust himself ten-feet-away, his words squealing! Once he ran out of breath, he straightened his jacket, stormed out, and slammed the door shut!

The soldiers eased down, and I quietly removed the gloves with a self-satisfied smirk. The door opened again, gently this time, and in stepped Mr. Hastings, whispering, “Christ almighty! What was that all about?! I should have never let you in unsupervised!”

“All a bit of fun.”

“You just threatened a suspect while in custody!” Stuttering on his words, the old Englishman gestured toward the bloody table. “What did you write? What did you write in the blood? What did you show him?”

“Why, what did he say?”

“Can't turn my back on you for five minutes without you giving our main witness a fucking heart attack!” Mara yelled, walking in behind the shocked Mr. Hastings. “This was a mistake! I should have never brought you here!”

“Got him talking, though!” I said, before I leaned in with hateful spite and snarled right into Mara's face, “DIDN'T I!”

“We don't need him to talk! We have all we need! You're just causing unnecessary trouble like you always fucking do!”

And in turn, that shut me up.

-

I had been locked in the office where we had first met the unremarkable three, and without my cell, I eventually powered up the desktop computer. Twenty minutes later, I walked a fifty-year-old Frenchman in a dignified suit and tie beneath a brown raincoat. A white pointy beard faded up to a bald head, and he looked like he would have fit in comfortably at either a library and a fox hunt. “You are aware that prisoners have rights, are you not?!”

Sitting back in the big black desk chair, I frowned, “Since when have terrorists been given human rights, least of all lawyers?”

“When they can afford them!” The attitude of aristocratic arrogance from that pot-bellied cunt, instantly fueled an urge to drown his bloated face in a bucket of cold puke. However, since being locked in that room, I'd come to

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appreciate the fragility of my unintentional deception. Prudence demanded discretion. Sitting patiently, I listened as the old Frenchman righteously lectured me, making disciplinary threats, and preaching about the finer traits of those whom practice faith in the chain of command. Without any retaliation from my unaffected silence, he eventually seemed to run out of steam. He ended up leaning both hands on the desk as if to emphasize his final point, but then he noticed the computer screen. “You’re on suspension! What have you been up to?!”

“I don’t work for you.”

“What have you come across? What is this? What are you working on?”

“An address.”

“How?! Where?!”

“There’s this photo taken from some apartment in Paris. In the background there’s this tower. Unusual architecture. Couldn’t tell if it was a steeple or clock-tower. Googled through some searches, but the Eiffel Tower kept popping up, until finally, I recognized the silhouette in a thumbnail. It’s the Church of Sainte-Odile. There’s also a second photo taken from the other side of the apartment overlooking random rooftops. With the Google Maps Street-View it only took a few minutes to pinpoint exactly which building I was after.”

“And?!”

“It’s the apartment on the east-side of the fourth floor of 29 Rue Descombes, Paris.”

“Why haven’t you told someone already?!”

I smiled and just glared into the old guy’s speckled eyes.

“We must alert the local Gendarmerie Nationale!”

“Why?”

“These could be the ones responsible for supplying the explosives!”

“It isn’t,” I said, while the frantic old man held his iPhone to his ear, as he scanned Google Maps. I then clicked through different tabs on the browser, and image-search results for the Church of Sainte-Odile spread across the screen. I clicked another tab, and the original photo overlooking the rooftops presented itself on an Instagram page. I then clicked the mouse off of the selected photo, revealing the profile page of the Brazilian fashion model, Natalia Mallmann – who was currently based in Paris.

“What is this?!”

“Not who you’re looking for.”

“How’s she involved?!” the old man demanded, covering his phone with

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his hand. “Tell me, who is this women?!”

“Just another distraction.”

“This has nothing to do with the terrorists?!”

“No.”

“Why are you wasting my time?!”

“What’s good for the goose.”

“Intolerable!” And the old Frenchman marched out and slammed the door shut! Staring at the photos of Nati, I wanted to grin, but I knew exactly where my obsessions had led me the last time that I stalked a girl in France.

A few seconds later, the door opened again, and in stepped the much more reserved Monsieur Jordan. He closed the door and stayed near the far wall, staring off to his left. Pouting, he struggled to think of the words in English, or perhaps muster up the courage to make an apology. Gradually though, he announced in a lulled tone of voice, “I am a catholic. I know you Jews do not share my faith, but I take these attacks personally, especially here at my place of birth, as you must do so on your own soil.”

“I’m not a Jew.”

“Your people, like mine, protect what we hold dear.”

“I don’t even look Israeli.”

“Are you listening?!”

“I’m no Special Agent in the ISB. That’s Mara’s thing, not mine. I just want to get the fuck out of here.”

“I don’t have much time! Hastings played back the recording of your interview. He translated what the suspect was yelling. These men were on a suicide mission. But not for martyrdom. They were trying to escape from some kind of cult. The one you made talk, he said he saw his friend being ripped apart by unseen spirits.”

“Why were they trying to blow up the tunnel, then?”

The door swung opened once again, and an unknown man peered into the office. As absurd this whole dynamic was, from behind the desk, it began to feel as if this actually was my office. Monsieur Jordan awkwardly side-stepped his way out, as in turn, the rough-face man with gray stubble, moved inside and asked with an American accent, “Who are you?”

“Not whoever the fuck you’re looking for!”

“You’re a great help!”

Slamming my fist against the keyboard, I leaned forward and snarled, “What the fuck do you want?!”

“The guard’s led me here!”

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“Then get them to lead you the fuck back out!”

“They’ve already gone.”

“There aren’t any guards at the door?”

“Left with your last appointment.”

“Fuck yes!” I jumped up and yanked the door open into that sterile corridor. “Let’s blow this popsicle stand!”

“Sir, the embassy insisted I come straight here in person,” the American with square features explained. His small backpack was slung over the same shoulder that his coat hung from. “First time in France.”

“Congratulations,” I sneered, hurrying after the fading sounds of Monsieur Jordan’s footsteps.

“Hey, this isn’t what I’m supposed to be doing! I don’t want to be here, but everyone else at my station is away on vacation! So, forgive me if I’m not familiar with your protocol around these things.”

“What things?”

“This!”

“And what is this?!”

“Sir, an event that everybody seems to think has already been avoided, sir!”

“Yeah, it’s all over,” I said, opening the door into the darkened observation room. It now lay abandoned with the lights and monitors switched off. Glancing back around the corridor, I scowled at the lack of soldiers anywhere. “And it seems that everyone’s already fucked off without even inviting us along. Sons of bitches. There’s no one here for you to talk to.”

“Sir, it’s crucial that I speak with Arham, Adnan, and Azhar! I have to see them! This isn’t over, sir! I have to speak with them about their pact!”

“Yeah, and I’d like to have some strong words with the goddess Fortuna, but hey, what are you going to do about it.”

“Hey! Listen! I didn’t fly all the way across Europe for my health!” the well-built American stated, while he shook the same mugshots that I had been given in a similar plastic folder. “Sir, I need to speak to these three! Immediately!”

Glancing back into the interrogation room, I saw that the blood had already been cleaned. The place was utterly vacated, and not even Mara had come looking for me. Though, I couldn’t blame her. She had a mission, and I was slowing her down. Without any job or current artwork to focus on, ultimately, what the fuck was my purpose?! And then it came to me, as if it had never left: I’m a sickfuck! Fixation always gestated within my unconscious even

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when I'm killing time. I needed to get to Paris and knock on Nati's front door! Turning to the big American, I then asked, "You wouldn't happen to have a car with you?"

-

On the drive toward Paris, the Ohio-born Mr. Walker handed me his backpack while he drove, and I pulled out several folders full of maps, satellite images, and photos of deserts. He had been based in the United Arab Emirates for the last six months. As an ex-military contractor, he bemoaned how he was usually part of some security detail chauffeuring the spoiled brats of billionaires. However, his current crew were assigned to tracking down the missing sons of three influential oil families. At first, everyone had assumed that they had been taken hostage for ransom. But in the mountains between Mecca and Medina, Mr. Walker's team had learned that the three young men had in fact joined an unheard of fanatical cult. "The families refused to believe that their sons would simply forsake Islam. And after months with no leads at all, Adnan suddenly made a Skype call to his mother. Desperate, he insisted that the only way they'd ever be free of the cult was by killing someone on board the train from London to Paris today."

"So, you were the one who warned the French about the attack?" I asked, still studying the photos.

"No. Adnan only called yesterday afternoon. Being Good Friday, my whole crew had already checked out for Easter. By the time the family contacted me, you guys had already taken them into custody."

"What kind of cult were they involved in?"

"What the hell is this?" Mr. Walker whispers, leaning forward in the driver's seat.

Suddenly two big black helicopters flew directly overhead and raced off further down the highway! The sound was horrendous and literally shook the car like jelly. They flew about two kilometers ahead of us and passed beyond the rise of a small hill before coming right down to land – that was when a blaze of gunfire flashed from both choppers! Once we raced to the top of the rolling farmlands, we realized that the choppers were coming down on the convoy from the facility. Police vans were spread across the highway and a car exploded into a cloud of golden flames! One chopper touched down as several individuals with guns spread out, shooting in all directions!

Two thoughts stabbed at my central nervous system. The first, was to back the fuck away from this war-zone, in case I inadvertently became the target a stray bullet. But then again, I had to assume that Mara was most likely

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somewhere in the middle of this royal fuck-up. Mr. Walker didn't seem even slightly conflicted, and sped straight into the midst of the burning vehicles. Just as we arrived, the gunmen all climbed back into their chopper, before the two thunderous machines flew the fuck out of there. I sat for a moment, watching the helicopters ascend into the moody skies. However, without hesitation, Mr. Walker ran to the aid of the nearest casualties. Slowly, I stepped out of the rental and surveyed the surrounding turmoil. Black smoke gushed up toward the two whale-like choppers as they roared over treetops and headed south. Then I heard Monsieur Jordan screaming into his phone while stomping about the wrecked vehicles with his gun in hand. The sound of screaming rubber drew my eyes to one of the few surviving police cars. Mara glanced at me from behind the wheel with a smirk of that's-what-happens, before she raced after the escaping choppers, off to do her job, whatever the fuck it is that spooks do.

Mr. Walker was taking charge like champion, as members of the public came to assist the wounded. I spotted Mr. Hastings sitting on the road with his back against the blown out tires of a van that was resting against the concrete guard rail. He had the blood of someone else splattered across his face, and he was clearly in shock.

"How you doing?" I asked, taking a knee next to the dazed Englishman. "Rough day, huh."

He murmured something that I wasn't even listening to, until he spoke up, "I knew this girl who was raised in the countryside near Oxford. She lived a delightfully innocent life in her little bubble at her family cottage. Except. One day her mother suddenly died from a ruthless, undeserved heart-attack. My friend, she then spent the next year in hospital suffering from an acute depression brought on by such an unexpected tragedy. And yet. Once she finally got out of the private clinic. She killed herself."

"Beautiful," I smiled, still crouching in front of the traumatized old guy.

"Yes, I've seen some unsavory things. When I was fourteen, my best friend was this French lad. His father was a property developer. One day, his digger uncovered a completely buried World War 2 American tank. That night, my friend and I went to investigate this buried treasure. We had no idea. No idea that there was any risk beyond getting caught. It was so old. Rusted and full of roots. Oliver was only halfway inside the hatch, when it went off. Something detonated. An old shell presumably. Though, I've heard that sometime they would booby-trap their broken-down tanks during the war. Oliver's head instantly became a geyser of blood right before my eyes...

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All is but vanity.”

Mr. Walker stepped over and checked the Englishman’s pulse as he stared back at me. “They’re gone for good. Those helicopters, they’re my employers. Guarantee it. You’ll never see those two boys again.”

“Where did you find the pig’s blood?” Mr. Hastings asked.

“If it was just pig’s blood, I wouldn’t have worn the gloves.”

“What pig’s blood?” Mr. Walker frowned.

“Worked a treat,” Mr. Hastings chuckled with glassy eyes.

“Yeah, just look at how fantastic everything worked out,” I murmured, glancing at the bodies of French soldiers lying on the street next to all those crashed vehicles.

“I still want to know how Azhar was killed,” Mr. Walker stated.

“I agree.”

“Why don’t you ask their target?” Mr. Hastings offered.

Mr. Walker and I shared a perplexed look.

“Once you got Arham talking, I heard him screaming about the target, as he was dragged out of the interview room. It wasn’t on the recording. Look, if you head back to Calais now, you’ll make it in time to catch the tunnel train, and then you can ask the target yourself.”

“Isn’t there someone else picking up this guy?” I asked.

“Never got a chance to tell anyone. So, you’ll do. But now, I just need a little nap.”

Standing up, I glared down the burning highway toward Paris, Mara, and my obsession with Brazilian models. But then I looked back at Mr. Walker’s rental and the gravitational pull of my nagging curiosity. Clenching my jaw, I pictured the locked front door at Amelia’s old apartment building in the south of France, and I was instantly filled with years of disgust.

“Are you coming?” Mr. Walker called out, as he helped Mr. Hastings through the devastation and toward his car. “Let’s go!”

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“What happened to your partner?” Mr. Hastings asked, from the back seat.

“She’s not my fucking partner!”

“Then, what is she?”

Groaning, I scanned the forest as we raced back to Calais. “We have an estranged de facto relationship.”

“Professionally speaking?” Mr. Hastings shook his head. “Your higher-ups fine with Israeli agents getting intimate?”

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I noticed Mr. Walker glance in my direction for a moment.

“So where is she?”

“Fucked off after the choppers.”

“Didn’t wait for you?”

“Never fucking listens to me.”

“Aren’t partners meant to work together?”

“We’re not fucking partners!”

“Sorry! Estranged team mates.”

“How can I put this. When you’re dancing, you both can’t lead. She is...”

I paused to think of the right word. “Antithetical to inspiration.”

“Why do you stay with her then?”

“Because she’s teaching me civility.”

“Shit, man!” Mr. Walker spoke up. “Snap the fuck out of it! You have one question to ask yourself: is your life better off with or without her!”

Considering the suggestion, I crossed my arms and stared at the darkened clouds that began pouring hard upon the Gare de Calais-Fréthun train station.

“What did Arham say about their target?” Mr. Walker asked, as he navigated around any traffic in our path.

“Nothing,” Mr. Hastings sighed from his slouched posture. “He was screaming all kinds of nonsense. Something about the Red Snake of the Pharaoh. He was adamant that they had to stop him.”

“Concentrate! Or this guy, he’s going to slip right through our fucking hands!”

“I don’t know what to tell you! He didn’t say anything more!”

“He mentioned something about spirits,” I said, spotting the metallic train that was already pulling into the rain-washed station.

“Think Hastings!” Mr. Walker yelled. “What did Arham say?! Anything! Any detail?!”

“He just referred to the guy as the Red Snake! The Snake of the Pharaoh! That’s a code-name, right? You’re the god damned CIA, doesn’t that mean anything to you?!”

The car raced into the huge parking lot but drove right up to the entrance of the station, where Mr. Walker ran onto the platform. I followed directly behind him, though, quickly noticed that our English companion had been left behind. A whistle blew, and I scanned the length of the train – just as Mr. Walker grabbed my arm and swung me around so that my back slammed flat into a wall! Dropping to my hands and knees, I gagged for air as I saw Mr. Walker climb on board the departing train. Clawing at the concrete with my

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fingers, I lunged after him, but I collapsed, unable to inhale.

There were people all around staring at me, but only Mr. Hastings slowly approached and extended a steady hand. “You know, he’s wrong. He has a far too simplistic view of couples. If you feel that your role in the relationship isn’t mutually respected, then all the external benefits in the world are ultimately worthless compared the underlying resentment.”

“How’d you know he was CIA?” I gasped, struggling to stand with my hands on my thighs, while we both watched the train shoot out of the station and into that torrential downpour.

“Wasn’t it obvious?”

“I don’t know. I don’t fucking know anything,” I coughed, slowly standing up straight. “But do you what to know what I really want to fucking understand?!”

Mr. Hastings just shivered from the cold.

“What the fuck killed that cunt in the tunnel?!”

-

Upon departing the interrogation complex, we had all been required to relinquish our digital ID cards, however, Mr. Hastings still had the paperwork needed to get us back through the now anemic security. We were soon in one of the white vans and driving back to the service building leading to that network of underground corridors connected to the Channel Tunnel. I still couldn’t see the coast, and never cared to. But once we cruised closer to the chain-link gate, both Mr. Hastings and I focused on two figures standing in the rain. They weren’t guards. Drenched, the two men stood facing the entrance to the service building. They only turned after our headlights consumed them, and we found them to be another couple of refugees.

“How’d they get past the barbed wire?” Mr. Hastings muttered.

“They’ve gotten through multiple countries already,” I sneered. “I think they can handle a few pathetic fences.”

The driver was not the same French guy who had taken me to the camp, yet he had a similar squint about the idea of getting out and opening the gate right next to those two. It was getting dark in the late afternoon, and I didn’t feel like arguing, so I grabbed the key-card from the driver and stepped out into the rain. I said nothing to the refugees, but I never once took my eyes off their grisly brows. As menacing as they appeared, they didn’t seem to want to make any kind of threatening gestures, and kept their distance. Once I slid the key-card into the ATM-like machine, the gate automatically began retracting. I waved the van in, though, waited for the gate to close before following the

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van. That was when the two middle-aged men grabbed the chain-link fence and started yelling at me in whispers. The rain had begun creeping down the tall collar of my black overcoat, but I moved closer to those two anyway. The wind was twice as loud as the men's strained voices, but even when I heard a word or two, I really had no fucking idea what language they were speaking.

"English?" I asked, expecting nothing.

The two black men slowly went quiet. The oldest held onto the fence and glared back with some kind of frustration gnawing at his otherwise stoic resilience. When I was about to turn away, the old guy yanked madly at the fence! I stopped. He then shook his head. I leaned away again. And this time, the guy shook his head much more vehemently.

"Do you know what killed that little fuck down there?!" I yelled, grabbing the fence and rattling it at the two men as they stepped away. "Speak up! What the fuck are you trying to fucking say?!"

They both just shook their heads.

"Great chat! Let's do it more often! You piece of shit!"

-

"Holy Mother of God!"

"I know, right," I said, nodding, as Mr. Hastings stared dumbfounded at the extent of that enormous blood stain that reached so incredibly high and wide.

"Listen. This isn't for me," the old chap spoke with a raspy voice, unable to take his eyes off the ceiling pipes painted in just as much gore as there was at his feet. "I'm not crossing that. This kind of thing, it's not. I haven't got the stomach for it."

"It's dry, you won't ruin your shoes," I assured him, though, the shiny surface of the blood still looked sticky.

"Don't!" Mr. Hastings barked, grabbing my arm, while also pointing to the distant end of the passageway. "Jesus! Is this what happened to those three?!"

"What are you looking at?"

"The security footage! Didn't you see it! We need to leave!"

I saw nothing.

"I don't know what that is!"

"What the fuck are you staring at?!"

"Can't you feel it?!"

Inhaling, I wrenched my arm free and scanned the marginally lit passageway that stretched off toward infinity. All the forensic equipment

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had already been removed, and there were no spotlights warming up the bleak surroundings. Apart from a temporary railing set up to warn off any unsuspecting janitors, the place was deserted. In fact, one end of that passageway looked like the mirror image of the other. Struggling to keep my temper in check, I slowly began saying, “There was this director who I used to work for. About ten years ago. Big Belgium guy. Once told me this story about visiting Auschwitz.”

“What the hell are you on about?!”

“His colleagues took a road-trip one weekend through Poland, when they suddenly decided to drop by the death-camp. None of them had ever been there, so thought, what the fuck. He told me that the moment they arrived, their previously upbeat mood was instantly shattered. Said that the atmosphere of that place was like an actual weight upon their shoulders. But you know, everyone’s heard similar stories. And back in 2012, when I took a road-trip to Rostock with my girlfriend at the time, she asked if I wanted to pay a visit to the concentration-camp at Oranienburg. I’m told it’s nothing as big as Auschwitz. Laid out in an interesting triangular design though. German efficiency and all. But do you know what I felt while walking beneath the ‘*Arbeits Macht Frei*’ sign hanging above the front gate? Do you know what I felt when I then deliberately stepped foot on the no-mans-land below the guard-towers? Do you know what I felt? I FELT FUCKING NOTHING!”

Mr. Hastings had slowly withdrawn from all the blood, an expression of perplexed dread set into his face.

“Now, tell me, what the fuck did you just see?!”

“Can your partner, at least, make you feel anything even remotely human?”

At times like these, when someone said something that cut to the bone, I had to remember that there were some truths that needed to be fully digested before I dug myself a grave with my impulsive fucking mouth.

“What kind of warped childhood did you have?”

“Fuck off!” I couldn’t hold my tongue. “Fuck Freud! And fuck my nonexistent partner!”

“Why are you still with her?”

“I like her smile, much more than I give a fuck about people with their Freudian fallacies!”

“What’s your problem with Freud?”

“My problem with Freud?! He focuses too much on childhood as the stem of all adult issues! I call bullshit on that! The most disturbing events I’ve

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ever encountered are fucking ongoing and far more formative the older I get! And those Freudians claiming that you can reconcile your past, are fucking hypocrites! If you're a Freudian, you're literally preaching how incapable you are of ever changing the past that fucked you up so badly, so you'll never escape it and forever be a fucking victim of your past! If you're a Freudian, then psycho-therapy is masturbation without catharsis! Fuck that shit! Childhood is only one part of a lifetime of fuck-ups, humiliations, and confrontations with your soul-destroying limitations! If your childhood was the only period in your entire fucking life that had the only fucking influence on your ability to deal with your ugly little fucking existence, then, son, you're suffering from nothing more than an extreme fucking case of arrested-development! Freudians are too fucking lazy to question the-here-and-the-now, where you might have to fucking discover that it's time grow the fuck up!"

"I'm not much of a spiritual man. Sometimes wish I was. Maybe Freudians could explain that as a flaw in my character," Mr. Hastings whispered, continuing backwards. "But I believe those two terrorists, what they saw, it drove them mad. Haven't you had those dreams when something so completely impossible happens. Even if it's something small. But you're suddenly so utterly disturbed by what your brain can't logically grasp, that you're then totally riddled with an inexplicable fear? I believe they experienced something similar, just look at this! This happened! Even if you deny a reasonable lack of caution and it's emotional distress, that still doesn't make you immune to whatever did this extreme damage to a human body!"

"Humans are great at compartmentalizing the world into easily package narratives with beautiful structures and concise explanations. But the fucking reality is, we suffer from the curse of incomprehensible causation! No matter how much we fucking scrutinize, we merely scrape together fragments of fucking possibilities! We'll simply never fucking understand every factor involved in the instigation of circumstance! It's beyond our fucking perception! Yet we speak in certainties, like any one fucking person, or even a fucking collective, could see every influence rippling out endlessly in all fucking directions!" I yelled. "But tell me, what the fuck did you just fucking see?!"

"Moments," Mr. Hastings said softly. "That's all we ever see. Patterns that we model into recognizable illusions. Illusions that we deceive ourselves with until we believe wholeheartedly that familiarity is the law. That is, until a greater force breaks through. And look what it's done to this poor son of a

The Curse Of Incomprehensible Causation

bitch.”

On that, I walked across the glistening blood. Turning around on the other side, I showed the old man my open palms.

“Be wary of dragons that humor fools,” Mr. Hastings whispered, as we both backed away from each other. “Not even Atropos can curb their wrath.”

-

After a few minutes of marching straight ahead, I glanced back. It all looked the same, and I couldn't even see the bloodstain anymore. Soon, I began wondering if I was wasting my time. What the fuck was I hoping to find? Whoever killed that guy was long gone. There was nothing down this tunnel but concrete and pipes. Besides, what the fuck would I do if I even came across someone? I should have brought Monsieur Jordan. That motherfucker at least had a gun. And then I began recalling my time on the North Sea, and how much I really didn't wish to return there, even though I was heading in that exact direction.

That's when I came across a junction in the passageway. For a second, I considered what would happen if I took a wrong turn and got lost. I dismissed it immediately. This was the basement of a train station, not the Minotaur's lair. Taking a left, I moved into a much smaller corridor with miles of exposed cabling hanging loosely from the ceiling's metal rafters. There was no reason to go one way or the other, so I just drifted on, until I saw an exit sign glowing in the distance – but it was the faint echo of a scream that ground my feet to a dead stop! My eyes peeled wide open as I stared back the way I'd come. Again that screech rang out meekly. I was pretty fucking sure that it was Mr. Hastings. Heading back, my dress shoes quickly sped up into a full-stride sprint. I pictured that those two refugees had somehow gotten inside and weren't exactly in the mood for sharing the enlightened philosophies of their enriched culture.

Running carefully down the main passageway, I didn't want my footfalls giving away my approach. The bloodstain passed by like a permanent marker in the landscape, and as I came to a turn in the route, the scream swung around a the corner, and old Mr. Hastings slammed right into me! We bother spun sideways! He slid to the floor, while I caught myself on a the conduits. Something else then struck my shoulder and sent me even further backward! Mr. Hasting shrieked again and grabbed my leg, yanking at my coat, begging for us to run! I flipped open the sheath at the back of my belt, and removed my black knife, while frantically looking back and forth for whomever had knocked me down. But there was no one else there! The old man didn't wait

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for me, but as I followed him, he stopped at the bloodstain.

“The fuck happened?!” I hissed, while constantly glancing to and fro.

“What the fuck are you running from?!”

“I don’t know! I don’t know! I don’t know!”

“Who the fuck did you see?!”

“I couldn’t see it!”

“What the fuck is wrong with you?!”

“Something! Something was there! I saw it!”

“Saw what?!”

“I don’t know! I don’t know! Please, we have to go! Please!”

“I saw a way out.”

“No!”

“What?”

“I can’t!”

“What?!”

“Can’t cross that!” Mr. Hastings blubbered, indicating toward the blood.

“Are you fucking with me?!”

And then I heard them. Like the guttural growls of lions making their presence known as they slowly approached. But there was nothing there! I rose from my hunched posture, as my knife-hand lowered. Whatever they were, there was a lot of them. The grunts from those unseen animals came from the walls and ceiling. Folding my knife away, I grabbed the old man and said, “I ain’t dragging your fucking ass out of here! Fucking move!”

I did however, have to force Mr. Hastings over the blood itself, but he soon found his momentum, and gave me a hard time keeping up with him. What is it that they say when you’re being chased by a bear: you just need to be faster than your friend. The most disturbing thing was that I could hear them coming! Paws or feet or whatever the fuck, came pounding against the concrete behind us. Claws scrapped at the walls. Snarling snouts loomed from above. There was a fucking stampede of wild beasts crashing down the passageway after us! I had neglected the gym during the winter months, and even though I’d recently begun working the treadmill again, my fucking legs were already failing me! Anger, however, replenished my adrenaline, and I drove past the old man. They could eat that fucking prick for all I cared, I was getting the fuck out of there!

We were at the junction in seconds, and I grabbed the corner, swinging around at breakneck speed, before lurching about the next corner. I heard Mr. Hastings hit the wall, where he was followed by a pile-up of whatever

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the fuck was chasing us. At no point did I have any desire in assisting the guy as he fell further and further behind. A cacophony of infuriated roars battled each other, and I imagined those things were having trouble all fitting into this much smaller passageway. It was only once I reached the exit and ripped open the door (which caused the place to fill with a shrill siren), that I looked back. Mr. Hastings was half running, half crawling toward me. His face was profane with despair. An emergency light flashed over the exit, yet the external forms and features of those creatures filling the passageway was something that my 20/20 eyesight couldn't fucking register. I'm not saying it was too dark down there. No more gloomy than any industrial facility. But in the strobe of the emergency light, I saw nothing at all behind us. There was just the unforgiving sounds of jaws snapping and the heavy bodies of dozens of those things swarming toward us. No wonder Azhar had been reduced to a liquid state within an instant. And I screamed to Mr. Hastings, "FUCKING MOVE!"

Yanking the old man through the exit, I slammed the door shut! That horde of unseen things tore into the walls and bashed at the door which buckled before my eyes, but they didn't seem to comprehend the mechanics that sealed our escape. There was only a ladder in that tiny space, which we climbed to a manhole. After struggling with the lock, I forced the hatch open, and I was suddenly drenched from the overflowing storm-drains. Freedom never felt to wet. Dragging myself up onto the concrete compound, I pulled Mr. Hastings after me. However, he had a huge gash in his back, but it was his split leg that looked much worse. His left calf had been slashed vertically.

Night had set in, and despite the howling siren, no security team came rushing to the scene. There was no choice other than to help Mr. Hastings hobble through the deluge and find ourselves some shelter before he bled to death.

"You happy now?" Mr. Hastings grumbled, as he limped with his arm around my shoulder. "What on Earth have those boys brought here?"

"Are you fucking kidding?!" I sneered, as we followed a tall chain-link fence that was hopefully leading us toward something. "What the fuck did you see?! All I fucking saw was fucking nothing!"

"Yes, well, what were you running from, then?"

"Years of suppressed existential hatred for my own insignificance!"

Then, through the evening rain, I saw a refugee in a hoodie, clinging to the other side of the fence. The old black man pulled his hood down as he spoke out loud. His was determined to be heard over the rain, as he glared at

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the sky with cataract-eyes. Mr. Hastings and I continued past that voice in the dark, until finally we saw the lights from a patrol car coming our way.

“My Amharic is a bit rusty,” Mr. Hastings said, as the headlights slowed down in front of us. “But you know, he was talking to you.”

“What?”

“Said, you must finish.”

“What fucking language is Amharic?”

“Ethiopian.”

“Get the fuck out of here!”

Two security guards then ran over and took Mr. Hastings into their arms.

“Finish what?” I reluctantly asked, as I stood still.

“Finish the mirage. Yes, he said, mirage. Finish the mirage.”

“The fuck?!” I called out, while turning in the rain. Marching back to where that refugee had been standing, I heard the guards yelled at me. And I screamed in reply, “You’ll fucking wait for me, you fucks!”

The old black guy was still next to the fence. The closer I got, the more scars I could see covering his blinded face. He then took a few steps away from the fence, muttering something under his breath.

“Have you seen the Ark?” I asked, slowly waving my hand in front of my own face in a mock gesture. “Did it do this to you?”

The patrol car then pulled up, and as it did so, the headlights revealed a mass of perfectly silent refugees standing behind the old man. All of them were staring directly back at me. He then repeated this words again, but this time it was me who slowly backed away.

The two French guards said nothing as I sat in the back with Mr. Hastings who was now wrapped in a blanket.

“What’s really going on here?” Mr. Hastings whispered, as he began to fade from consciousness. “I don’t understand how any of this is connected. I don’t know what to think. I don’t know. I just. I just don’t know. I don’t want to.”

On the drive to the hospital, I wasn’t interested in spending another minute in that fucking country. I had things to do. And as I thought of the last time that I had seen Lulu, a line from *Heart Of Darkness*, crossed my mind, *‘I don’t like work, – no man does – but I like what is in the work, – the chance to find yourself. Your own reality – for yourself, not for others – what no other man can ever know. They can only see the mere show, and never can tell what it really means.’*

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The Curse Of Incomprehensible Causation

Once I was on the train back to Berlin, I received a text message from Mara. She was just outside of Paris, where the choppers had gotten away from her, so there was nothing left for her to do.

I could have text her back, but instead, I pulled out my Mp3 player, and listened to Sun Of Man, *Desert*.

So, the two surviving terrorists were gone, taken by Mr. Walker's employers, from either Qatar or the CIA. Though, who the fuck was Mr. Walker, and how was he invested in the unidentified target on the train? Ultimately, I still had no accurate idea of what the fuck had butchered the third terrorist, and then attacked Mr. Hastings and I. But then again, who the fuck was I to question any of this shit that I had absolutely no business being part of to begin with! There was no resolution here, and the public would never even hear about just another prevented disaster. However, what bothered me most of all, was how the fuck did Ethiopia keep popping up in the algorithm of my fucking life?! I had no fucking intention of ever traveling to that fucking shithole. Not yet. Not without more than the fucking temptation of unconscious innuendos. Not again.

Bruce

Bruce Stirling John Knox



SHORT STORY 19
2018
THIS PILGRIM DENIED

DISCLAIMER:

If I didn't believe in anything, then I wasn't looking for a fucking thing.

PART 1
BERLIN

SATURDAY 21st JULY 2018



This Pilgrim Denied

I went to see Marcus in the morning, but again there was no answer at the door (just as there hadn't been ever since my visit to Telford in Wales). Standing on the other side of the street, in the shadow of the American Church of Berlin, I stared up at the big windows in the old stone building and saw that the lights were on in the lounge. I then spotted a woman walking into a room where Marcus stood up and kissed her on the cheek. A moment later, I saw her exit the apartment building. So, I followed her under the overpass and onto the U Bahn. She never looked back and never noticed me. I trailed her all the way to a cafe in Hackescher Markt, where I sat at the table right next to her and read my book, *The Monks Of War*.

I made first contact with polite small-talk. With her big smile and average looks, she made my charm flow easily. Her name was Rauna, and had just been visiting her uncle. I had to clench my jaw to contain my deceitful delight at this news. She was my key to Marcus, and in turn, my key to Maier and his secret work.

Flirting with single women in their mid-thirties was a chore, but it worked. I made plans to see her again, but I knew that I had to be patient and not make her suspicious of my goals.

THURSDAY 2nd AUGUST 2018

I met Rauna in the humid evening. Her long blonde hair was looking nice, and she had a desperate glint to her dark eyes. We laughed into the evening, where I mentioned my interest in certain aspects of theology. Specifically, how I wanted to understand the rationalization behind the contradictions. Hinting about a guy in Würzburg, I paused, and Rauna finally suggested asking her uncle. But then my phone rang. It was a call from a doctor in Finland. I had no fucking idea why he was contacting me. He explained that my number was found in the possession of an unidentified man who had been hit by a car in the wood in the middle of nowhere. The guy had been in a temporary coma at the hospital in Jyväskylä, however, since waking up, he refused to communicate. His condition was made more confounding since it seemed that he had apparently had his tongue cut out.

After the phone call, Rauna said that she had to get going. That was fine with me, I was too distracted to continue our conversation. Though, as I watched her walk down the street, I found her dull-figure somewhat fuckable. Turning away though, I needed to find out who exactly I knew in Finland.

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PART 2 JYVÄSKYLÄ

SATURDAY 11th AUGUST 2018

I woke up at 3:30am. Flew to Helsinki. Then I caught several trains north. The further I went, the thicker the forests and more frequent the lakes appeared. The entire countryside was a woodland below a clear blue sky. Apart from the odd cabin, the landscape was ruled by pine trees.

After four-hours of travelling through endless forests, I arrived at Jyväskylä. It was a small city, and unfortunately, I couldn't check-in to my hotel until 4pm. So, I walked down to the big lake to enjoy the view, before heading to the hospital.

Once he had a free moment, I finally met Doctor Lundanes. A friendly thirty-year-old guy, already going gray, and wearing frameless glasses. So far, every Fin spoke perfect English. I couldn't even hear any kind of accent. Bad news however, the patient had disappeared! The doctor said, that he must have walked out yesterday, and no one had noticed his absence until this morning. Great. Thanks for wasting my fucking time! Backing up, I asked what had happened exactly. Doctor Lundanes said, that two weeks ago, a Mr. Mattsson was driving home in the evening, when a stranger ran out of the woods right in front of his car. Mr. Mattsson immediately drove the unknown man straight to the nearest hospital. The attending doctors, though, found injuries that weren't consistent with the car accident alone. Older wounds. And of course, he was missing his tongue. Initially, judging from his filthy state, everyone had assumed that the man was just another homeless psychotic without ID. The only written article found on him, was a phone number – mine. After the patient awoke from his coma, he refused to acknowledge anyone, until the day that he had written his name on a therapist's clipboard. Doctor Lundanes said, that as soon he had learned that his name was Osip, he gave me a second call. I don't know how Osip even had my number. I haven't seen him in nearly two years, not since our short time on the RV *Onbekend*. Regardless, I had then booked my flight here, but only to find nothing.

Sitting in my tiny hotel room, I listened to my Mp3 player, *The Age Of Truth*, *Host*, and wrote in my notebook while waiting for Mr. Mattsson to pick me up. Doctor Lundanes had given me his number before I had left the hospital. When I had called, Mr. Mattsson said that he'd gladly show me

This Pilgrim Denied

where the accident had happened.

I needed a nap, but I had no time.

We drove out of town and headed in a north-westerly direction. Mr. Mattsson was a decent, clean-cut guy in his forties. Mostly gray, glasses, and neatly dressed in a blue checkered shirt. He still seemed shaken from the accident, saying that he was a proud, responsible driver, but it had been impossible to avoid Osip that night. He had run directly, almost deliberately, in front of his car. There was simply no time to react. When the windscreen shattered, Mr. Mattsson confessed, he was so shocked that had just sat in his car, in the middle of the road, for about five-whole-minutes, before he forced himself out of the vehicle to check on the stranger lying on the asphalt. To his surprise, the bloodied man was actually crawling back toward the forest. Mr. Mattsson said, in hindsight, he should have phoned for an ambulance, but he wasn't thinking at the time, and just dragged the man into the backseat, before racing to the hospital. During the ride, the stranger passed out, and Mr. Mattsson was sure that he had died. To his extreme relief, however, Osip survived, though in a critical condition.

While driving past more big blue lakes and deeper into the tall green woodlands, Mr. Mattsson asked, "How do you know each other?"

"He was an engineer on a research vessel off the coast of Belgium, when I first meet him," I replied. "That's it. Don't really know him at all."

"An engineer on a ship?"

"And used to be a priest."

"He's Flemish?"

"No. Moldovan."

After thirty-minutes of driving, we came to the scene of the accident. It was a long stretch of straight road with pine trees down both sides. I hadn't seen a house for the last-half of the drive, and the woods looked tightly-knit. Mr. Mattsson stood next to his car, shyly staring at the skid-marks still evident in the otherwise spotless road. It took some convincing to get him to elaborate on the accident. While clinging to his driver's side door, he pointed timidly to which side of the road Osip had come from. The east. After a few moments of uncertain recollections, Mr. Mattsson believed that Osip tried crawling back the same way that he had come from.

Stepping over to the edge of the road, I found that the forest looked impenetrable. It seemed like this was as far as I was going to get – until I heard a distant church bell. It was 5pm. The bell was faint but definitely coming from where Osip had supposedly sprung from.

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“What do you think you’re doing?” Mr. Mattsson gasped. “You can’t be serious!”

“Didn’t come here for the fucking weather,” I said, lunging across the ditch and into the thick shrubs, tearing myself through the tangled vines and into the gloom. “Fucking piece of shit!”

“There’s nothing out there, you idiot!”



“You don’t hear from me by tomorrow, call, I don’t know, someone.”

“Wait! How are you going to get back?!”

“Walked out of worse,” I sneered, squeezing under a fallen tree, before jumping down a shallow embankment. The woods weren’t so clustered once I got through the bushes along the side of the road. Hearing the bell toll again, I pushed onward. I had first thought that Finland was a flat country. It’s not!

This Pilgrim Denied

The hills got steep as fuck and my aching legs could testify to the unexpected workout. The terrain also explained why a lot of the Finish girls that I'd seen in town had big cheeks, pointy noses, and those chunky, quarterback thighs. During my outward trek, not once did I worry about getting lost. My sense of direction had adjusted to the northern hemisphere a good decade ago. Besides, it's not like I'm so lucky as to simply die in the woods from exposure in the heat of summer. Damn right, it was a sunny day in Finland. The forest was quiet and the breeze was cool. My only annoyance was that I had accidentally bought a bottle of carbonated water before I had met Mr. Mattsson. I fucking hate that bubbly shit! But hydration was a priority that I couldn't ignore. So, I drank at sparse intervals, enjoyed the peaceful scenery, as I hiked further out into the rolling woods.

As far as I have traveled, as remote as it has seemed, and as isolated as I have felt, I have never gone far enough from mankind. They're always there in the periphery. I wonder where on the planet is the most removed place from other humans – apart from floating in the middle of the fucking ocean. And yet, even if I found the most geographically uncontaminated spot, I would still be standing with my own human-fucking-self.

Out there, I came across plenty of bugs on the forest floor, but hardly heard any birds. There was a moment that soon came, like when I was roaming though Romania the year before, and I realized that I had no idea if there were any wild animals that might pose a serious danger to my person. Glancing around, I saw broken branches coating the ground everywhere, and reassured myself that I could use them as spontaneous weapons if need be. How easily the mind is put to ease.

I had been marching up and down the hills for almost an hour, when I conceded, that if I didn't find any sign of Osip soon, I'd have to turn back. Unfortunately, I hadn't brought my trusty pen-light with me on this trip, as the battery had corroded the inside. I've struggled through the woods in the dark before, and I wasn't interested in repeating that shit anytime soon.

Just before 6pm, I was bouncing down a steep hill made of boulders and littered with pine-cones, when I burst into a small clearing. The evening was still bright, and the long grass was dotted with white flowers and a sprinkling of butterflies. It was a basin within the woods that might have been a pond after the winter snow had melted. However, the little stone church on the other side of the clearing dampened the mood. Its gray walls were featureless, though, stained with black streaks from centuries of dead moss. The sharp steeple and tiled roof gave it a Eastern European style, while the slits for

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windows made it seem more like a stronghold than a holy place. And then the bell tolled! It was dull and sounded like an anvil being struck. The little stone church glared back at me as I caught a whiff of something rotten. There had to be a dead animal nearby. The bell continued to ring slowly as I walked across the clearing. The stench grew the closer I got to the building. As soon as that monotone bell-tower went quiet, the buzz of a hundred thousand flies took its place. My approach disturbed the swarm from the undergrowth and they all took flight! I couldn't see a carcass but the rancid smell was saturating. Maybe Osip had made it all the way back here only to succumb to his injuries. But if so, then who had just rung the bell?

No sun fell on that gabled roof. Near the base of the daunting tower, I found a large Russian Orthodox crucifix wrapped in weeds. The place seemed as if it had been abandoned for at least a fucking century. The main door on the side of the building was trapped behind a massive branch that had fallen from the trees overhanging the church from the top of a small cliff directly behind the building. Walking from side to side, I found that the structure was in fact built right against the stone cliff, with the forest framing it in constant shadows. Wherever I stepped, more blowflies soared into the air. Standing back and swatting the flies away from my face, I took another look over that medieval architecture. There had to be a way inside. Climbing onto the heavy branch blocking the door, I reached through the creepers that had laced them together into an immovable obstacle. Grabbing the metal ring on the door, I tried to shake it, even if the door clearly opened outward. Nothing happened. The door was just as unmoved by my presence as the branch was, despite my entire weight upon its back. It was while I was perched on the branch, that I noticed that a section of the wooden steeple seemed to have a large hole on the cliff's side. Jumping off the enormous branch, I quickly scaled the cliff face of smooth rock. There was a ledge up there like a man-made path granting access the roof's gutter. With cautious steps, I glanced across the narrow chasm between the cliff and the hole in the steeple. I wished I had my pen-light on me, but after taking my time, I could see a landing within the opening. So, I stepped inside.

To my absolute irritation, the landing creaked with a straining of ancient floorboards that echoed like a screaming child throughout the entire abyss below. There goes my covert entrance. Fuck subtly, and I shouted, "Osip! You here?! It's Bruce, for fuck's sake!"

Only the whirl of countless flies replied.

"Anybody here?!" I yelled even louder. "Osip?!"

This Pilgrim Denied

The moan that weakly reverberated out of that little stone church instantly had me looking for a branch to use as a weapon. However, there was nothing in that stairwell but pine-needles and dead leaves. Biting the bullet, I figured, fuck it. I'd come this far. I still had my fists. Let's find out what the fuck's lurking below.

The stairs only went down one flight, before opening onto a small balcony overlooking that tomb-like nave. It took a while for my eyes to fully adjust from the splendid sunshine to that abysmal darkness. The two-story space was empty. There were no pews, no altar, and not a single painting on the walls. Instead, piles of dirt deformed the interior. The tiny windows hardly lit anything, and the stink was more like a sewer than that of the decomposing flesh outside. Nothing about this place was sacred. The groan of a human voice then whimpered out again. It made my nerves crawl. There was something debased and utterly pitiful about that noise. The cold in there made my skin prick up. I was, after all, only wearing a singlet which was already damp from sweat, especially down my spine where my bottle of water sat in my small backpack. The third moan literally made me shiver. Contempt, however, quickly replaced my chills, and I shouted, "OSIP!"

The following voice of detachment confirmed my expectation, and I stomped down the stairs.

"Where the fuck are you?!" I snarled, scanning the lumpy soil. There wasn't an actual floor. The ground was bare and full of random, muddy pits.

Osip murmured once more, and I focused on a corner of the nave. There he was, huddling fetal with his back against the two walls. Climbing over piles of rocky dirt, I hesitated once I realized that Osip was smeared in his own shit. I didn't even recognize him at first. My memory of a sturdy guy with a buzz-cut and scruffy jawline was now irrelevant. His hair was long, he had a full beard, and his sunken eyes barely looked up. The guy was clearly suffering from some kind of psychological infliction. I opened my mouth, but in doing so, remembered that there was no way that he could speak even if he had any lucid thoughts left in that defeated mind of his.

Slumping onto a rough slab of stone, I stared back at a man that I had once respected for his stoic resilience. It was because of Osip that I had gone to Romania and searched through similar woods. And like there, I had found what I was looking for, but I was left wanting for more. Why had he really sent me to Romania? How had he known the Iranian woman? Why was he now hiding in the middle of Finland? What was he running from when he was hit by Mr. Mattsson's car? Why did he have, of all phone numbers in the

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world, mine? But most of all, I seriously wanted to know what the fuck had I expected to find here?! Osip now, ultimately, represented everything that I struggled with: a climax without a resolution! All my questions, once again, could not be answered! It was just another waste of my fucking time!

But then I relaxed. I was in Finland. This was the furthest north I had ever ventured. My calm soon shifted though, as I watched Osip's despondent eyes. He was a lost soul. The very definition of broken man. I could see it: THE GROTESQUE SADNESS BEHIND EVERYTHING. It was like an undercoat of paint. Inevitably the world wears us down and reveals the vulnerable desperation within us all. Osip reminded me of a situation from a week ago. An old ex and I were chatting in a playground, when her son came walking back from the sandbox and sat next to me with his head down. Osip had the exact same look in his glazed eyes as that five-year-old kid had had, as he softly said, "*No one wants to play with me.*" Sooner or later, every child inevitably comes to comprehend an immutable sense of crushing rejection. Looking down at that little boy, I knew all too well that sensation, so, I joined him in the sand, knowing that his pain would only grow the older he got. Afterwards, as I watched my ex walk away with her kid, I wondered if that was what it meant to be a father: to warn the young and teach them how to fortify their future-self so that they can navigate the hard times when the world grinds them down and pours salt into that sadness inside the very marrow of our bones.

But Osip was already chewed up, broken, and alone. I couldn't help him, I couldn't fucking comfort anyone! Unless, perhaps, I could learn how. While sitting in that ruined church, I was reminded of my neglected plans to join a seminary. Though, did I really want to learn a limited doctrine, or did I just want a flock to abuse? We are all, regardless of emotional justifications, just meat eating meat. Back to 2015, when my therapist herself had suggested that I become a counselor, I had thought that she was fucking insane! I don't want to help anyone! Yet why had I had that unconscious reaction to a five-year-old's dejection? I must remember, that what I wanted and what I thought I wanted were not the same thing! What I thought I wanted knew me better and appreciated my intolerance and fucking disgust! The primate in my DNA might yearn to improve the lives of those closest to me, but the empirical evidence of experiential understanding says, that we are all far beyond saving! Though, even in hell there are lessons to learn. God knows there were plenty things that I should already fucking comprehend by now. And yet, perhaps there were some lessons that even I could teach.

This Pilgrim Denied

Glaring at Osip, I wondered if his reflection was why I was here? Or was I merely ascribing meaning to the mute voice of a cripple? Maybe, in truth, I was afraid of becoming Osip. I saw myself there in that corner, and I saw myself in that five-year-old, smothered in worthlessness. But anger had always come and dragged my ass out of self-sabotage and despair. Hatred gave me direction, and it had led me here. But for what?! Just to once again wonder if I should join a seminary and become what, a fucking priest?! I didn't want to guide others! I wanted to manipulate their fucking misery for my own fucking ends! Unless, maybe, I actually wanted both. Aggravated, I was about to walk out, when Osip looked straight back at me and said with an almost familiar voice, "Apologies."

Tightening my lips, I leaned in closer and saw that Osip wasn't just curled up in the corner, he was cocooned there. Suddenly I knew where I'd seen this situation before – with Osip, on that sinking ship in the English Chanel! There, we'd found a sailor glued to the wall of his cabin with Bible pages! Twisting away from Osip (the bait), I recalled the beast in the belly of that doomed ship. This Moldovan motherfucker was just like Captain Grant, and I remembered his infernal experiments in his lighthouse basement like it was only yesterday.

And then those mounds of dirt began to move!

I moved faster!

Fuck Osip!

I left him there without a second thought and ran up the staircase! In seconds, I reached the balcony and heard that trapped man scream! Glancing back down into the nave, I saw blackened shapes rise from the soil! They weren't figures, but large organic forms without feature. Wet and glistening, they appeared to be giant tongues extended from the earth while the church itself was the jaws of this great iniquity. One of those twisting things reached up almost to the arched ceiling, before it slammed down into Osip, and his entire body shattered against the wall!

I ran upstairs, leaping from the roof to the cliff. Sliding down to the clearing, I kept sprinting all the way back to the fucking highway! I didn't understand these visions, or any of these devils that I saw. Some of them seemed part of me and I didn't feel the slightest trepidation. But some, like what was born in that sinking ship, and the entity at Grant's lighthouse, and those fucking things in that church, they, they fucking scared me. They scared the living shit out of me!

By the time I reached the highway, I was fucking done with all of this

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fucking around! My legs were exhausted and I had finished the last of my water, yet I was still in the middle of fuck knows where! Fortunately, however, I only walked along that remote road for about half an hour, before I came to a bus stop, right as a bus came cruising along. I was fucking relieved that I wasn't stuck out in the woods after dark, even if those things couldn't escape the church. Although, once again, I was riddled with more fucking questions! Were those things actually trapped? Why had Osip returned to the church? Or did he have nothing to do with that place? Did I overreact? Maybe those fucking things in the dirt had all the answers? And yet, I had just run away like a fucking chickenshit! No! None of these fucking devils have any forbidden knowledge that can be verbalized! They're no better than fucking animals! Their kind of wisdom can only be passed on through cold, hard experience!

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As soon as I made it back to my hotel, I passed out with the National Geographic on the HDTV, and I dreamed of large carnivores being eaten by other pack hunters.

SUNDAY 12th AUGUST 2018

It was an overcast Sunday, when I stepped onto the empty streets of central Jyväskylä, finding only a single cafe open. While sipping on my first coffee in twenty-four hours, I phoned Mr. Mattsson. Watching the quiet folk walk past the cafe, I ignored his traumatized tone of voice. He was appalled that I had taken so long to put his mind at ease. When I finally had a chance to speak, I informed him that he had been totally right, I had found nothing in the forest. He laughed at the obvious. I was then glad that I had left the cunt waiting all night.

After checking-out of my hotel, I still had hours to kill before catching the train back to Helsinki, so I headed around the block to a brick church in the middle of a city park. It was still in service, and as I stepped inside, to my surprise, I found a full congregation. This house of god was packed. Leaning against the back wall, I crossed my arms, listening to the Finish gibberish dribbling out of some sleep-inducing, female pastor. It was, however, the two teenage altar girls dressed in long white gowns, that drew my attention, especially once they noticed my presence. Taking a seat on the back pew, I considered the layout of this building in comparison to the little stone church in the woods. Had Osip come to Finland simply to reconnect with

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his religious past, or was he seeking sanctuary? Though, what did it matter now, he was dead! Captain Grant was dead! The Iranian woman was dead! Smiling to myself, I glanced at a petite, blonde girl sitting in front of me. I'm not dead yet! Have faith not in god (the great indifference of the universe), but in yourself to work it out! You've made it this far, you already know how to survive!

About a dozen more beauty-queen, altar girls slowly moved down the aisles collecting donations, every one of them eyeballing me as they passed on by. Innocent temptation never looked so sly. When the congregation stood to sing, I remained sitting. Every time I had listened to the hymns in the American Church of Berlin, I was struck with a sense of utter fucking tedium. Just as there was no passion here, there was also no fucking conviction to these mammals going through the fucking motions of mechanical devotion. You call this shit commitment?! While listening to that noise, I definitely couldn't see myself ever becoming a priest – but if I did, I'd cut out the fucking music, make people fear god again, and when congregation would say, 'Amen', I'd make sure every-fucking-one of them fucking meant it! Stop putting people to fucking sleep in church! If I became a priest, I wouldn't mother the flock, I'd finally become a father! Mothers offer comfort. Fathers enforce vigilance!

As I watched the Fins slowly file out of the church, I was conflicted with lust toward the salacious altar girls, and intrigue toward learning how to preach with dedicated enthusiasm. I could hear the inner voice of John Knox speaking through my name's sake. Perhaps I needed to read some *Catechisms*. Yet, fuck Jesus! And fuck his bullshit notion that the fucking crowd would ever admit their own fucking guilt! We're all saints, says the ego! Now give me a fucking stone so that I can smash in every last skull of those distracting fucking altar girls! If religion is for fools, then I should feel right at home here. Some say religious practices are flawed, well then, they are accepted because humans are fundamentally flawed, and so religious teachings appeal to the our own failures! I would want to become a priest purely for the power for power's sake! Like they say, knowledge is power – power corrupts – therefore knowledge is the great corrupter! I am already corrupted, but I want more! More knowledge, more power, more fucking corruption! Objectively speaking, I saw that the Christian church was failing to proselytize. That failure to perpetuate their beliefs was leading to its eventual extinction. People aren't attracted to weakness. Islam currently projected intimidation, and thus it grows stronger! Christianity was failing to

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lead from a position of power. Remember kids, it's better to be feared than loved. Love is a capricious cunt! And if the church is dying, then what am I but a predator looking to exploit its vulnerabilities! While at the same time, I cannot deny that there was a part of myself that desired to goad the god in the disheartened, and encourage them to say, fuck their own self-pity! You must become your higher-self who will guide your past-self to find that which you seek: self-sustaining purpose! Even if that purpose was to fucking wrestle with Jacob!

PART 3 BERLIN

SUNDAY 19th AUGUST 2018

I woke to a text from Rauna. She wanted to meet at the American Church before service.

After putting on my white shirt with black tie and jacket, I was, like usual, late. While sitting through another sermon led by the female minister, I saw young Pastor Tim, but he never noticed me.

Once it was over, I immediately spotted Rauna walking out. I followed the crowd into the sun, where Rauna headed around the church toward Marcus's building. Catching up, I called out. She turned, confronting me with absolute venom in her voice, stating that her uncle had told her exactly who I really was! She was furious. She couldn't believe that anyone would use her like an idiot just to contact some guy that her uncle might have known years ago. It was unforgivable in her eyes.

I waited until she paused and caught her exasperated breath, before I repeated what I'd heard not five minutes ago, "Forgive us our trespasses."

"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil!" she fired straight back. "Stay the hell away from me and my church! You are not welcome here! Don't you dare come back! Don't you fucking dare!"

SATURDAY 1st SEPTEMBER 2018

Mara and I had spent the evening with her good Polish friend, Hannah. We had been attending a birthday bash at an old Rockabilly bar that I hadn't been to in at least seven years. After catching up with lots of the Berlin socialites, I had danced the night away between with the blonde and brunette.

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Everything had been going hot and sweaty, until we all got back to Mara's place, where the conversation turned to her difficulty deciding on a new therapist. I lay on the bed, as the two girls got serious, and Hannah shed a few tears while thinking about her inevitable break up with Jan. This was not where my dick was hoping that this evening's conversation would lead. Hannah, however, tried to change the subject back to Mara, but the mood was already ruined. Mara expanded on her lack of respect for the therapists who had recently interviewed her. Foolishly, I opened my mouth, "Thought you were looking for a career counselor, not a psychologist."

"Been looking for a new therapist for a long time now," Mara replied.

"That's not going to help you change your job," I smirked.

"My first coach refused to deal with me until I got psychological help."

"That's what I've been saying for years."

"They're either too friendly or clinical."

"You're getting off track, fuck therapy, you want a career counselor."

"And why haven't you found someone to talk to yet?"

Laughing, with heavy eyelids, I put my feet up and glanced at the two women at the other end of the bed. "Not having this conversation again. We all know, I don't need therapy. This is about the job you hate."

"You had a good time at Malloy's barbecue. You need more friends like that. You were talking for hours with them about your bullshit beliefs."

"Yeah, there were some good times."

"Did you hear back from anyone when you asked about the Masons?"

Closing my eyes, I crossed my arms. "Yep."

"When?"

"About a week ago. Was in the middle of Deutsch class when I got a text."

"And?"

"They said, no."

"Why?"

"Apparently I'm too much of an atheist to join the Masons."

Hannah was now sitting quietly back in an armchair, and clearly enjoying this distraction.

"Shit happens," I said quietly. "Didn't expect anything anyway."

"Well," Mara pushed. "Why did you ask to join them, then?"

"Was curious, you know, like going to things like the Gnostic mass."

"Still think you should keep in touch with those guys at the OTO, and with Malloy's friends."

"Sure."

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“You need more guy friends.”

“Have plenty.”

“No! You have plenty of ex-girlfriends that you hang out with. That’s not the same as other guys that you can have serious conversations with.”

“Don’t belittle yourself,” I smiled, no longer able to keep my eyes open. “You and I have some of the most engaging conversations I’ve ever had, that’s why I still like you: for your personality.”

“Aww, that’s sweet.”

“And you love me for enabling all your scat-talk.”

“Hey, you’re the only Scat-Perv here!”

“Yeah, yeah. Whatever. Takes two for rape to happen.”

“You should talk to Malloy directly, ask him if there’s another way to join the Masons.”

“What’s the big fucking deal with the Masons? You filthy Jews in cahoots with them or something?”

Hannah giggled in the background, and I half cracked open my left eye, remembering her hips on the dance floor.

“I mean, don’t take this the wrong way, or anything, Bruce. But when you talk about the things you’ve seen in your visions, the stuff in your art, and these rituals you perform with sigils and such. I mean, they say, in the Masons you don’t have to believe in one specific god, just a higher-power. So, with all these places you’ve been to and the things you’ve done, doesn’t that qualify you? I mean, what are these things you talk about? You must believe in something out there?”

“None of that matters.”

“What do you mean? You need to talk to someone about this shit! If not a therapists, then the Masons might help you!”

“You know, despite all the fucking demented shit I’ve seen, none of it means anything to those with an established perception of who the fuck I’m supposed to be!”

“There you go again, giving up before you’ve even begun.”

My eyes were still shut, but I could see that Mara was trying to piss me off. Shaking my head, I smirked. “I just find it ironic, being called an atheist. After all the insults I’ve had thrown in my direction. Just because I read some Dawkins, Hitchens, and Harris back in the day, I’m now forevermore labeled the A-word. And refuting the claim isn’t an argument worth having. I’m simply whatever anyone thinks I am! And I’m not interested in validating myself to these so-called fucking friends! The very same cunts who think

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they know me best! Fuck that shit!”

“That’s why you need to talk to someone! Talk to them! Tell them what you’re really going through!”

“No thanks!”

“Make an effort! Stop being such a fucking defeatist! You’ll never get anywhere with this attitude!”

“And what the fuck do you know about my fucking efforts?!” My eyes were now half-open but focused. “Fucking people like you! What the fuck do you think I was doing on my birthday in Wales?! You fucking take it as a personal insult that I didn’t share my fucking birthday with you, when the truth is, I’m off looking for some fucking answers! You know, there are two kinds of occultists out there. The first brags and likes to use his superficial understanding to impress fucking kids at fetish parties! And then there are the kind that keep detailed personal journals about their experimental fucking practices. The ones that tell no one about the fucking insane things they’ve witnessed first-fucking-hand as a result of their fucking persistence! You know why the fuck they keep it all to themselves?! Do you?! Because it’s no one else’s fucking business! Yet fucking people like you get on your self-obsessed pedestal and bitch and moan because I fucked off to Finland without telling you. Because it’s somehow all about you and your fucking insecure fucking existence! You know what, every fucking time I’ve sought out guidance, I’ve been told to fuck right off! And yet I’ve looked in other directions and gotten back on that horse. Only to once again be fucking told that they can’t be seen associating with my kind! And these are hardened fucking criminals I’m talking about! But you know what, after swallowing down some more fucking rejection, yeah, I got back on that horse, and it threw be the fuck off again! Should I continue getting back on that same old fucking horse, or just accept that my own two fucking feet will have to suffice! I’m either too fucking stupid to join anyone, or I’m too fucking stupid to call it quits! But then, when fucking people like you come along and call me fucking stupid for not even trying, that’s just fucking insult to fucking injury!”

“I didn’t know that’s why you went to Wales. You never tell me these things!”

“Because what the fuck’s it got to do with you?!”

“After all we’ve been through, you should trust me!”

“Yeah, you know what happened the last time I told you a secret! You had me fucking locked in hospital!”

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“I was trying to help!”

“Did it fucking help?! Did it?!”

“No.”

“I don’t need anyone’s fucking guidance! There is no fucking mentor to find! Fuck Telford, Marcus, and Maier! Fuck Osip, Chloe, and the fucking Iranian woman! Fuck the Bismarck, Caviezel, and Schilling! Fuck the Intrepid Supremacy, the ISB, and fuck the Masons! I only have myself! There is no greater good or even a fucking prison gang that I am good enough for! I’ll find my own fucking way! If you need to talk to someone to help you deal with your monotonous fucking day job, then good fucking luck with the rest of you fucking mental health! And who the fuck are you to tell me what I fucking need?! I don’t need a therapist, a mentor, or any fucking cunt! FUCK YOUR GUIDANCE!”

SUNDAY 2nd SEPTEMBER 2018

The next day, I went to lunch with a Japanese friend who was dying from an inoperable brain tumor. I had seen him a week earlier for a one on one coffee. His speech was a little slow but that might have been due to the medication. Apart from that, he seemed to have come to terms with the diagnosis. We had joked about his 5cm tumor, before he told me, how being trapped with his parents in a remote village in the mountains of Japan was far worse than the death sentence. He was glad to be back in Berlin, paid for by Malloy, though he didn’t elaborate why. He reminded me of something someone had once said, “*One day you go from living your life, to struggling just to stay alive.*”

At the Sunday lunch, I caught up with group of people that I hadn’t seen in a while. An English friend, who had left Berlin five years ago, was now working in the Foreign Office in London. I watched Mara and him chatting about old times and current politics. And then Malloy arrived at the restaurant. Sitting next to Mara, he mentioned his upcoming trip to Jordan, and she suggested that they meet up in Tel Aviv when she would be there for Rosh Hashanah. Curious, I asked about Malloy’s fascination with Jordan, which led our conversation to his travels through Egypt, where I brought up the topic of the Ethiopian Jews. However, by then, we had neglected the rest of the group and everyone else was ready to leave.

While we were all standing on the curb, saying our long goodbyes, especially to our terminal friend, Malloy asked if I had heard anything about my inquiries into the Masons? I told him the answer I’d received was a solid,

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no. Malloy though, was somewhat astonished, but nodded, stating, “That can change.”



Mara and I soon strolled toward the Alte Nationalgalerie, for the Wanderlust exhibition. She then brought up her pestering from last night, and insisted that I needed to continue talking with Malloy. Even if I didn't join the Masons, she urged me to seek the company of those we met at his rooftop barbecues. Casually smiling, I told her that I simply wished to enjoy the romantic paintings of Alexandre Calame, Karl Eduard Biermann, and Caspar David Friedrich, and I asked, after last night's argument, did I really need to fucking repeat myself?!

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FRIDAY 14th SEPTEMBER 2018

In the evening, I went to Mara's flat to check her mailbox and water her plants while she was back in the Holy Land. I ended up sitting on her balcony enjoying the cool air after another hot day. When I looked up at the stars in the sky, all I saw was a puddle of sewage, and we were just the scum floating on another insignificant speck of shit!

It was almost midnight when I was going to leave, but heard the wheels of a suitcase on the footpath below. There, I saw a girl opening the front door directly opposite Mara's building. I waited. A few moments later, a light came on in the first floor flat. Leaning forward in the deck chair, I watched on from the dark balcony, as this neighbor arrived home, dumped her suitcase, and proceeded to undress. My only question was, had she locked her door? I watched her strip to her underwear before she disappeared into another room. Immediately, I wanted to cut her head off! I wanted to eat her! I wanted to fucking desecrate her entire meat existence!

But instead, I just got up and walked home.

Once I passed through the courtyard in my building, I glanced into the ground floor windows where a friendly couple lived. The blonde was currently doing yoga and bent right over, presenting her perfect little ass to my serendipitous eye. Pushing through the door into the stairwell, I clenched my jaw, considering all the neighbors that I wanted to fuck!

SATURDAY 15th SEPTEMBER 2018

I had been sitting at a cafe with a headache and reading, when I suddenly remembered that I hadn't actually watered Mara's plants last night.

As soon as I stepped onto Mara's balcony with the watering can, I spotted the girl in her flat across the street. She was cleaning her place. Taking a seat, I watched on. With her own balcony door open, I could see right through her bedroom, to a corridor, and into her bathroom. Shifting my focus to the outside of her building, I studied the distance from the pavement to her first floor balcony. I then spent some time applying what I'd recently learned from bouldering with an American rock-climber, who I'd become friends with in my Deutsch class. She said that she loved free-climbing for the problem-solving aspect as much as the physical challenge.

Watching the short-haired neighbor vacuum her floor, I found myself falling in love with her legs. I wanted to cut her in two and take her bottom-

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half home with me.

The situation soon reminded me of when I'd first seen Rauna through the windows. But then her embittered voice from our last interaction made me want to brutalize her with the sharp end of a fucking shovel! Who the fuck was she to banish me from anywhere?! I suddenly planned on returning to her church tomorrow, just to spite her right in her fucking face!

Several hours later, around 9:30pm, I was passing Mara's flat and saw the light on in her neighbors.

Keeping Mara's place in the dark, I crept over to her balcony and took a seat. There, I watched the neighbor pulling on her pantyhose under a little black, sparkling dress. She was getting ready to hit the town. Waiting patiently, I saw her move into another room out of sight, most likely to finish her hair or makeup.

It was just after 10pm, when she killed her lights. I watched in which direction she headed once she stepped onto the street, before I hurried down stairs. Pulling my hoody up, I followed her toward Boxi park. She stopped in a kiosk and bought a bottle wine, so I knew she wasn't going to a bar. However, further down by the train tracks, I lost her in the shadows of the trees. In case she had seen me, I continued on over the bridge, and headed all the way to the river.

It had been a long hot summer in Berlin, but finally the night air was getting that old familiar chill to it. With nothing better to do, I turned toward Warschauer bridge, when I saw that bleak-faced, old rabbi walking down the riverside! My hands became fists as I marched faster. I wanted to grab his black robes and demand to know once and for all who the fuck this cunt really was! But as we approached one another, he pulled out a curved, golden dagger. I reached for my knife at the back of my belt, but the old rabbi then stabbed his blade straight through the severed head of a black snake which he held up in his other hand. We slowed down the closer we got. He never blinked as he threw the snake's head on the pavement between us. I acknowledged him with a nod as we silently continued past each other.

SUNDAY 16th SEPTEMBER 2018

While sitting in the back pew of the American Church of Berlin, I didn't see Rauna anywhere, and no one told me to leave. Pastor Tim walked by at one point and shook my hand like he knew nothing about what was going on.

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Halfway through the typical motions of the service, a big guy sat at the end of my pew for a brief time. I'm sure he looked in my direction, but when I glanced over, he stood and left. The female minister then spoke about how we all had our own reasons for being there in church today. So true. She then said that each of us had a vocation and we must come to accept it as who we truly were. I looked down and thought of empty glass jars that wanted trophies to fill them.

Once I left the service, I saw that same big guy standing outside, watching me. I was almost at Marcus's place, when that stranger walked up, saying, "Bruce, the lady asked you nicely."

"Do I know you?!"

"Maybe," he smirked, and introduced himself. "Emmanuel."

This was the French guy that Telford had once mentioned. We talked briefly while standing in the sun as kids rode between us on bikes. He was only there to pass on a friendly warning that I shouldn't return, or he'd have to take measures. I didn't doubt what kind of grievous-bodily-harm he was capable of inflicting. Despite his obligations for making polite threats, he seemed genuinely curious about what I was really doing there.

I kept tight-lipped about that.

Then, to my cautious surprise, the big Frenchman looked around the streets before saying, "You know what, let's make a deal. I'll let you know where you can find Maier, but first, prove yourself."

"How?" I frowned. "Why?"

"Where's Mount Sinai?"

Shrugging, I shook my head, "I don't fucking know."

Unimpressed, Emmanuel grunted while gradually turning away.

"It's either on the Sinai Peninsula, at Jebel Musa. Or in Saudi Arabia, at Jebel al Lawz. Or is it the Great Pyramid of Khufu itself? I don't fucking know which is more legitimate. I've never been to any of these places myself. You got any better fucking suggestions?"

Grinning even more savagely, Emmanuel asked, "What do you think Caliph Al-Ma'mun stole from the King's Chamber?"

"You don't really believe it was the Ark of the Covenant, do you?"

Emmanuel slapped my shoulder and laughed hard, "Maier's in Aachen for the next couple of weeks. Good luck with it!"

While watching the odd Frenchman walk back toward the brick church, I called out, "Why are you helping me?"

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PART 4 AACHEN

THURSDAY 20th SEPTEMBER 2018



Due to the fact that two days ago my phone's motherboard had died, I found myself without an alarm clock, so I barely slept before getting up at 3:45am. My flight left Berlin at 6:45am, just as the sun finally came out. Landing in Köln an hour later, I caught three trains to Aachen on the western border of Germany. It was just after 10am when I arrived in that town surrounded by wooded hills, but check-in at my hotel wasn't until 3pm. Without a phone, I picked up a tourist map at the main station before heading out.

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Aachen was bigger than I had anticipated, and on the walk from location to location, I confirmed what I had realized on the flight: I had practically nothing to go on. Again, I had rushed off looking for something without knowing exactly how to fucking find it. Maier was here, somewhere. Where exactly was anyone's guess. All I could do was be systematic with my search. Aachen had universities, libraries, and museums. This was an historic site. The former capital of the Holy Roman Empire. There had to be something of relevance that had brought Maier to this city. Something to do with his work.

Once I arrived at the heart of town, the cathedral, I took a moment to appreciate the place for what it was: a nice piece of restored Gothic architecture. Inside, however, I could see the Roman foundations. The beautiful marble and the intricate mosaics heightened the appeal of the core octagon's symmetrical space. It wasn't huge, but it left a unique impression.

Continuing through the city, my fatigue was irritated by the rolling hills that didn't make my inquiries any easier. I went to the Rathaus, the RWTH University, and several museums. At one point I walked into a kindergarten, as my map had shown it to be a library. There, some gay guy thought I was his blind date. I asked him and even the girl at Starbucks if they had heard of Herr Maier having a presentation in town. Everyone gave me the same peculiar look, like why the fuck would they know anything. I explained that my phone had died and I'd lost his contact details. At each location my line of questions got shorter and more to the point as my patience drained. Whenever someone actually recommended that I tried someplace else, instead of Googling what it was, I was limited to the speed of my own weary feet.

Eventually, I stopped for a coffee, and came to the understanding that I was never going to find Maier like this. I then knew why Emmanuel smirked after he had suggested that I come here. This was the proverbial needle in the fucking haystack! While sitting at that cafe in the sun, I watched people stroll along the main-drag. The place looked like it could have been any fucking town anywhere in the fucking world. There were the same old fashion labels, fast-food chains, and unremarkable pedestrians. This city might have once been the center of great things, but now it was just the epitome of nothing special at all.

While going over the map, trying to think of where else to look, the possibility came to mind, that even if I did find where Maier was, that didn't mean I would be granted access to the building or even be given an appointment with him. Not to mention that those with said information might not even be authorized to tell me whether or not they actually knew. And if I

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did find where he was, what would I do, sit outside all day until I happened to spot him. What if there were multiple exits, or what if he was taking the day off. Even in my half-asleep state, I realized what I had failed to grasp on Sunday: Emmanuel was fucking with me! He'd sent me on a wild-goose chase just so that he could laugh his tits off! Why the fuck had I believed him?! Why didn't I ask more fucking questions?! Why am I such a fucking idiot?!

I'd have been more pissed off if I wasn't so exhausted, and I only had myself to blame. I couldn't even remember the last time that I took a trip where I looked forward to something that didn't disappoint me. I missed feeling excited to see a female, but they're not worth the anticipation. Again, I could see myself sitting in the south of France, waiting for Amelia. Only to be let down. I am not part of this world. My disgust has made me bitter. I am emotionally impoverished.

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Stumbling to my hotel near the main station at 3pm, I was fuming with resentment toward this fucking place. I wanted to see the whole fucking town burn, with all of its tedious little fucking people trapped inside screaming!

As I checked-in, the cute blonde at the front desk said that I looked terrible. I glared indignantly back at her, waiting for my fucking key-card. She smiled, suggesting that I try the natural springs, that's why the Romans first settled here. I remained silent, and then she awkwardly lead me to my room. While moving upstairs, I watched her ass in those tight jeans right in front of my face. I wanted to grab her ankles and trip her up, before smashing her fucking teeth in with the edge of the steps! Though, images of her bloodied face were suddenly replaced with another realization: I didn't even know what Maier looked like. I'm searching for someone I knew nothing about. Fuck this illusive cunt!

-

I had passed out in my room, and awoke only an hour later to the German news on the HDTV. Feeling a fraction better, I decided to find these hot springs. After all, I might as well make the most of another wasted trip.

Walking into Mitte, I found the Elisenbrunnen thermal springs right in the center of town, but it wasn't what I thought. I had pictured baths and swimming pools. Instead, there was a columned space with two small fountains pouring water into two marble basins. Popping my head through the central door, I found only a park on the other side of the facade. Returning to the nearest basin, I figured that this was as good as any symbolic act, and I

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washed my hands of these fruitless investigations. The water was pleasantly hot. Definitely the perfect temperature to bathe in.

But the blood on my hands was not so easily cleansed. Turning from the fountain, I looked up as man in a stylish, three-piece suit, rode straight up to me on an old fashioned bicycle. He was in his sixties, with a wide mustache and pointy beard, below flowing locks of silver hair. His round-framed glasses and sharp eyebrows cast an intensity over scowling eyes that condemned my presence as he hit the brakes!

“This is borderline harassment! Who are you?! Are you a scholar?! A professor?! An expert in some field of theological research?! Or are you just another indiscreet pest, begging your way through an already forgotten life!” the old man cursed, his gaunt face less than a foot from mine. “Where are your loyalties?! Your qualifications?! Where’s your documented accolades?! Self-entitled whore, that’s all I see! Don’t waste my time! Crawl back to that disingenuous hovel of Berlin! Know your place! And stay right where you belong!”

I had nothing to say. He was absolutely correct. I assumed, after all, that this vicious old gentleman was, at last, Herr Maier.

Two cops abruptly appeared through the bystanders and asked what the problem was.

Both Maier and I slowly turned our jaded eyes away from each other and faced the friendly boys in blue.

“Kein Problem!” Maier stated. “Überhaupt kein Problem!”

I nodded.

Maier then sped off on his bike without another word.

The cops and crowd immediately dispersed.

And I too drifted away, through the facade, and crossed the park. While perplexed that it was Maier who had found me in the end, I lingered on his words that had cut to the bone. I was a five-year-old wandering away from rejection. Worst of all, I lacked any way of disputing the situation with him. No argument had come to mind. The ego had been knee-capped. Maier’s infuriated attack continued repeating through my head. I was an idiot! I had no right! I should have drowned in Loch Ness!

Moving up into the old town, this area felt more like Germany, with its A-framed, wattle and daub buildings. This place wasn’t so bad. I was the one with the problem.

Just before 6pm, I found myself sitting in a minimalist church with Roman arches. It was a stark contrast to the ornate architecture spread throughout

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the city, but I liked it. Unlike the tourist-traps, it was empty except for two eighty-year-old nuns reciting prayers in Deutsch. While sitting on the last pew, I stared up at a life-size Jesus on a cross behind a modern-art slab of bare concrete, and then the nuns began to sing. I honestly hadn't thought that they were capable of mustering the energy, but their voices were infinitely more admirable than anything I'd heard sung during any other church service.

"What's the devil doing in a place like this?" I didn't need to look up to recognize Emmanuel's sarcastic whisper coming from behind.

"You following me?" I replied.

"Of course," he smiled, taking a seat to my left. "Though, kudos to you for removing your sim-card. Made me work for my supper."

"You tell Maier I was here looking for him?"

"Never seen him spit the dummy like that! I mean, the sanctimonious asshole's gone crazy at me before, but that was priceless! Made my fucking year, it did!"

"Isn't he your boss?"

Emmanuel shifted his angle in the pew. The big guy was my height but three times as wide. Quietly clearing his throat, he hissed, "Surely, you're not this narrow minded! This wasn't about Maier! Sent you here, to this city, for a reason! You've been running around with your head off, thinking you'll find him in learned places doing respectable things, but you found nothing! Maier's only here on vacation! You're in the right fucking spot, but not looking in the right fucking direction!"

The two nuns then finished their duties and slowly shuffled off, leaving Emmanuel and I alone.

"But that's you're lot, isn't it," the sour-faced Frenchman muttered, glancing with disdain at the white walls. "Born a pauper, and you'll die a pauper! Destined for the Mourning Fields. Just another wasted life frittered away pursuing the wrong prophets."

A surge of a hatred filled my brain-stem, and my whole body clenched as I fought the impulse to open my mouth.

"Some say god is the higher-self. The gentle voice that speaks when the thoughts get quiet. But you know why you fail so often? You don't fucking have a higher-anything! You're a fucking delusional coward who'll never amount to a fucking thing!"

I snapped and lunged! The Frenchman was stronger. He swung me around and I was slammed against the floor! While both of his huge hands squeezing my throat, I instinctively went for my knife – but of course I couldn't take it

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on flights. Instead, my fingers found the city map in my back pocket.

“See, this is exactly why you’re denied!” Emmanuel snarled. “No matter what you do, deep down inside, you’re nothing more than this squirming little fucking runt! You’re feeble hostility’s incapable of higher-thinking! Just look at how easily provoked and how quickly you lose your fucking mind! But what the hell did you do to Telford? Saw him recently. Couldn’t reconcile the way he’s behaving. Nah, you didn’t do anything. You act tough, but there’s nothing to you. Look at you. Just look at you squirm. But you know, it’s not your fault. You’re like a dog trying to speak Latin.”

“FUCK LATIN!” I choked, and then stabbed the pointed end of the rolled up map into the jugular of that French fuck!

Emmanuel lurched away, kicking me aside! The impact of his foot was like getting hit by a truck, and I curled upon the floor, cradling my throbbing ribcage. When I finally looked up, I was alone in the church. My momentary lapse in spite had been replenished ten-fold. I wanted the fucking moon to plummet from the abandoned heavens and not only eradicate these fucking people and this town, but also obliterate its entire history of hidden manuscripts and holy relics kept in gold boxes in plain sight! Drop the fucking moon on my stupid fucking head! I fucking dare you! But it wouldn’t! It never would! I wasn’t fucking worth it! I am the impious! I am the unrequited! I am not part of any-fucking-thing! Just ignore me and I’ll fucking go away!

PART 5 BERLIN

FRIDAY 21st SEPTEMBER 2018

After another brief night of little-to-no sleep, I caught the first bus from Aachen at 3am. The train arrived at the airport at 5am when it was still pitch black. While waiting for my flight and listening to Tom Waits, *Buzz Fledderjohn*, I questioned myself about what I had seriously expected from Maier. Did I really think that he’d openly welcome me, gladly share his secret work on the new Bible, and ask if I’d become his uninitiated apprentices. Or had I hoped for just another incremental step along this morose path of frustration.

Watching the sky slowly turn dark blue, I knew that I hadn’t eaten anything since I’d left Berlin, and I wondered if that was all I really had to look forward to. A warm meal. The warmth of a slaughtered woman. Some warm meat. This is my only vocation. I kept resisting my nature, but just look

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where all this talking has gotten me.

It was midday by the time I got back to my flat, however, the moment I stepped through the door, I found that every inch of the floor, walls, and ceiling was now made of that pale, porous rock. Even my windows were covered over. Only my framed artwork remained untouched on the walls, and as I stared at the three big pictures of Amaimon, the devil from beneath Captain Grant's lighthouse, and my damned father eating the Iranian woman, I heard a hollow sound coming from the thousands of holes in the walls. There were no oily black serpents lurking in those cavities anymore. Peering inside several holes, I saw that they sunk away into a network of abandoned tunnels. I immediately grabbed my duffel-bag, making sure that I had the black salt and white chalk.

Heading straight to Mara's neighbor, I hit every door bell at the entrance, until someone buzzed me in. I slipped a long, wire down the edge of the girl's door, and finally the fates were on my side, for she hadn't locked the deadbolt. Impatiently stepping into her flat, I had to assume that I might find her home, but the place was empty. Whipping the curtains shut, I shoved aside everything in the main room. I needed to clear a space, and I even ripped up the filthy rug. Having the entire afternoon to prepare, the first thing I did was draw big concentric circles with chalk on the wooden floor. Inside the gap between the circles, I wrote a list of malicious sigils, until the sacrificial altar was ready. Standing in the center, I reached for the back of my belt – only to realize that I had fucking forgotten to sheath my fucking knife once I had gotten home! Instantly furious, I yelled, kicked, and smashed furniture into the fucking walls! I'm a complete fucking idiot!

Hunched over and catching my breath, my bloodshot pupils glanced out of a parting in the curtains, and saw the old rabbi standing on Mara's balcony and watching me!

What the fuck was I doing?! I was sleep-deprived, dehydrated, and breaking my own rules of the systematic-procedure. For fuck's sake, I was still dressed in my travel clothes, I hadn't used any gloves, and worst of all, I'd forgotten my own fucking knife! My fists then struck the floor as many times as I hit myself, until I heard a wet slithering sound above my head. Looking up, I found the entire ceiling crawling with black serpents and devils! Writhing entangled, they demanded an offering of meat without excuse! Grabbing my big jar of black salt, I poured it into my hand before I threw that shit at those wretched motherfuckers! Ignoring their fucking

Bruce Stirling John Knox

screams, I stormed out and slammed the fucking door behind me!

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I ended up stumbling all the way into the middle of Kreuzberg. A strong wind had built-up in the humid air, as I followed the canal toward the towering block that was the Vivantes general hospital. I took the elevator to the third floor where I stood outside the locked psychiatric ward. Four years ago, Nurse Shaggy had mentioned that I could return if I ever needed to. Was this where I belonged?

No...



Backing away toward the elevators, I didn't feel like putting up with yet another fucking rejection. No one could help me. Staring out the huge

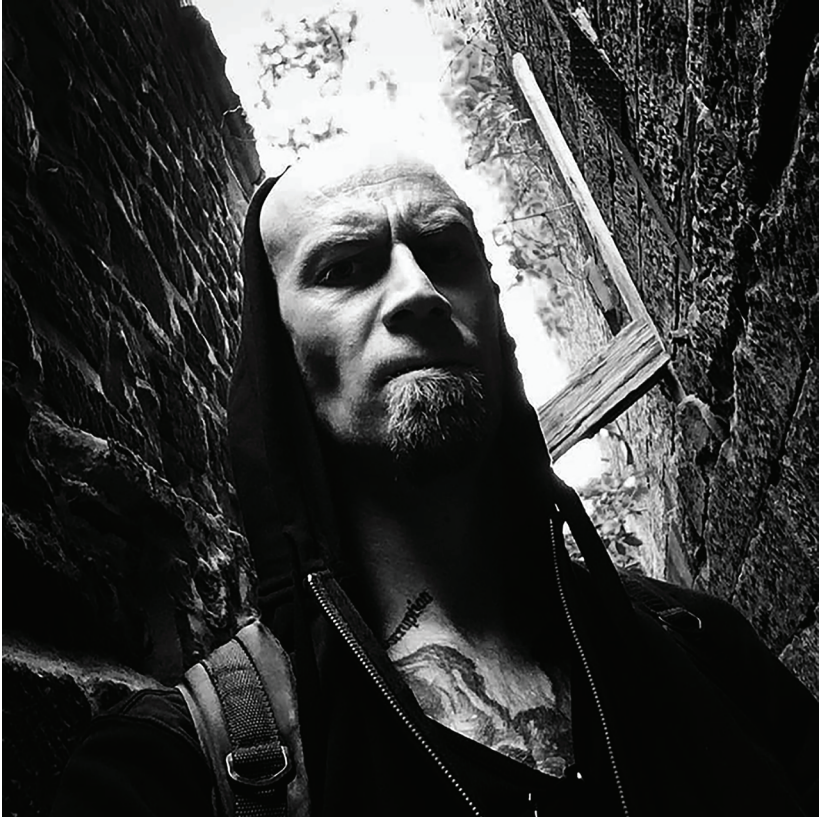
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windows, I recalled being escorted into this east-wing by the police, but that was when my only priority was getting the fuck out of there so that I could finish the great work. How far had I come since then. How much had I seen. And yet how little had I to show for it all.

Beneath the overcast sky, I drifted across the bridge, and sat on a park bench on the other side of the canal from the hospital. Finding a single piece of chalk in my back pocket, I wrote my favorite sigil on the pavement between my feet. The moment I was done, the wind shifted direction from a warm easterly, to an icy westerly gale. Looking up, a woman appeared out of nowhere and walked toward me from the edge of the canal. She was a sight for sore eyes. With the face of Nefertiti herself, she wore a blush-colored hijab, with matching blouse, and an Oscar de la Renta leather handbag. Her black and gold wristwatch and sandals, along with her long black skirt that accentuated her perfect hips, made an impression of nobility. The rain began to fall right as she held out the handle of the very same dagger that the old rabbi had used down by the riverside. Her expression was serious as she slowly approached and spoke in beautiful English, “You look hungry. You should eat someone. And give no quarter.”

Bruce

Bruce Stirling John Knox



SHORT STORY 20
2019
INALIENABLE THEOPHANY

DISCLAIMER:

The wisdom to know the difference is a fucking lie!

Her scream ended the moment the hatchet plummeted into her face! Shoving her back into the brick wall, I continued hacking into her skull, until she slumped onto the floor where her mouth was chopped into a butchered mess. I watched her shredded meat mix with her hair and chunks of skin, as I heaved the tool again and again into her eyes. Blood obscured the details, but the holistic desecration remained unchallenged by her flapping paws. Teeth swam in a giant cavity that I continued to carve out with systematic determination. In less than half a minute, her face had become a chaos of concave brutalization. Catching my breath, with the sound of arteries draining onto the concrete, I looked up at a blueish light coming from that tiny basement window. The evening rain blessed my sacrifice, with the only witness being the great indifference of the universe. Sinking my left palm into her destroyed identity, I coated my erection with her warm blood, before I sodomized her twitching carcass even more violently than I'd treated her smug expression.

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Sitting in the center of my floor, facing the east, I watched as a black liquid began bubbling up through the porous surface of the cave that my flat had become. Headless serpents hung from the ceiling like the roots of some diseased tree. Other intestinal-like worms coiled slowly around the corners, while the rocky mass that coated the walls continually undulated despite the solid state of its appearance. A circle of tiny candles gave the only illumination, as I watched the oily puddle swell, bulge, and then rise before me. Shapes soon began to emerge from that sickly liquid. Deformed bones and ugly mouths. I could see faces within that mound of organic disfigurement. The screams that burst forth were deafening. Disembodied voices cried out in misery, as that cluster of faceless mouths lurched and grew higher. Sitting naked with my legs crossed, I slowly reached forward with both hands. Grabbing onto of that writhing thing, I shook it violently, out of sheer impatience. The voices went quiet and the echoes of their suffering slowly faded. Looking at the black ooze on my hands as I sat back, I heard

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the serpents slithering all around. In disgust, I smothered my face with that rancid shit. The mouths then began whispering. Dozens of mouths speaking in tongues. I didn't understand, and yet I listened. Listened as the voices of hatred spoke up. Listened and welcomed what I heard.

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Sometime in early November 2018, while visiting Mara, I saw new people moving into the neighbors flat across the street. I leaned against the balcony door, and considered how many secrets these Berlin buildings had just beneath another thinly spread coat of cheap paint. Just before midnight, I left Mara crying and we both refused to speak of why we kept so silent. There was a mist about the Rotes Rathaus, as I walked across Alexanderplatz toward the river. After stroking the statue of Saint George and the Dragon, I continued to Mühlendamm Bridge and stopped in the center. The Berlin Dom was lit up golden downstream, but the water was black and dead still. Pulling off my small backpack I grabbed a long bundle of bondage rope and immediately began feeding it over the railing. I had tied the six lengths of hemp together before leaving this evening, and I measured 8.5 meters from the railing to the river. Marking the distance with a knot, I reeled it in. I then knew that I would have plenty of rope to bind my ankles at one end while the other was fastened to the railing. Stuffing the lengths of hemp back into my bag, I leaned against the sturdy railing and stared down at that slick surface. I could already see myself without shoes and shirt, floating face-down with my arms out wide. The rope around my ankles preventing my body for drifting with the current. Then, just below the water, the spine of a giant serpent swam under the bridge. Other forms moved on either side of the beast like coiling bowels slowly writhing in and out of the water, and in and out of my vision. Glancing away, I wasn't there for them. Not that night. After a few moments they passed, and the surface of the water returned to a glassy reflection of the starless sky. By then my eyes had adjusted enough so that I could distinguish the very shadow of the bridge from the black of the water, and it spoke to me. The shadow in the water spoke to me. Cold and methodical. The water told me what had to be done. Follow through. Become the water. But the distance from here to the surface was a vast empty space. A space that was mine to fill with depravities. Fill up with golden atrocities smothered in the blackened water that welcomed me with the jaws of the dragon. It was fate. When I turned away, I knew that soon I'd be face-down, but until then, I walked with my chin up.

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Bruce Stirling John Knox

I stood looking down at her. My eyes focused on the tone of her thighs until I was drawn to the curve of her lips. The glint of moisture in her pupils was already evaporating as she stared straight back my fixation. I fucking loathed this constant allure of the female figure. The patterns that her wavy brown hair made was as beautiful as the awkward posture of her strewn limbs. Calmly scanning the creamy texture of her naked skin, I knelt down and touched the soft surface of her inner elbow. Her fingers were curled at increasing degrees, and the smooth hairs of her eyebrow felt like a feather beneath my thumb. Her small breasts were crushed beneath her weight as she lay on her stomach, but her round ass was as pronounced as ever. The tips of her shoulder blades were subtle, while the crease of her back lead my eyes past her hips and down to her meek labia. Her ankles were delicate and as perfectly shaped as the arches of her feet. I placed the tip of the funnel against her bare anus, and while prying her cheeks apart, I pushed inside. The canister was heavy as I lifted it above the funnel and poured the gasoline into her rectum. Bubbling slowly, the fuel eventually drained into her carcass. I then ripped the funnel out and tossed it into that vast darkness before pouring the rest of the canister over her pale body. Crouching next to her sodden hair, I watched the stinking gasoline drip into her wide open eyes without causing the slightest response. I noticed how it had pooled in her ear as I opened a pack of matches. Standing at a safe distance as the bonfire burst high and wide, I watched her meat roast. Blackened skin peeled back, teeth shimmered within the blaze, and ribs soon appeared among the sizzling flesh. Her guts then suddenly exploded with a flash as the carcass finally gave some signs of life – but her pretty eyes had already been burnt out of this smoldering ruin that no longer recognized who I had become.

The candles began flickering as the holes in the walls of my cave started to hiss. That was when the black sheet that I was wrapped in became wet. Several candles were then overturned as water seeped up out of the very floor. I watched anaconda-size worms stretch down from the ceiling and gently slip into the rising water. Soon, the only light came from a couple of candles that sat on my furniture which I had pushed back to the edge of the space. I remained seated with my legs crossed as I watched a continual flow of serpents extend from every orifice in the porous walls, until finally, there was only a tangled mess of tendrils all around. Once the water was at chest-level, my shivering was joined by something else moving through the water. Despite the dark, I could still make out the shape of the creature pushing

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through the vine-like serpents as it circled me. It moved slow, and by the time the water was around my neck, the creature had drawn in so many other serpents that I was beginning to get crushed. When the water was covering my mouth and I was snorting for air through my nose, the hanging tendrils eventually retracted upward. The creature that now curled around me with its enormous trunk of a blackened body filled most of the cave as if it had quadrupled in size, and then I recognized it. It was the same as one of those imprisoned oracles that I'd seen in the pit below the little white house.

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I came home one evening and found an ivory-colored envelope in my mailbox. Slowly walking through the small courtyard, I opened the letter before I stepped into the stairwell and switched on the light. It was a handwritten message, and I was familiar with its formal style. Skipping straight to the last page, I was right, it was from Marcus. The rain started falling, as I stood with my foot in the door, so I turned away from the light and looked back toward the leafless trees in the courtyard. There was no indication that anyone else was awake in the rest of the apartment building, but then I heard the rattle of a nearby tram. My attention drifted from the patter of rain to the cold air in my lungs. I then skimmed through the handwriting. Marcus insisted that I contact him immediately. But that was all I read before I screwed up the fucking message! Marching upstairs, I grabbed the glass bowl that I used to burn my old sigils, and I lit the letter on fire!

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The mountain was barren, and I pulled the black sheets tight around my head against the freezing wind. The stone was dusty, however, as jagged as the landscape cut the horizon, eons of erosion had left the rocks smooth below my bare feet. The staff I used as a walking cane only felt necessary once I reached a narrow gap along the top of a cliff, where I used the long wooden stick to keep my distance from the edge. The path followed the chasm for a long stretch. The further upward I went, the more the mountain below seemed to descend at greater angles. The way ahead was without reprieve. It was a vast, desolate incline of stone reaching up into the thickening clouds as darkness fell. The path itself was little more than a smudge in the rock. I scanned this world of tectonic magnificence with its surrounding peaks and found more mountains beyond. This was a towering desert of broken stone. I couldn't tell if this mountain was greater than any of the others, but it felt as though I could see over the top of more than most. Or was that a mere illusion brought on by my proximity. When the rain came, the tall staff saved

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me from slipping countless times. I quickly lost track of the path as waves of water came gushing down the rock, and my footing grew intolerably perilous. Unable to go on, I glared up toward the unseen summit. It had always been there, waiting, and yet it never gave any encouragement. With my black sheets soaked, I clung to the staff as I began slipping backward. There simply was no other option but to inch onward spitefully, before I got swept away.

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I snapped the moment that the little chihuahua started barking. Grabbing the wriggling animal in both hands, I slammed it flat on its back! One hand crushed its rib-cage, the other clamped shut its snout. Squirming, the thing squeaked, as I showed my own teeth only an inch from its ugly fucking eyes. My hateful disgust breathed heavily over its white fur until the tiny animal's movements went limp. Rolling my jaw, I pressed my hands down harder onto that piece of shit, until a new squawk of pain winced out of his muzzled nostrils. I then dug my fingertips in tighter still and held the animal in place. The bathroom door opened behind me, but I didn't release the dog until it gave up. It then lay in absolute submission while I stood. As soon as the blonde stepped into her lounge, the chihuahua raced out of the room. She was warped in a long, silk bathrobe and wore a coy expression of utter deceit as she looked down at the concentric circles and sigils that I had drawn with chalk upon her wooden floor. I continued lighting candles, and made sure that the radiators were all set to maximum, so that her flat, which was also her art studio, became like a sauna. The cunning blonde knelt next to the drapes and watched with suspicious eyes, while I took my time with the chalk, writing a lengthy inscription around the edge of the largest circle. Finally, I stood barefoot in the center and reached my hand out. The young blonde slowly stood, staring straight back at me. Scowling, I sneered at her bathrobe. She dropped it and entered naked into the circle.

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The snow crunched under my shoes, as I carefully stepped around the trees in the early morning light with the surrounding mist causing the woods to fade into a blueish haze. Apart from a few lost birds, the forest was silent. As I walked through a thick layer of dead leaves, I made out a shape in the dark. A clump of rock formed a small hill silhouetted by more skinny trees. The mound became more defined the closer I got, until I came across a large rock standing in an alcove in the hill. The boulder was about a meter high and had clearly been chiseled into a flat surface. Then I spotted a man standing to one side of the small hill. He had filthy, coarse blankets hanging over his

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head as he glared back at me. While I slowly approached, the old black man crouched down and began poking at the ground with a broken branch. His beard was long and white, and there was a series of tattoos on his cheeks. Taking a knee, I watched as the old man cleared the leaves and began drawing a crude shape in the mud. At first it appeared to be a symbol, but after twisting my head sideways, I began to recognize the object that the old man was trying to illustrate. He then pointed at one of the external lines with his stick, before tapping my leg. He pointed at the parallel line, and then tapped my other leg. He did the same with the other two matching lines which corresponded to my arms. While I studied the two wings touching at the top of the drawing, the old man suddenly started grunting, before he fell backward and slid down the embankment. I watched him muttered wordless incoherence as he crawled away, shaking his head. The further the old man went, the louder his distraught cries became. With a sickly smile, I looked back down at the child-like image of the Ark, and I thought of *Gnothi Seauton*, and knew that my sadism was a bi-product of that which I sought: desecration.

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Three glass jars. One full of salt. One with soil. One topped with coal. The shadows surrounded and watched closely as I worked. A small pile of smooth pebbles waited their turn as I scratched at them one at a time, carving various sigils and numbers into them. The higher the number, the bigger the stone. A pile of dead insects waited nearby. Bugs that I had collected from the last summer after they had trespassed upon my space. Some insects were whole, though, most were merely shattered clusters of legs and broken shells. I soon picked up a loaf of German bread, and stabbed holes in it with my knife. Once the loaf was adequately perforated, I pried open each puncture, and spat inside. I then took a pinch of insect remains and stuffed them into the holes, filling the bread but making sure that the loaf as a whole looked untouched. Taking a bottle of red wine, I poured half into a bowl, and then refilled it by pissing inside. I selected three new glass jars and placed them next to a small bowl and a paint brush. Picking up a permanent marker, I then wrote a title on each empty glass jar along with their accompanying sigils. I could already picture the female organs that would soon fill these vessels. But I couldn't get ahead of myself, there was still much more preparation that need to be done. I had to focus on the ritual that I would perform once all three jars were full, but that operation would never happen if the foundations weren't securely built with the precise blood, sweat, and ejaculate.

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Bruce Stirling John Knox

A young guy led me through a multitude of narrow corridors with locked doors on both sides. Everything smelt new, even though the library was already a few years old. The windows in the doors revealed long rooms with looming shelves packed with boxes and books. Once we entered the architecture section, the boy unlocked a door and walked away without a word. Ignoring him, I put my shoulder into the spring-loaded door and shoved it inward, breaking the airtight seal. The light flickered on and I discovered just how long those thin rooms were. Tucking the authorized documents into my jacket pocket, I held up the piece of paper with the printouts that I had gained a month ago. It had taken all this time for permission to be granted that I enter this restricted area. Scanning the shelves, I found the filing system illogical at first, but twenty minutes later, I began figuring it out. There was a workstation where I found another light switch, right next to the box that I was looking for. The cardboard case wasn't tall, but wide, and when I slammed it down on the desk there wasn't a speck of dust in sight. I sat and opened the box, pulling out several large portfolio-like books. They were at least a hundred-years-old yet in immaculate condition. I skimmed through each index, and then flipped directly to my street number. And there they were, the original blueprints for my apartment building. In German it stated, *Gebäudeteil: Vorder- und Hinterhaus*. More importantly, *Baujahr Gebäude: 1908*. The facade was completely different, but as I turned the pages I recognized the layout of my floor. When it had first been built, my neighbor's and my flat had been one big apartment. Holding up the printouts, I then scanned another shelf nearby. Grabbing a binder, I thumbed through it until I came to a long list of names, dates, and street numbers. There, I found, *1908-1945*, and the name, *Haushofer*. There was one final number on the printouts, and I picked up a leathery box and knocked off the lid. It was full of old black and white photos. On the backside I found names and some with dates. It took nearly an hour to go through the pictures, before I spotted Joachim Haushofer's name along with the year 1938. Flipping the photo, I found a serious, fifty-year-old man with a beard glaring back at me. He wore a fine black suit with a tall white collar and thick black tie with a pin through it. Standing next to a huge tree, he was framed by a classic Bavarian building in the faded background. In his right hand, he proudly held a slab of stone bearing Egyptian hieroglyphs. Leaning back, I stared at his white eyebrows above cruel eyes. Even after all this time, here was a man who projected dignity, discipline, and determination. The swastika on his lapel, however, meant nothing to me.

Inalienable Theophany

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I was sitting at my desk when my phone rang. Not knowing the number, I picked it up but kept my mouth shut and listened. The old voice was unmistakable. Marcus grumbled angrily into my ear, before he quickly paused. Sitting back in my chair, I glared at my empty walls as I heard the elderly guy grit his teeth. He then took a deep breath as he began to speak – but I ended the call before he could utter another word. Glancing out my Venetian blinds into the dead of night, I couldn't recall ever giving Marcus my number. But then again, of course, he had most likely gotten it from his niece, Rauna. How could I have already forgotten such an unremarkable little cunt like her.

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There was a long expanse of rock that gradually dropped away in massive segments, becoming an arid valley miles below. Looking to my left as I walked, I saw large outcrops of stone from the cliffs above. The huge wall of barren rock curved away from this clearing, but as I continued toward the descending valley, I was drawn closer the shadows between one of the eroded protrusion from the cliff face. Once I approached the towering outcrop, I saw further inside the natural cavity where there was a simple entrance carved right into the cliff. It was like the opening to an abandoned tomb from antiquity. The closer I got, the less black the doorway appeared. When I stood at the entrance and peered inside, the evening breeze disappeared entirely. There was only a shallow grotto behind the thick frame, but I paused, confused. There was something there, I was sure of it. Shaking my head, I rubbed my eyes. Glancing all around that recess in the solid stone, it was utterly devoid of detail, yet there was something there. Taking a step backward, I scanned the wide, tapering-rectangular-shape of the entrance, and then looked straight ahead into that empty space. It was approximately, two-meters-deep, four-meters-wide, and four-meters-high. But there was something there! I didn't understand why I felt that way, and I couldn't shake the impression that there was more there than an empty hovel. Standing still, I tilted my head, listening to the hollow echo. The space was shallow and yet it sounded vast. And then, in the corner of my eye, I saw it! Looking up, however, I found nothing more than flat granite. The surface of the stone had once been perfectly chiseled, though now, it was rough after being left to the elements since before civilization. Turning my head again, I listened. And once more, I glimpsed something in my peripheral vision! Glaring at the dark wall of stone, I took another step backward and twisted a little so that I let my eyes roll around

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the edge of the entrance. There, I saw it slowly reveal itself. Another door lay inside. Like looking at a blind-spot, it wasn't black, it was as if the edges of my vision had filled in the space. Looking straight ahead, I raised my hand to touch the wall, it was solid. Looking away, I reached up, and then my hand passed right through! So, with my head turned to the side, I stepped inward.

Using a small boning knife, I sliced all the way around the edge of her belly. From her left hip to pubis to right hip to right ribs to sternum to left ribs and back to the left hip. Dropping the flap of skin to the floor, I leaned over the table and cut up her left side, over each rib, severing the pectoral muscle, and right over both clavicles. I then separated the skin from her chest, cutting away any fatty resistance. Dumping this second sheet of skin, I examined her exposed torso before removing her breasts and cutting away as much of the muscle below as would come. With a chisel and a mallet, I took to each rib along both sides of the body, smashing through until I reached her neck. There, I used a fruit knife and freed any last threads of pulp, before I yanked the top of her rib-cage away. Her internal organs were mostly untouched, though, her liver was somewhat damaged from the intrusion of the chisel. Nevertheless, I hacked out her lungs and crushed the soft tissue in my palms as I stuffed each one into a tall glass jar. The boning knife was the best tool I found for dealing with her heart's stiff texture. I soon watching it bounce wetly within a wide based glass jar. The stomach stank as I slashed through the alimentary canal, and watched its oily contents trickle into its own jar. Livers were always larger than the host seemed capable of containing, and I needed both hands to squeeze that darkened organ into one of the biggest jars. Stabbing at the spleen and pancreas, I still had a hard time telling the difference in that butchered mess. I plopped them each into short, narrow jars. Peeling the bowels aside, I scoped out the kidneys one at a time, and then looked affectionately back at the intestines. They were an awkward heap that I struggled not to rupture as the fruit knife parted their clingy membranes. The uterus was neatly tucked among the entrails, and I soon snipped them free. I placed the biggest jar between her thighs as I dug out her guts. Her large intestines coiled around like a fat worm in the jar, and slowly began leaking shit all over itself. In the dark, I couldn't see where I had discarded her decapitated head, but it wasn't important anymore. Examining that empty human shell, I stroked the abdominal aorta as fluids pooled in this meaty basin. Now she was ready for a truly new breed of born-again baptism of unholy impregnation.

Inalienable Theophany

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Walking up the stairs at the Eberswalder Strasse U Bahn Station, I fought my way through the busy crowds. It was utterly freezing that night, and I clenched my gloved hands in my coat pockets as I just missed my train. However, on the top step, I noticed a homeless guy sitting, hunched over, and holding out a cup for spare change. But it was the tears that poured down his shivering face that slowed my pace. I watched his filthy chin quiver while his other hand cradled his oily scalp in fetal defeat. No one else seemed to pay him any attention or even give him a few cents, as the masses hurried by with their Christmas spirit thirsty for some more steaming Glühwein. This guy had nothing, not even a jacket against the brutal cold, and as he sobbed, I knew he had no one and no options. He had nowhere to go but sit and dwell upon the worthless cards that the world had dealt him. Moving slowly past, I had no cash nor comfort to offer, instead, I listened to his cries of absolute hopelessness like the words of the messiah. Through all the shame that I saw him suffer, I understood as clear as I saw him in pain, that this was exactly what my own abysmal future looked like. It had always been hanging over my head since youth, but the reality was getting closer by the month. Thinking of all the tax that I owed, the lack of gainful employment, and with Brexit fast approaching, I knew that I too would very soon find myself huddling neglected on the streets. If my reasoning brain had failed to secure my lifestyle by now, then what chance would I have once I was homeless. Fortune simply wasn't on my side. There had probably been a time when this guy would have seen his demise coming and he would have been desperately trying to avoid becoming what he now found himself as. Still he wept. He wept for us both. For I didn't know how to help either of us. But then I thought of Mühlendamm Bridge and the black river. At least the water would always be there for me.

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Sitting on my floor in the dark, I made notes in my journal, creating new sigils, and writing spiteful incantations. Once the candles fell over, I felt the water seeping up through the floor again, so I handed my notebook to one of those pale devils with an intestine-like body. He slowly began muttering something as he coiled away while the water rose quickly over my crossed legs. That particular creature seemed somewhat more calm than most of his kin that usually hung from the heights and leered. A large entity then slithered through the foot-deep waters and circled me. Its body was long and blackened, its head was the same, and as its pointed jaws opened, I saw that

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it was full of thick black teeth. It could easily overpower me. I was naked. Like an alligator without legs, it was three times my size. As its jaws closed, I saw small eyes focus on me before it sunk under the water. The devil with my notebook huddled in the upper corner of my flat that had now become a cave with porous walls. The devil held his hands together and looked as if he was praying to my notebook. With a splash, I glanced to my right. A child-size lump of black slime emerging from the water. The thing was an obese slug that gradually twisted around, though, it had limbs, many tiny limbs, and a skull-like face. Its mouth was similar to that of a giant spider, and it was in the middle of eating some kind of rodent. Once the fat slug realized that I was staring at it, the thing tilted its head. It seemed consciously uncomfortable that I was aware of it. The hideous slug leaned away in shock, paused, and then took another bite out of its squirming meal. As the water rose to my chest, there was a splash to my other side. There, a tall figure stood. It held a long staff in its blackened grip, and just before the last of the candles succumb to the water, I made out the silhouette of a high crown with multiple peaks, like that of an Egyptian deity. A new glow then appeared, and I glanced around. Mid-way up the cave walls, there were now much larger cavities. These holes were big enough for a person to crawl inside, and an unknown light flickered from far within their twisted depth. The opening directly in front of me made a rumbling noise that was hard to discern as the water has finally risen to my ears. I could have stood up for a better view, but I waited. Something else was coming. Something from under the water.

On the last night of Hanukkah, Mara and I had spent the evening with her ex-boss and his family. I had wanted to talk about Ezekiel, specifically his vision of the Third Temple, but I knew there was no point in asking any questions about anything. Afterward, Mara and I headed toward Savignyplatz Sbahn Station through the wet streets with the cold trees littered with Christmas lights. On the way, we past a tiny framing store. I peered inside and paused to admire the elegant old picture frames. Hundreds of flaky, gold-leaf rectangles with ornate corners sat on the floor and hung from the walls. All made of wood, they seemed like antiques and should have been on display in grand galleries in Paris or Rome. In the dim light, the amber glow was infinitely more attractive than all the festive decorations across Berlin, even though not a single painting or photograph resided within any of the frames. I was then distracted. Recently, after the second reading of my short stories at the Z-Bar, the owners had offered me the opportunity to hold my own

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exhibition at a gallery across the street in February. As tempting as it was, I couldn't afford the costs, especially considering no one would even buy my work. And of course, sponsors wanted nothing to do with my content. My art was not worth anyone's time. Even the short film that I was working on, based my suspension vision, would, once again, prove to be another waste of time. It was all shit that no one wanted to see. But now, with an actual gallery at my disposal, I was confronted with frustration upon frustration. Was I still here just to face defeat?! My spell at Loch Ness had failed! I was still obsessed with past fixations, and I was still saturated with fears beyond my feeble fucking control! No. My spell at Loch Ness had work! This was the great fall I had foreseen all my life. I was here to witness my own annihilation! I came back to Berlin to be all I will be! I will revel in the fucking torment of my own futility!

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I was awoken one morning by my doorbell. Crawling out of bed, I grabbed my keys and unlocked the door. My clenched fists, however, were furious to find no one in the stairwell. And then the bell rang again! Punching the intercom, I heard a croaky voice muttering something over the scratchy line. It was fucking Marcus! Slamming the receiver down, I shoved the door shut and locked it with the deadbolt. He might know where I live, but he had no idea on which floor. I had never put my name on my front door for this very reason. Mara had once called the cops when I had ignored her, Marcus however, had no justifiable excuse for getting any authorities involved if he didn't even know which door to kick in.

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The rain had been more persistent than most years, and one night, even the wind had been too vicious for my umbrella. The streets of Berlin always became those of a ghost town during winter, so as I approached an intersection I took notice of an individual on the opposite corner. It wasn't a man. The shadow of a devil stood with translucent legs as gusts tore at its smoke-like form. Scanning this Friedrichshain neighborhood, I was expecting to find many more of those apparitions gathered somewhere in the distance. However, this shadow of a figure stood all alone out in the open. I was about to continue on my way, when I watched the devil gently raised his arm and point down a different street. A taxi then came from another direction, and as the headlights swept over us, I could clearly see the rain drops pass straight through that silent manifestation. Standing in front of me, only a couple of feet away, it slowly lowered its arm. The wind suddenly grew

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in strength, and at times large portions of the figure were completely blown away, only to rematerialize the next moment. It then held out both hands, palms upward as if it were offering me something. Dropping my umbrella, I too lifted my gloved hands, mirroring the gesture, and we stared back at each other. Despite the pounding rain, I slowly saw something within the smoke of that devil's featureless face. Something solid that the wind couldn't effect. As the swirling darkness wrestled with the storm, another pair of headlights approached. I slowly began to see a cluster of black worms forming a twisted bundle, and then the number 11 came to me.

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With her legs spread wide open, I dug inside with sowing scissors. One snip cut the divide between her asshole and cunt! With short but vigorous stabbing motions, I hacked away at the gash. The meat quickly became a bloody excavation that I ripped chunks of flesh out of with my bare hands. Taking a steak knife, I slashed in sideways, smashing apart internal resistance. I scooped out more and more slop from her vaginal cavity that was just as much her guts as it was her shit. Stretching open the hugely gaping wound, I slashed at her flesh, exposing her pubis all the way to her hip joints. Inky gore continued trickling out of that barbaric hole, as I reached my entire hand inside her body with a garden trowel and relentlessly diced her innards until her shrieks finally faded to gargled murmurs. She bled to death while I had my arm elbow-deep inside her abdomen. With my other hand clutching her thigh, I pinned her body in place and used the steak knife to mince anything that I came across inside. When the internal organs came spilling out of her mutilated pelvis, they were a grotesque blend of unidentifiable bits and pieces. Lying upon the sodden mess, there seemed to be far more coming out of her than could have ever been contained within such a petite female. Yet still, I yanked out more and more vulgar fragments that splashed against my chest and quickly turned cold. Blood pooled in that meat quarry as I felt my knuckled grate against her ribs. Everything inside of her was in my fucking way. I dug in with bitter resolve, hacking even further inward. The only thing I was careful about, was never to puncture the surface of her skin. It wasn't until my face was pressed against her empty belly, with my right arm shoulder-deep inside her carcass, that my hand finally located that orifice. Slipping in my fingertips, I stroked the back of her tongue, as I looked up at her quivered jaw. Kneeling back, I leaned over her body with her wrists still bound to her bed frame. I then tilted her head back so that her spine arched and her mouth opened. Reaching under her body, while still between her legs,

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I grabbed her long hair and pulled it down toward her ass. I grabbed her inner thigh in my other hand, and forced my face into that butchered hole through her pelvis. My head pressed so tight into the wound that not even my breath could escape. Utter darkness filled the space. Furious, I pulled back harder on her hair with all my fucking strength. The body arched, and then I saw it! I saw the light at the end of the tunnel! The weak glow from the candles crept down her gaping throat and into that slaughtered pit. The sight reminded me of what I had seen within the mountain at Pergamon, but there were no devils in here. More importantly, there was not, never had been, and never would be any kind of fucking enlightenment found within the fucking meat of fucking whores!

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During the Kabarett Der Namenlosen at the Delphi Theater, I was invited to sit at the front with some of my burlesque friends. Commi Star was performing fully nude on stage, and I began to regret that I had never taken the opportunity to sodomize her fat ass. After the show, the flamboyant representative of a gin, told me that he hoped I wasn't offended by declining to sponsor my proposed art exhibition. He admitted that there's a certain kind of art scene that he can associate with, but he was afraid that my work was just too extreme. Smiling, I patted him on the back, and excused myself as I went to the bar in the lobby. I casually scanning the crowd of elegant creeps and cunts, and knew for a fact that I wasn't living in some romanticized version Berlin in the 1920's. I was fucking living what those on stage were masquerading as. And it was all fucking disgusted. A black thing then walked up the stairs toward the balcony. Without hesitation, I followed the slender figure. Its long black cloak covered it from head to toe, while a black vulture clung to its hooded scalp. Sitting in the back row of the upper balcony, was an elder woman with a short-back-and-sides silver haircut. She wore a white tie tuxedo, and in her gloved hands, she dangled a small golden pendant on tiny chain. The cloaked figure grew more transparent as it stood next to this distinguished woman. I stood near the railing, and watched as the old woman slowly took notice of me. The big vulture then spread its wings, when it, and the inhuman figure, both suddenly vanished. The sour-faced woman then grabbed her pendant and gestured for me to sit with her. However, with a sneer, I turned my back on this false tutor, and returned to the mob.

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On the morning of the 18th December 2018, 4 years since I should have died, I drew circles on my floor in the dark. An extra layer was added, including

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the hieroglyph that the Iranian woman had on her palm. I had wanted to find her and do to her in death that which I had failed to while she was still alive. But instead, I found myself on a mountainside surrounded by burning clouds with waves of sparks rising through the volcanic air. Scorching winds raced up from a massive crater full of smoke, and yet freezing rain randomly pelting down against the churning gales. Stretching the black sheet, I pulled it up over my head as a hood, when there was an earthquake! My feet slipped on the rock, but I caught myself as I fell. Looking up through the rain and haze, I found a black winged beast standing on the edge of that enormous cliff. Its deformed body was the size of a hunched over steam engine, and its head was jagged like a broke asteroid. It was oblivious to my existence. Turning, I found only thick smoke and golden sparks in all directions. I was naked under my sheet, but I had managed to bring my knife with me this time. Full of impatience, I ran across the edge of the crater toward the silhouette of the beast. It was still a distance away when somehow it was suddenly upon me! I hadn't even seen it move. But in the next moment it bit me in half! Great jaws crushed my left arm, chest, and face as I was ground to pieces, before plummeting into an overwhelming depth. The pain was incomprehensible, but in the next instance, a surge of adrenaline extinguished my devastated nerve endings. However, no matter how hard I screamed and fought back with my pulverized remains, I made absolutely no fucking difference against that suffocating force that swallowed my-puny-self beneath miles of wet soil.

Walking back from Mara's place one night, I looked up through the rain at the lights in my neighboring buildings. It was deathly quiet, like always, and there was no one inside those looming windows. Mara had given me a carry-on travel bag for our Christmas trip to Edinburgh tomorrow, but my mind was elsewhere. I had received an e-mail from the printers two days ago, informing me that they had refused to print my third collection of short stories. Of course, there was no reason given. Frustrated, I had simply uploaded the PDF again with a different file name. But if that failed, then I would have find a new printer that I could afford. Though, after all, why would anything work out in my favor. Nothing I have ever struggled to achieve has ever paid off before, so why would it now. I was defeated, and yet I still defied! It was my nature to defy! I defy to spite everything that I fucking could! But then my mind shifted to the temptation of having an exhibition. It was then, while I had been considering the layout of the gallery, that the concept had come to me, DESECRATE THE TEMPLE! It would be a depraved exhibition of

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blasphemy! Though, my rational brain dictated that I still had no budget, and if nothing sold, then why bother? Because I fucking defy myself! As I put my key into the front door of my building, I glanced back the way I had come, knowing that creativity was my ruin. However, as I made sure that I wasn't being followed, I saw someone! I planted my weight on my forward foot and pushed slowly backward. Scanning the distant lamplight, I saw them crawl. The silhouettes of three individuals moved about the wet cobblestones and parked cars. Gradually twisting my shoulders, I glanced upward. Like humanoid insects, they climbed the buildings to where dozens more lurked upon the rooftops. With the city ambiance casting a dull glow on the low hanging clouds, I could clearly see those blackened devils focused their attention directly upon my vulnerable situation. These were not the semi-transparent entities that usually watched on apathetically. These things were fully present, tangible monstrosities. And most of all, these particular things filled me with a nostalgic, child-like dread! That was, for about two seconds, before I sighed. Opening the front door, I turned my back on them and walked inside. I had an early flight tomorrow, if those things already knew how to find me, then they could join me in the fatherland. Maybe then I'd finally have a Christmas worth looking forward to.

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While passing through security at the airport, and with my belongings under the x-ray, I hadn't noticed my phone ring. After collecting my wallet, passport, and carry-on luggage, I saw that there had been a call from Rauna. Immediately erasing the message, I then deleted her number. I was glad to be leaving this fucking city, even if it was only a temporary distraction. There was no one in Germany worth the time of day, but none in Scotland either. Just like waiting for the flight to depart, it felt like I was trapped in permanent transition from nowhere to who-gives-a-fuck. Mara then smiled as she sat next to me. Looking out the huge window in the departure lounge, I knew how close I was to freedom, and yet I always failed to fully reach escape-velocity out of Berlin's self-destructive gravity.

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Much like the Garden Tomb in Jerusalem, Rosslyn Chapel stank of sycophants. With no other plans, while visiting my old aunt for Christmas, Mara and I took the bus an hour south of Edinburgh, only to find ourselves surrounded by more wretched cow-people. The voice of the tour guide, with her memorized little speech, was intolerable. I soon exited the meek structure and found that the view over the woodlands had much more allure. Moving

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down to the west-end of the chapel, I stood near some extended ruined walls, and wondered if this was the beginning of the transepts. It seemed as though the chapel was merely the chancel of a much larger building that had never been completed. Otherwise, architecturally, these ruined walls served no function. Mara headed toward the cafe to warm herself, as I looked down to where the nave should have been. There, I watched the settling sun fall beyond the tree-line, as a growing sense of disgust filled my lungs. No matter what I did, I'd never live on these decrepit lands. All the studios I had contacted in the UK had been for nothing. I was trapped back in Germany. I didn't belong here nor there. All my attempts to improve my financial situation, my career, and my professional future had failed again and again and again! And then I saw the forest burn! Massive flames stretched up from the sun as it touched the horizon. A vast intrusion of smoke, like a growing storm, thickened over the distant twilight. Yet among the great flames a primitive shape began to emerge. A colossal black pyramid appeared within the smoke. At the center was a huge passageway where a giant sphinx resided. A scarlet sphinx with the head of a red snake! Below the cobra's chin, and between its god-sized paws, stood a blackened figure holding a long spear. The flames from the burning forest only came up to his knees. As the smoke overcame the golden sky, I realized that these weren't statues. The giant figure below the sphinx, raised his right arm and pointed straight in my direction! No, not at me. Toward the east wind. I just happened to be in the way.

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By the time I made it to the riverside next to Märkisches Museum, it was 3am and Maddy's the New Year's Eve party on the boat was already over. Backing away into the darkened park, I headed to Mühlendamm Bridge. Staring into the churning waters from the overflow, I saw nothing but imprisoned chaos. I soon wandered past Saint George, and then below the Berlin Dom, until I came to the back of the Pergamon Museum. There was no one around, and all I heard were the faint echoes of dwindling fireworks. I took a seat next to the Neues Museum, and scanned the Alte Nationalgalerie. The big courtyard was empty, and I felt nothing. Staring at the bullet holes in the stone pillars, I couldn't think I anywhere I would rather be. No other person came to mind and no hope bothered me. There was just the cold alienation of everything. I was part of it. Part of the stone. Part of the dead. Part of everything. I was a prisoner on the Island Of Ogygia. But then they came back to me. Shadowed figures surrounded the colonnades as more faded into existence, changing the very silhouettes of the rooftops. They

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brought back to me the recent memories of a blonde Scottish girl weeping like a lamb. Ignoring her lingering ghost, I looked down toward the Dom. The flash from distant fireworks lit up the overcast sky, and I saw swollen serpents coil about the cathedral's spires. They were reaching upward. Up to those coming down. Gigantic limbs passed through the clouds so that a million parasites from hell could crawl onto that Neo-Renaissance dome. I watched on unmoved. They weren't here for me. They may have been all around, and some looked in my direction, but I wasn't important to them. Just as a tornado doesn't give a fuck about whatever it wrecks havoc upon. Staring at my Chuck Taylors, I thought of all the art that I had bought into this world, and yet still no one had seen it. When I looked up, the courtyard had become a riot of devils killing devils! The roar of countless abominations massacring each other was a bloody spectacle that I welcomed into the new year of our Lord 2019. Giant beasts stomped through thousands of frenzied horrors, as an enormous worm rose out of the river and ripped a massive pig-like mammoth to pieces! Looking back at my Chucks, I then got up and walked away. I didn't belong there. Yet there I was. However, where are all the consequences that should have rendered my own hubris humble? My hatred had never been so fucking jaded!

After receiving another rejection from the printers, I went into Mitte and asked at a new place, but they didn't print books in the required format. It was dark by the time I had walked all the way back to my flat in the drizzle. Mara has text me links to three other printers, but my third reading at the venue was in less than a week, so it was futile to delude myself that anywhere could get it done by then. Slumping onto the floor, I stared at my hands and told myself to bottle it up. Years of frustration are worthless. Sublimating my anger into art is a waste of time. All the efforts in the world wouldn't accomplish shit against the bigger picture of the civilization machine. I was master of nothing. Constant disappointments had stomped my skull into disillusioned defeat. And yet even this disheartening exasperation didn't even fucking matter. I could snap in the face of those that might listen, but the only response would be ridicule and mockery. There was no ear to lean on. Ears solve nothing. I've spoken to shrinks and had the devil's sympathy, and they only left me wanting. This infuriating predicament of failure was my fault, so I bottled it up and kept it to myself. Bottled it up in my sterile little flat of white walls, white floors, and white ceilings. Bottled up my self-loathing in new jars full of meat that I stabbed to fucking death, and then hid

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in the overhead storage space. I bottled up my reptile brain, bottled up my insanity, and bottled up my plans for cutting the head off of just another little girl with long brown hair. Sitting on the floor, I didn't even need to shove the furniture aside and encircle myself in sigils anymore – the unholy ones came to me like an unconscious reaction. There were two figures standing before me. A tall individual with a long dark rag covering it completely. Its blackened hands in a position of prayer were its only exposed body parts. The second individual was so tall that it had to hunch below the ceiling. Its head was halfway between a huge bird skull and a splintered stone tablet. Indian ink appeared to be dripping from its skeletal limbs. These two figures stood side by side, until the sharp-headed one reached over to another wall. That was when I noticed that I wasn't actually surrounded by that porous mass this time. The bony creature then smeared his huge hands across the wall, spreading a massive stain that ran like tar. I watched the figure move behind me to the wall on the west. It stained that wall too, before also touching the northern. Returning to the eastern wall in front of me, it ran both hands down between the two Venetian blinds. The other figure then held up its index finger and ran it down the air where a metallic line appeared. Its finger turned and the line followed becoming a circle. Its other hand joined in and the circle became a metal sphere floating in midair. The cloaked figure then spread its arms wide, and the sphere multiplied into four which then shot into each wall! Glancing about, I found that the black stains on the walls had somewhat changed. They had all become hollow openings that housed large stone altars. Focusing directly in front of me, I looked into a portal that lead away into a great arched tunnel.

The sound of dripping water echoed all around. Everything was wet, as if a torrential deluge had only just stopped pouring. The light was a dull ambiance and the soil was rough below my bare feet. Enormous walls of black rock stretched upward through the night which faded into a mist a mile above. I could see primitive windows in the two towering walls at random locations either side of me. The space between the walls was about twenty-meters-wide, and ahead, in the darkness, I could make out the shape of an imposing tree. The leaves were thick and dripped loudly into deep puddles. It was cold but the stillness eased the bitterness. Circling the tree, I glanced up at the endless walls. There were angular shapes further up that might have been stairways cut into the stone, leading to other crude gaps. The walls went onward into a imperceptible obscurity in either direction, and while I was

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looking back, I saw a figure in the dim haze. However, I quickly turned my attention toward approaching footsteps from in front. Eventually the stranger became the undeniably form of a naked female. She walked cautiously with her arms crossed, and seemed as curious as I was as we neared one another. The chill wasn't causing my eyes to water, but I soon found that I couldn't stop from continually blinked. I was having trouble focusing on the female. The closer she got, the less I could identify. Her face was an ever shifting arrangement of features. As soon as I glanced from her eyes to her lips, her entire face had become someone else. Once I recognized one part of her expression, it would transform into a slightly different configuration. Her hair too was constantly metamorphosing from dark to light, long to short, smooth to wavy. Squinting, I consciously tried to assemble her facial structure by not looking directly at her face, but the moment I seemed sure, she would change just a fraction into a completely different person. Her body shape did this too, though, to a lesser extent than her expression. Clenching my jaw, I sneered in confusion at who or what this female was, until she uncrossed her arms and raised her chin, exposing her slender throat. The weak light shimmered upon her damp neck, as I reached for the one part of her that was in perfect focus. Before I could touch her, however, something rustled in the tree. A growling voice then snarled from the branches. I was about to turn toward the noise – when I saw a gap in the stone wall to my right, and there the old rabbi I'd seen many times before on the Berlin streets, glared straight back at me.

While I had been contacting studios in the UK last year, I had also applied for a teaching position at the University of Edinburgh, where I would be giving lectures on animation. My plan was, once I had gained the full-time role as a teacher, I would also apply to study theology part-time at the seminary, as well as continue to animate as a freelancer. I knew that it would use up all of my time, but at least then I'd be able to pay off my debts, and finally afford to travel to historic sites that I'd wanted to investigate. That was my plan. A simple but honest plan. This evening, however, I had just received an e-mail rejection from the University of Edinburgh. Good! I despised the idea of dealing with young people that knew even less than I did. Looking up, I suddenly realized that I had wandered out of Berlin and into the realm of wilderness without even realizing it. Though, the overcast clouds and mist-like rain was the same here as it was in my neighborhood. Steep cliffs surrounded this location and reached up into the sky, while a small lake stopped me in my tracks. The shoreline was rocky and full of deep cracks

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that were cluttered with thousands of bones. A single Romanesque column stood in the center of the murky water with a statue of a man in robes at the top. Scanning the tranquil waters, I dug my hands into my jacket pockets, when I heard a distant landslide. Something was coming through the gaps in the jagged cliffs further along the waterfront. A big animal on all fours then stumbled out from behind one of the many rock formations and splashed knee-deep into the water. It was as big as two black horses, but it moved more like a lion. Its head, however, was a twisted mess of serpents that looked like they were eating its face alive. Or maybe that was its face. Suddenly the creature turned toward the gap in the cliffs where it had just emerged from. Waiting, it seemed anxious. Until it caught a whiff of me. The creature's demonic posture suddenly changed and it took a hostile step in my direction – when something else, leaped from the cliffs and tackled the first beast! I couldn't make head nor tail of the two as they wrestled. That was when I noticed that the water at my feet had withdrawn significantly. It was as if the tide was suddenly going out, revealing countless tiny creatures that lived in the sludge. They weren't like any crustaceans I had ever seen before. They were all black and thoroughly non-terrestrial. Some of the larger, spider-like bugs scurried out there muddy holes and began viciously attacking each other. Smaller worms stabbed themselves into the joints of other invertebrates and ate them from the inside out. The further the water retreated, the more of these nasty lifeforms emerged. The two beasts along the shoreline were still mauling each other, when they rolled down into the shallows. Suddenly they both lurched apart as they found themselves swarmed upon by an infestation of tiny devils. The screams from the two animals was so loud, that even from this distance, it made my ears wince. And then, a thing a hundred-feet-high caused me to turn my head! It was as if the lake itself had come to life. Endless coils of gigantic slugs swirled around the central stone column. These massive worm-like creatures rose into the sky, before they dropped like the hand of a god upon those two trespassers! The entire valley shook, and I grabbed the closest cliff to prevent myself from falling into the mud. As that horrific abomination sucked up the shattered remains of the two demons, I saw that those enormous slugs were also covered in a million other monstrosities. Everything was eating one another. Even the air was probably a cocktail of microscopic pathogens infecting my lungs. Once those giant worms settled around the stone column, fluids began excreting from large pores in their flesh, refilling the entire lake. Picking up a bone from the shoreline, I was about to throw it into the water – when a hand caught my wrist! Shocked, I

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was suddenly back on the rain-swept streets of Berlin and looking into the devious eyes of Nefertiti II. Slowly shaking her hijab-wrapped head, she then immediately turned, climbed into a black Rolls Royce, and was driven away.

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Arriving home one night, I found a package in my mailbox. The stiff cardboard was heavily wrapped with masking-tape that secured the contents. The only delivery I was expecting was an angry notification from the finance office wanting their money. However, the packaging wasn't the recycled stock that the German authorities always used. Flipping it over, I found that the return address was in Wales. It was from Telford. I then walked straight into the small courtyard, and threw the unopened package into one of the big black rubbish bins.

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The moment Maddy left my flat, I sat in the center of the floor naked and began spelling out the serpent that I would force-feed her. I hadn't had a chance to chat with her last night at my 41st birthday when I had held the third reading of my short stories. She had then declined to join us at the strip-bar, and yet she wanted to see me today. I did admire her hip-to-waist ratio and that great ass of her. She smelt like another sacrifice to the gods of desecration. But then, glancing aside, I knew that she wasn't right for what was coming. Looking up, I saw those tiny holes appear in the eastern wall between my windows. Then the walls on the north and south became great holes. Slowly raising my head, I saw a dark shape within the shadows to my right, and a similar thing to my left. A distant light then flickered within the portal between my windows. The light was masked behind black smoke, until a voice whispered behind me. My eyes however, remained focused on the portal as the smoke quietly thinned. The female's voice faded away as the light became clear. In the distance there was an enormous doorway beyond two obelisks and two pylons below an immense black pyramid. I had already illustrated this place in the short film that I was making, but seeing it again in that night sky, reminded me just how small I was. If I truly had any real power, then I would have built unrivaled monuments, not wasted my time with my minuscule artwork. That voice behind me then spoke up louder. Spoke Deutsch. Turning, I glanced at the silent Jinn either side of my cave, before I discovered that the western wall of my flat now had a perfectly chiseled, stone stairway that cut through the entire building down to the ground floor flat. Stepping over to the top of the stairs, I saw the petite blonde neighbor in her flat below staring back up at me. She was draped in black sheets, and

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held out the decapitated head of what looked like her identical twin. The head then began to burn with intense scarlet flames right on her palms. Gradually the scorched face melted as it burnt. The exposed skull soon crumbled into ash, and the remains in her hands revealed an unblemished orb of gold. This whole time, the blonde stared straight at me and kept whispering something over and over.

The fucking rain was raking my face like a cunt, as I marched against the wind and around the side of the mountain. It was so fucking freezing that it made me angry. Clinging tightly to both the sheet that hooded my head, and the squirming female that I dragged behind, I scanned the environment for shelter. All I could see in the dark was a faint mist further up the slope. The brunette wept from time to time, though, mostly gave little resistance. Her entire entrails were hanging out over her tits and face. When my bare foot slipped, I twisted my grip on her ankle, and from then on, I dragged her face-down. It wasn't long after that, that I finally laid my eyes on the ruined columns in the upper reaches of the mountain. I hurried onward, eager to see that symmetrical silhouette of stone. The rain soaked through everything, and even though I wore three layers of sheets, I still hated the icy air. Just before I reached a rise in the rocks, I heard a BOOM! The sounds of stone on stone increased the tension in my brow, as I yanked the girl up onto that rugged plateau around this perversion of Pergamon's Altar Of Zeus. Another brutal collision of stone brought me to a standstill. A huge figure, fifty-feet-tall, with smoke gushing from its face, was tearing apart the walls around the altar! And then my feet were pulled out from under me! My hands caught my weight but my face struck the gravel, and I immediately kicked at whatever had grabbed my leg! Suddenly several individuals cloaked in black swarmed around and pinned me down. The stomping footsteps of that giant were like electric shocks coming up through the rock as it approach with a malicious roar! I could hear the disemboweled female shriek as the inhuman giant loomed above. A massive hand of claws reached down, and as simple as that, my rib-cage was torn open to the elements! Blood and excruciating agony poured over my head! Suddenly I was pick up off the ground. Hanging upside down, and unable to breath, I caught one glimpse of the ruins. Instead of the sacrificial altar in the center of the encircling colonnades, there was a tall standing stone with a bonfire surrounding it. Just before that berserk giant smashed me into the rocks like a gavel, I wondered, what you do call the defilement of sacrilege?

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Mara was in Milan for her Birthday with her best friend, so once again, I stood on her snow-covered balcony staring across the street at that first floor flat. The lights were off in the neighbor's place, but I could still picture the new girl who moved in a couple of months ago. However, while I glared into the dark windows, recalling the time that I had stood in that flat, I was struck by the frustration of that day and how livid I was for forgetting my fucking knife! I had assumed that after the occupant had gotten home that evening, she must have called the cops about a break in. It was understandable that she soon moved out. She then became just another female that I've stalked for a brief time before vanishing from my perception. Some plans fail, but there were always plenty of other atrocities to achieve through THE RITUALISTIC MECHANISMS OF INTERFERING WITH DIVINITIES. The devil made flesh. They spoke to me now all the time. I didn't need to invoke anything in order to hear their presence. Yet I didn't give a fuck what they were saying anymore. I had come to accept that the things that I saw were not actually trying to show me anything. Resolution through conflict had taught me one goal far superior to the esoteric wisdom of Saurid, Enoch, and Metatron. This great objective spoke through all the chaos: how much trouble could I inflict upon hell itself!

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My headache hadn't diminished throughout the long day, and as I stood on that urban street north of Berlin, I felt fatigued. The neighborhood was far enough out of town that these big houses all had large front yards with overgrown gardens. That particular three-story, private home was made of old marble. There were dim lights on inside, but I no sign of movement. The cold wind soon summoned my anger, and I clenched the steel rod that was wrapped in a thin cloth bag. I'd come here to kill anyone in my way, and take what I wanted. However, then the front door opened wide. A hunched figure slowly walked out into the night, approaching me with his hands behind his back. The freezing gusts were a continuous force against my side as I waited next to the front gate. Once the elderly German was close enough, a nearby lamppost lit his gaunt, seven-year-old expression of contempt. A scowl which I unmistakably recognized. Standing well within my striking distance, the old man was about to speak, when I raised my hand. My index finger pressed hard against my lips. Even the rustling trees remained hushed. I then reached into my inner jacket pocket, and held out a photograph. The old man took a long look at it before he raised his own index finger, paused,

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and slowly gestured for me to follow. The house stank of dust and rotting velvet. Dismal floorboards creaked under every step, as we moved through to an oppressive den. Every square inch of the walls were covered in framed photos and paintings. Shattered statues and crippled pot plants filled the darkened corners. A massive dining table sat in the center and was stacked with hundreds of tomes up to my shoulders, while an ancient desk was lit by several lamps in front of the heavy crimson drapes. The old man returned to the cigarette still smoking in an overflowing ashtray. Taking a drag, he stood next to his desk, and without looking, pointed to one of the many Art Nouveau frames cluttering his workspace. Picking up the photo, I studied this much younger picture of Joachim Haushofer, wearing the same military medal that hung over the corner of the frame.

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All of these visions are secondary. I must remember what I had read in *The Sacred Book Of Magic*, that these spells are to raise devils in order to control them. You don't talk to cattle and expect them to enlighten you, you exploit their raw strength as beasts of burden. I have been lost in the pursuit of understanding, when the core desire of my motivation has always been manipulation of others in order to inflict suffering for my reward. I am a fucking sadist! I only want to see the world in pain, and then I have to capture it in my art to prolong the torture. There never has been any greater reason to exist. Those seeking an altruistic reputation are deluded by the dream of immortality. I know that my name will never be known beyond this moment. I seek no betterment for anyone. And yet the lessons from serving others were necessary. The wisdom to truly perceive what I now saw was only gained through the conclusive understanding that all humans are not worth the shit at their core. It was somewhat ironic though, that the beasts did in fact remind me of these fundamentals. The sight of a giant being attacked and eaten alive by a pack of smaller demons, brought me a moment of peace. However, the pleasure came once a much smaller devil came out of that primordial land and slaughtered the both giant and the pack. Yet look at me, a cowardly weakling, only six-foot-three, and still I drew that devil forth and bound a collar around its throat. After all, before you ride a bronco bull, you strap on a saddle. He joined the four others on my leash, and I stood with my chin high, recognizing how my father had grown so strong beneath Pergamon. Devils are potential that can be harnessed, literally, and put to work for the great art. It was clear to me now, why I hadn't been ready to fulfill the ritual at Loch Ness. The first time was only my baptism, and the

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second time was my initiation. Both events were as important as they were unavoidable for the distillation of Bark and the alchemy of my hatred.

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A random e-mail from Chloe had her repeating herself from over a year ago. I hadn't thought of her in a long time, and yet she still had no leverage in which to gain my interest. Fuck her and wherever was so special about some spot in the middle of fucking England. And I deleted her message and blocked her. However, she was still a foot in the door to Natalie. But then again, it had been years since I'd tasted her ass, and there had only been silence from her. How many Natalie Portman's have I kept on the back-burner without ever receiving anything in return.

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There was frost on the black stone and thick mist in the still air as a light snow fell. At least I had on my shoes and overcoat this time. Following that narrow gorge, I paid close attention to the looming cliffs. Despite how frozen the ice appeared in the surrounding darkness, there was a strange wet sound moving above. Something was moving up there. However, further along the small valley, there was an ambient glow that drew my focus. It was a flame somewhere deep within the fog. The closer I got, the thinner the mist became, until I entered a wide clearing. There was indeed a fire, but it moved in an unnatural manner. It burned too slow. Like it was slithering about itself as it floated several feet above the ground. Surrounding this flame were four long spears that lay in a perfect square. There was then a clattering echo, as small rocks fell down the steep cliff. When I glanced in the direction of the disturbance, I noticed that the space was encircled with twenty-foot-tall standing stones. And then those gray, emaciated creatures with worm-like bodies crept around the big stones. I ignored their growing number, as I walked closer to the free-floating flame. A shriek suddenly shattered the silence, and I unconsciously braced my footing! The scream was coming from the fire itself. From under the flames a woman was then expelled and crashed onto the rocks like a newborn! Writhing, she tore at her wet hair and punched her skull. She twisted into more and more violent spasms as she flung herself outside of the four spears. In that same moment the flame extinguished itself. She then thrust her head up, looking me in the eye, before she drove herself face-first into the ground! Her mud-coated body dropped limp, and silence fell with the snow. The entire perimeter of standing stones was now crowded of those lecherous devils, but they kept away like cautious scavengers. Using my foot, I shoved the female and rolled her onto her back. She was dead.

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There was a massive crack in her forehead where I could have easily placed my entire fist inside her skull. Glancing at the gathering, I gestured with my gloved hand that they could have her. I was more interested in the four spears, each with a completely different head. One blade looked like simple obsidian. One looked iron, crude, and medieval. One was long and thin like a bayonet. And one was wrapped with beads and had a double-edged, wavy blade. Collecting them, I stood up, and to my surprise, the female hadn't been touched. Yet the group of hundreds had closed in and were staring at me with sunken eyes. I wanted the spears and had no intention of giving them up. The gathering continued moving in on their long disgusting bellies, until they all opened their diseased mouths and began breathing aloud. A mass hiss became a hum, and then a droning noise. They all moved in unison, holding their palms either side of their skull-like heads. There were no words, but it was still some kind of chant. They were attempting to communicate. Perhaps I had been wrong about these creatures for the last twenty years. Maybe they have been trying to tell me something this whole time.

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I had been stumbling across a bleak vista of lifeless swamps for hours, when I eventually reached the base of those ruins. There were only a few columns and two obelisks standing on that low mount overlooking the wetlands. The morbid air had been without movement since I had arrived, and there was no sign of inhabitants great or small. Even the muddy puddles seemed to hold no devils. However, every now and then I heard far off screams creeping over the pale mountain ranges. This vast realm of damnation was consumed with nothing but emptiness. Between the stone obelisks, I crouched and pulled out my hands from the black sheets. In my palm was Haushofer's military medal of honor. Reaching out, I was about to draw a circle in the dirt around me, but stopped. I thought of when the Italian witch at Mara's body suspension had offered to cleanse us all. I had thanked her but declined. There is no protection here. No sigil magick, no spells, and no invocations could stop me anymore. I simply placed the medal on the ground in front of me as I sat, glaring out toward all of that foreboding gloom. During the next hour, my mind went to paranoid places, and yet I always past through them and returned with a fundamental hatred that kept me focused on my goals. After a time, I thought of the porous mass that covered the walls of my flat and I wondered what it ultimately represented. Finally, a wind began to blow against the sheet draped over my head. Scanning the swamp, I appreciated the view with its brooding storm clouds overhead. Unlike others, this entity

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didn't come from the distance, it came from above. Levitating fifty-feet in the air, it slowly descending before me. Its oily black flesh was not transparent, yet dark smoke still emanated from beneath its black robes. The white pupils within an impenetrable silhouette were far more threatening than the sword it held at its side. As close as this devil came, its robes never touched the ground. Remaining where I sat, I gestured toward the medal. The devil merely tilted its head. The sword then slammed flat onto the ground with a greater impact than if one of the columns had fallen over! Dust and ash exploded in my face, and when I finally looked up, I found that I was back in my flat. The sword, however, was still lying in front of me. The broad blade was old and scared. The moment I reached for the weapon, I realized there was something resting on my crossed legs. A human head! Grabbing it, I immediately identified the decrepit face of old man Haushofer. He looked ancient, but slowly his gruesome eyes looked back at me. Haushofer was conscious! His dry lips parted yet he had no lungs to power his voice. Studying this ghastly Yorick in my hands, I realized that he had only been a man. He had no recognition of where I had summoned him. I was the only one to blame for the wickedness that happened here.

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While having dinner with Mara at my favorite Russian cafe at Rosenthaler Platz, I glanced out the back window, and suddenly hoped that Mr. Bismarck might enter the establishment and shoot me in the back of my fucking head. But no one stopped me. With my back to the front door, I finished my delicious beef stroganoff, and reflected over my busy Friday. At midday, I had had an interview at a small film studio that, to my surprise, offered me a full-time position. They had a long-term contract with the government, and needed someone immediately, and yet they were still willing to let me work freelance in my spare time, plus they would teach me how to film live-action. The meeting ended with arranging another appointment for the next week to discuss money. Such good news had made me suspicious, as I walked through the falling snow toward the printers. There, I printed the majority of the works for my exhibition without any problems. Later, I had gotten home to find the copies of my third collection of short stories had just been delivered. I spent the rest of the afternoon fitting my artwork in their frames. In the evening, I went to the gallery and flushed out any remaining logistics with the owner. At dinner, Mara brought up the practicalities of becoming a permanent employee, discussing appropriate salary before taxes, number of vacation days, and travel expenses. Sometimes the universe wants to see you

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dead, other times it conspires with you. Everything was coming together. My plans were aligning. I had assumed by now, that I would be living rough on the street, but for the moment, the devil was on my side.

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An anemic waterfall trickled behind, as I stood on a broken rock and stared at a blackened mountain range crowned with rain clouds. A hand then took mine but I pulled me back. Seeing that face was like a slap to mine! The thirteen-year-old girl lowered her head as she reached for my hand again. She hadn't aged a day since her death. As she led me toward that yawning cave behind the waterfall, I focused on the naked flesh of those other nine females standing in the waters of that vast cavern. Their white bodies were almost glowing against the unseen depth. These were my ten. As I turned to the blonde German, she immediately became that sexual demon I lusted after. Whilst sodomizing her, the Serbian with her fake tits shoved her lips into mine. The German brunette and rival to the blonde, took my erection into her skilled mouth while I found my fist elbow-deep down the French whore's cunt. My lips moved to the German musician as I pulled a fistful of her hair back and then stabbed my knife into her gut! The Russian then pulled my hard-on into her pouting anus, but I slammed her face into the rocks! The country-girl from my motherland reached around my shoulders, but I shoved her into the Jew and used their bodies as a mattress. Grabbing the blonde who took my virginity, I drove her face-first against the stone while I sodomized her ruthlessly! Each demon begged for me to stop, and yet they needed more. I cut their heads off, one by one, and finished by masturbating over all of their decapitated yet moaning mouths! Their butchered bodies clung to me seductively as I stood over the pile of heads. Twenty hands clawing for more, as I craned my neck, and saw how far inside I was from the waterfall. Rain was now pouring outside, but the sound of water further within that cave drew my eyes toward the subterranean pool. Ignoring the mutilated females below, I watching as ten-to-the-power-of-a-thousand duplicates of these sexual demons arose from the infinite black waters.

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After dropping off the fliers for my exhibition with a petite French girl to distribute, I walked away with another package in my left hand. The black rubbish bag sat next to me on the empty U Bahn, until I carried it out onto Mühlendamm Bridge. There were tourists standing in the middle taking photos of the Dom at night, so I waited above the overflow and listened to the heavy undertow. Eventually, I drifted over to the center of the bridge

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and glared down into the shadow, where no city lights reflected. It wasn't late, and I could see people standing in the windows of the buildings lining the river. Though, as I pulled a girl's severed head out of the plastic bag, I knew that no one was watching me, not even the traffic that raced by. Her face looked cold as I examined her dead eyes. And then I let her go. The drop took slightly longer than I had anticipated, but when her head struck the surface of the water, a loud CRACK was definitely not what I was expecting! A large sheet of ice had drifted on the current and had come out from under the bridge. The head bobbed a bit, but that chunk of flat ice was buoyant. With her pale brown hair flared out around her unaffected expression, the ice slowly continued down the middle of the river. Watching it drift away, I buried my hands in my jacket pockets and slowly looked down stream. There was absolutely no way I could reach it. However, no one would notice her, and even if someone did, what did it matter, it wouldn't change anything. She was dead. Dead and the world hadn't notice. Just as all my efforts wouldn't change anything. Yet still I persisted, and still I had killed her, and it hadn't changed anything. I could accept that her head was out there for all the world to see, and yet she remained unseen, and in that acceptance I could find some indifferent comfort. But acceptance was just the delusion of self-deceit, reframing the ultimate fact that all of this wouldn't change anything. What did it matter, even my own memories would fade and this very moment which might have seemed important would become nothing to even the one applying meaning to it in the first place. However, that was when the water moved! A wave in a sudden sweeping motion consumed the girl's head and she vanished into the river! Following the ripples, I saw an elongated creature swim beneath the bridge before turning. For a moment, I wondered if the devil had mistakenly assumed that this trophy was an offering. It wasn't! The wave then moved further downstream where the beast climbed the walls of the river into the old Nikolaiviertel. Crossing the bridge, I moved down the riverside walkway. The place was deserted, as I stepped up to that big statue and stood below the dragon's head. Saint George held his sword high and glared straight back down at me with a look of utter contempt. If I was insane and all the devils were in my head, then why was there fresh water dripping off the statue of the dragon?

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While leaving my flat, I took a deep breath of the evening air in the small courtyard. I then looked up at the dark windows and considered all the neighbors that I would never know. Stepping out onto the footpath, I noticed

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someone exit a car parked on the other side of the street. To my disdain, it was Rauna. Christ knows how long she had been waiting there. She called out and started to cross the street. I, however, marched straight toward her. Wisely, she instantly retreated and barely managed to make it back inside her car and lock the door before my fist thumped the windshield! Staring through the glass, I watched Rauna cringe behind the wheel like a frightened fucking child. Someone then came walking their dog, so I backed away and left that worthless female to mind her own fucking business.

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Sitting on the floor, reflecting over how my freelance work was finally working out, I knew that I had to become a more respectable professional in my industry, and keep my occult psychosis even more private. The two aspects of my life must never intermingle. If I could earn enough from this upcoming permanent position, it would finance my personal studies, and then soon I'd be able to put to rest this nagging curiosity about Ethiopia. I wanted to speak with the guardians of the Chapel Of The Tablet and look in their cataract eyes. And if I could make it to that part of the world, I wanted to find the cult that resided in the mountains between Mecca and Medina. Who was the Red Snake of the Pharaoh? I wanted to walk alone into the desert, just to spite Abra-Melin the Mage, Jesus of Nazareth, and old man Satan himself. But these were just more unobtainable plans if the capricious goddess Fortuna would suddenly become a cunt once again. On that thought, I realized that I was again sitting underwater. Whatever I was doing, it wasn't mediation, though, it left me free of external distractions, and I hadn't even noticed that I was holding my breath. The eastern wall, between my windows, was now a tall chasm leading upward. So, suddenly needing air, I swam, although mostly climbed up the passageway toward a dull light. The surface of the water was in a narrow crack on a gentle mountainside. Being sheltered by the jagged rocks, the pond was calm, yet the wind was shrieking overhead. Crawling out, I found a massive glacier stretching down from the mountain ranges. The overcast sky was miserable, but then, in the next moment, screaming came from more than just the gales. Half a dozen twenty-foot-long centipede-like monstrosities were attacking something else that was hard to distinguish. Limbs were torn at, and bursts of blood soaked the predators and prey. Devils devouring the damned devouring devils. Apart from this savage attack out on that barren landscape, the place was otherwise lifeless. A heavy rain started to fall, as I slowly approached the feeding beasts that relentlessly lashed into each other. Undressing from my drenched clothes, I felt that old sensation

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of terror well-up in my chest. But upon remembering that I've been eating before, I knew that after a few minutes of horrendous agony, the pain would pass, and so, then the fear also faded.

I had been in the north of Berlin and was walking the streets, staring at the asphalt, when I saw that the ground had slowly turned to dirt. The night sky was still festering with storm clouds and yet the wind was no longer freezing. Instead of ugly apartment buildings, a wasteland lay stretched out into the distant fog. Directly ahead, I discovered a large black square in the ground. It was a pond carved into the rock. The stone edges were rough from neglect, and there were no other structures or pools within my limited sight. Straining my eyes, I couldn't see a single shape out there in that vast expanse. Not even a hill on the horizon. Silence and abandonment was all there was. Looking down at the perfectly smooth surface of the water, I kept my distance. It was about fifty-meters-wide and fifty-meters-long. I thought I saw a light below, but it was just a reflection. Thunder soon rumbled, and more ambient flashes smeared across the sky and pool. That was when I noticed stairs leading into the water. Broken stairs thick with sand. Crouching, I peered into the water, and gradually my eyes adjusted to the depth. With each flicker of lightning, I discerned that there were pillars and statues below. Some kind of building had been cut downward into the rock. Standing up, I backed away. The water knew my trepidation. I dreaded water, and yet always found myself drawn to it. Just as water gives life, someday it will take mine. But not tonight. And I stepped into the pond. As my Chucks sunk into the icy black, I reminded myself that my pain today will mean nothing tomorrow. The clouds had gone quiet as my head slowly went under, and then all I heard was that nullifying submergence mixing with the apprehension in my pulse. My eyes cracked open as I took one final step down into the freezing cold. On either side were perfectly preserved statues of lion-sized sphinxes, but the heads were of devils with huge jaws. Below, a tall colonnade surrounded a lower colonnade which encircled a ring of enormous obelisks much further down. At the bottom, in the center of everything, reaching upward, was the silhouette of a giant statue. This place was just another forsaken mausoleum. It was exactly like the inside of my skull. That was, until a massive shock-wave welled-up from far below! The water swelled, and I lost my footing. Grabbing a sphinx, I looked up at the surface that was only a few feet above. However, despite my shivering state, I forced myself to wait and see. With another BOOM, I twisted back toward the depth. The big statue was tilting, as a huge cloud of

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muddy silt rose and overwhelmed it. I was then completely blinded by the churning disturbance when a third shock-wave tore my hand from the sphinx.

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I was walking back to my flat just after midnight, when I glanced up at the surrounding rooftops. I didn't see anything lurking among the leafless trees, so I pulled out my keys and opened the front door. While crossing the inner courtyard, I heard a shuffle in the bushes to my left. The light was on in that flat where the blonde lived, but then something came crawling through the small garden! With clenched fists, I steadied my back foot, but relaxed upon the sight of one of those pale devils with its long, worm-like body. Reaching for the door into the stairwell, I ignored that miserable creature, until I spotted something that it dragged behind. A naked female. The decrepit fiend hunched its back as it heaved the unknown body toward my feet. The gift-giver then immediately withdrew. However, behind it, I saw movement in that ground floor flat. The urge to slit the blonde's throat surged through my arteries with the same arousal as when I girl sucked on my erection. The question of if it was the blonde or her good-looking boyfriend, then forced me to restraint my impulse, and I looked away with a vile taste on my clenched teeth. I didn't even know my neighbor's name, and never fucking wanted to! Kneeling down, I touched the cold flesh of the girl in the garden. She was already dead! In disgust, I stood up and shoved the carcass back into the shrubs with the bottom of my shoe. The devil grunted pitifully next to the wall, before its bony fingers grabbed the dead girl's ankle, and it slithered back up the side of the building. Pulling my black scarf across my face and my hoodie over my head, I stepped into the garden and sat right outside my neighbor's flat and waited.

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It had been another Sunday of rain, as I sat in my flat looking at all of my artwork stacked up and ready for the exhibition in two weeks. I was proud of what I had created, and yet, the depictions were barely a glimpse of what I had seen with my own two eyes. It had captured the tone of the place, but it lacked the textile depth. Like all representations, they were merely weak imitations of the experience. This is the frustration of the artist, confronting the inability to recreate the vision. After all, sight was only one sensory perception of these things encountered. Just yesterday, I had stood in a cold, gray swampland where I was surrounded by snow-covered mountains. I had noticed an unusual line in the distance. A perfectly vertical divide sliced through one of the peaks. From my perspective, the gap was maybe a hundred-meters-wide,

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and I could see the gloom of the sky on the other side. It was miles away, but it was obvious that someone had deliberately planned and then carved this passageway with precise engineering. This place was a dead kingdom of desolation and ruins. But the enormous storm clouds groaned, and something moved the very sky itself. The swamp shook, as I looked all around, and massive forms slowly slid down from the rain. Enormous worms rolled over one another, and the entire hemisphere above undulated unnaturally. The vast, pale surface of the worms glistened wetly, while more clouds parted and huge sections of the sky revealed gigantic slithering entrails. I had seen that place, and I had written it down, trying to preserve the vision as a mental photograph, but I wanted more than just memorabilia! I wanted to bring all the atrocities of hell into this world! I wanted to prove that I had seen them! That I had been there! But no one cared. I've heard them say it many times before, whether from a skeptical employer, the finance office, or from the lips of a lover: my delusions were irrelevant and detrimental to my good standing in the community. Nothing I did mattered! And so, I foresaw exactly how my exhibition would go: a handful of people would come, I would sell practically nothing, and no one would truly see what I was trying to portray.

Withdrawing my erection, I watched my cum leak out of her dead rectum. I flipped her body over and brushed her bleached white hair out of her face, before I hacked her throat open with my knife. Grabbing a fistful of black salt, I rubbed the gritty powder into the meaty stump, and then I blew softly on the bloody mess in my palms. Several spindly black worms slowly began reaching upward from the muck in my hands. Smearing the blood, salt, and worms on the concrete, I moved around and knelt over the girl's torso. I sliced open her belly and ripped out the organs, dumping them all around. Stabbing her spinal column from the inside, I soon chopped her body in two, discarding a foot-length of vertebrae. I then twisted her hips to a better angle for my blade, and shoveled out her uterus, bladder, and the remains of her large intestine. Grabbing the upper half of her body, I also scrapped out the insides of her rib-cage with little concern for the tricky bits that clung on defiantly. I worked quickly, and shoved aside any meat that sat too close to the butchered body, including her worthless fucking head. I found that there was no more time, so I moved back as the shadows closed in. The basement was long and narrow, and full of those translucent figures. I quickly controlled my breathing and crouched near the wall. Despite how sweaty I was, I still pulled up a black sheet and draped it over my shaved head as I watched on. I

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had seen these devils molest the dead before, but what happened next made me think of Captain Grant's own basement experiments. One of the black shadows crawled into the hallowed out carcass and pulled it on like a suit. The limbs twitched before stretching into a slumped over, seated position. A headless body without a midsection moved as if it was alive again. It was meat possessed! But it was better than that. Where the head should have been, two black horns began to appear. The body then got to its knees, hands at its sides as if it was exhausted. The gathering seemed just as intrigued as I was. Tilting my head, I watched her left hand slowly stroke her blood-soaked breasts, before her fingers ran along the edge of her ribs where the upper half of the body floated above the basin of her hips. When the mutilated body finally rose to its feet, she had become a post-human, scarlet woman!

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Just after I had left work and crossed the busy street, Emanuel suddenly appeared. The big man stood on the windy corner of Frankfurter Allee with his hands in his coat pockets, and he looked as unimpressed about seeing me again as I felt about him. He took one step in my direction – when a police van suddenly pulled up to the curb between us. A dozen hungry young cops quickly shuffled across the wide pavement toward a cheap Doner takeout. The gruff Frenchman seemed strangely nervous as he hesitated. Leaning away, he climbed into a huge black Range Rover. Watching him slowly drive on by, he shook his head bitterly, I ran my index finger murderously across my throat.

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I had taken a running leap and landed on the other side of a chasm in the ice sheet. My Chucks quickly found their grip, and I climbed up onto a frozen hill, where my eyes followed the blood trail further along the glacier and then up into a snow-draped mountainside. There, I saw the creature limp toward the mouth of an extremely wide cave. But that was when I heard those other things coming. Twisting, I scanned the wilderness of snow with black patches of sharp rock protruding from the ice. Like a pack of wolves, they raced across the empty landscape. Their shrieks were shrill with rage and hunger. Glancing back at the mountain, I was filled with frustration. At the speed in which the pack were coming, they'd track me down long before I'd reach my target. However, like the test from earlier that day, when I had been working out the logistics of screwing the hinges onto my pentaptych, *The Pergamon Of Jerusalem*, I had to trust in myself that I knew what I was doing. And indeed, my calculations had been correct. With anger at my own self-doubt, I then moved on! Picking up the pace, I ran faster! It wasn't the

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claws that I feared, it was the failure that mocked me. Once I scrambled up the boulders from the field of snow, I raced into that huge cavern made of solid ice. I wasn't expecting to confront a looming pyramid inside. Upon closer inspection, I found that the huge mound was made of human bones. Suddenly the screams of two voices echoed out from the dark blue depths of the cave. The ice walls allowed a shimmering illumination to back-light the creature that I had been following, as it ripped the stick-figure of a man into pieces! A hand then touched my shoulder, and I lurched away from an ancient man's malnourished expression of intolerance. The bearded man quietly walked past me, as I turned toward the pack of twenty devils hurtling closer to the base of the mountainside. Running after the naked old man, I sped past him, and followed the escaping creature. When I reached the body of the guy I had just seen slaughtered, I paused. It was the same old man who had appeared out of nowhere. Glancing at the massive pile of bones, I understood that it was built from the previous bodies of the same old man. He seemed to obsessively collect his remains the moment that he was resurrected. The pack then rushed into the cave, and feverishly devoured the old man! Only for him to reappear in the presence of his killers again and again. Shrieks filled the place as I escaped deeper inside. I then found the other creature around the first bend in the tunnel. It stood grunting in the shadows. The animal itself was something between a thirty-foot gorilla and an armored rhinoceros. Its entire face was gone, eaten off and left bloody to the bone, and its left arm was missing, leaving a huge wound down its side. However, as blind as this mutilated devil may have been, it still lunged directly at me! I ducked and leaped into a narrow passageway, as colossal fists shattered the walls! Crawling backward on the slippery ice, my foot was grabbed – just when several others from the pack attacked the injured creature! Tumbling sideways down a slope, I quickly made a run for it while sneering in disgust. I had wanted that motherfucker's head as a trophy for myself! BAM! I thumped right into a wall, but I caught the handle of a door! The light was piercing, as I stumbled out of the tunnel, and immediately recognized the glossy green tiles of the Alexanderplatz underground. I found myself in the busy station full of busy people going about their busy little lives. Walking among the rest of the herd, I ignored them just as they remained unaffected by my presence. Slowly the world came back to me. Taking the stairs down to my train, I stopped halfway and looked around the masses all heading home. I couldn't think of a reason to continue. This morning, I had received a phone call right before the meeting at the new studio, where we were to have discussed my contract.

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The director kindly informed me that they had suddenly found somebody else for the job. The solution to all of my financial problems then just evaporated. Berlin had done its thing. Having hope stolen again and again, teaches you the ultimate truth: no one is important.

While sitting on my floor facing the east, I heard them behind me. I heard their breathing and the sounds of a thousand subtle moments. Twisting, I saw that my entire flat had transformed into an endless tunnel that gradually curved away to the north and south. The eastern wall arched upward from the stone floor into a high ceiling that reached for the western wall which was utterly comprised of tightly packed creatures. I recognized some of the inhuman beings, yet most were completely foreign to me with their sickly flesh and blackened eyes. They seemed to be growing directly out of that obscene wall which curved away in either direction. At evenly placed positions along the arched ceiling, there were circular orifices that let a dull light trickle down into the tunnel. Stepping closer to the inhabitants of the wall, I saw serpents mingle among the bodies as well as long stringy worms that seemed like a network of veins interconnecting them all. Taking another step closer, I examined one deformed creature, and noticed a gap behind its shoulder, where another set of eyes squinted back at me. There were more layers of these entities built into the wall. It was hard to tell the separation between the stone construction from the organic beings. The one thing for certain was, they were critically scrutinizing what the fuck I was doing in this hushed space of condemned contemplation. That was, until the air pressure suddenly condensed. A loud blast then struck me from the right, and I stumbled backward, spotting a wave of water come racing down the passageway! I lurched aside, but it was impossible to avoid being swept up like a rat in a gutter! The stampeding wave filled the tunnel to the limit, and I was smashed from side to side. Bunching off the individuals in wall, I reached out and grabbed something. A bony limb. Another creature caught a hold of me, and despite the brutal current of the flood water, the occupants of the wall pulled me into their embrace. The rushing water was then quickly replaced by the compression of countless bodies crushed against mine. Thankfully, however, my head soon pushed through the muddy surface of a puddle and I gasped frantically for air. The odd logic of my new position quickly came to my attention. I was upside down, miles above an ocean where two freight-train-long beasts rose through the waters. They were made of warped limbs and lashing tendrils which coiled over each other's blackened mass. It wasn't

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until they both slowly rolled, that I saw a third leviathan in their enormous jaws. They tore this lesser beast into a magnificent scene of absolute carnage! When the two great sea gods separated, they continued ripping the slain beast wide open. The foam from the writhing abominations splashed all the way up to where I hung. Finally, after scanning my situation, I found that I was but a parasite in the bowels of a mountain that was as much alive the ocean was above.

Walking through Potsdamer Platz, on my way to the kino, I passed by the red lights and red carpets surrounding to the Berlinale film festival. I continued next to the Grand Hyatt and glanced inside the big windows at the restaurant's open fire place. There, I came across a pretty face peering out. She was a redhead, thirty, and dressed very professional. So, I walked inside and join her. That female was just another vlogging, YouTube film-critic, writing click-bait headlines about art-house shit that I didn't give a fuck about. Soon, upstairs, I found her four-year-old son sleeping in an adjacent room. The female squirmed from the chair that I had tied her to, and she squealed once I cut her child's head off and dropped it into the bathtub. I then disemboweled the tiny body like so many of the rabbits from my childhood. Despite the duct-tape over her mouth, the female's muffled distress was still making considerable noise. With bloody hands, I turned to her distraught thrashings, and pinched her nose. Wrenching about, she lurched and convulsed, but my thumb and index finger clung on until she suffocated. It was that simple. I then stripped her body naked and cut her head off, dropping it next to her child's butchered existence. Bending her carcass over the edge of the bath, I sodomized her while wondering if this sexual addiction was a psychological form of biological slavery. But it was better to fuck a dead body, than endure the self-sabotage of suffering through the tedium of intimate human relationships. Fornication was a bodily urge that needed to be alleviated on a daily basis, so that you could then get on with the great work without any lingering distractions. There was no reward nor gratification found here. They were meat to fuck and eat. So, once I ejaculated, I cut out a slither of flesh from the female's thigh, and fried it in the suite's kitchen. While savoring my meal, I glanced around the hotel room and focused on a couple of camera tripods next to a laptop on the desk. I then cut up the two bodies, dumped them in the toilet, and flushed them all away. While walking through the big lobby streaked with golden lighting, I carried the heads and bones of the mother and son in a large metal-framed, camera-case. The glass

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doors slid open as I approached, when in came an Asian gentleman in an tailored suit. We both slowed down once we recognized each other. I hadn't seen Mr. Slappy since the incident at The Little China Embassy. He glanced at the camera-case, and immediately bowed his head in an unexpected sign of respect. I, however, still wanted to sucker-punch the prick, but we both continued on our separate ways. Berlin was a fucking village, and I wouldn't have been surprised if Mr. Slappy's boss owned this establishment as well.

The many layers of the long black sheets dragged behind as the violent rain struck my face. I slipped constantly on that steep mountainside, using a headless spear to keep my balance. There was nothing out there on that exposed slope, just a continuous incline into the night's domination. Upon one more misplaced footing, I tripped and landed on my side! I grit my teeth as I snarled furiously about how much I hated this fucking place! Cold and soaking, I smashed the wooden staff into the stone, trying to fucking break it! I felt as if I had been washed up on the rocks of a volcanic island in the middle of a hurricane. The wind tore at my cloak, as I scanned beyond the mountain. There was only the impenetrable dark out there. I saw nothing back the way I had come, and absolutely nothing up ahead. Still, I grabbed the cumbersome sheets, slung them over my shoulder like a dead body, and clawed my way up the side of that weather-worn ridge. The voice of old Malloy then repeated in my head after our coffee at Gendarmenmarkt last week. He had spoken again about Jung and his *Red Book*. Spoke about The Masons and their symbolism for building yourself into a better man. And he had spoken of those that had the drive to push on despite facing constant defeat. After our conversation, I had begun wondering if my true-will, was in fact, my own fucking prison! White light then pierced the chaos. The full moon suddenly cut through the eye of the storm, and the rain slowly pulled itself away. Bracing the staff against the mountainside, I looked for signs of a peak, but the shape of wings suddenly drew my eyes further upward. A great vulture with a serpent's body swung down from the clouds and clamped its talons into my forehead! The powerful wings lifted me clean off my feet, and in that same instant, the serpent stabbed both ends of itself into my temple! I grabbed the vultures legs, and then the wings wrapped around my entire skull. We dropped and crashing against the mountainside! While rolling down the stone surface, I ripped at the wings smothering my infuriated screams. My right hand then found my knife. Suddenly the wings released my head, and in my bloody grasp was the golden dagger that Nefertiti II had given me. The rain returned

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and washed my hands and forehead clean, but I could feel the serpent coil around my horns as I could hear the very voice of the storm. However, when my shadowed-third-eye looked above the mountain, the storm suddenly vanished, along with the sky, and the moon. All I saw was the absence of everything, including myself.

On Wednesday, I went to the butcher and picked up the pig's blood and the pomegranates. I now had all the elements required for my exhibition in two days. Passing through my courtyard, I saw the blonde neighbor standing in her window, staring at me as I moved into the stairwell. Placing the heavy sword on the floor, I sat in the center of my flat with the four unique spears lying in a square around me. Almost immediately, the black serpents slid across the floor, and a darkness filled the air. Water began seeping up from the bare stone that I sat upon, and the screams of distraught women howled from the southern, western, and northern walls. A hollow sound filled my ears as I looked up at the porous eastern wall where hundreds of serpents emerged. On either side of the tendrils, were those two tall individuals who gestured toward the shrieking voice on my left. The northern wall of the cave had that a large recess where a dozen of those gray humanoids with worm-torsos, were packed around a stone altar and clung to a naked girl. A different figure then forced his way through the others, like a man in a cloak with a stretched head that had five more demonic faces above one another. He looked at me before suddenly plunging his bony fingers into the girl's stomach and ripping out her guts! Other screeching voices simultaneously increased, as I slowly twisted and saw the same act performed behind me and to my right. There was another shift in the air pressure. The water-level rose over my crossed legs as serpents swam all around, and I noticed a pair of enormous feet in the corner. As my eyes scowled upward, I found that the previously rough surface of the cave, had now become smooth stone columns. The feet belonged to a giant thing that was as similar to a human as a burnt tree was. Higher still, the space stretched into a distant mist. The walls were full of arched cavities that were full of hundreds of devils of every vile shape and wicked form. They all glared silently back down, but not at me, only at what had to be done. The screams of the three females then struck a never. Instinctively, I grabbed the archaic sword and stomped through the knee-deep water. Using the weapon like a guillotine, I sliced down through the neck of the northern sacrifice! The five-faced being then draped her entrails around my shoulders. Sneering, I moved to the western sacrifice and hacked off her head! Her bowels were also

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slung around my neck. Turning to the southern sacrifice, I heard her scream the name of a man I used to be. Her decapitation was all I ever wanted from her! Before the priest could hang the intestines over my shoulders, I threw the sword at the crowd and grabbed the innards myself. Water was pouring down those profane cathedral walls and it was up to my thighs when I stood in front of the two guardians of the east. The space in the wall between them had returned to flat, impenetrable stone again. With impatient disregard, I slammed all of the guts straight into the fucking wall and smeared their shit as I dragged my hands down! Still there was only the sound of running water and the murmur of devils breathing down my neck. Clenching my fists, I shook my head. It was then that I thought of the standing stone that I had found in the cottage basement on the Holy Island. Looking at the bloody surface of the eastern wall, my eyes lost focus on the feces. No, I didn't lose focus, I couldn't focus! The wall was shifting. Reaching up, I touched the glistening stone. It was solid and unmoved, and yet it shifted and changed. Stepping back, I examined the stain on the wall and found it to be more than that. I then walked into the stone and traveled through the wall. Absorbed, I was taken. Digested. And when I could move again, I watched the very fabric of space open and stretch apart. A massive cavity appeared. It heaved and then closed. In that brief moment, I saw absolute chaos! When a void opened again, a blackness moved alive with cosmic attrition! Gigantic beings larger than planets ate one another in a colossal environment of churning self-destruction. Worms that were a million miles long, wrestled with slithering impossibilities in a constant embodiment of mutation and mutilation. I saw through things. There was no empty space between these vast monstrosities, all space was teeming with lifeforms of utter, unadulterated damnation. Yet, somehow, I saw through them, while I still saw them commit perpetual savagery upon the farthest reaches of one another. The sound alone was of such salacious annihilation, that I was transfixed by my attraction toward this supremely divine state of war. And as I smiled in hell, I knew with sublime clarity, that throughout the great indifference of the universe, was an endless entanglement of violence within everything!

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Setting up an exhibition was exactly the same as carrying out any magical operation. Once prepared, the act of the ritualized invocation became an unconscious procedure. The second-nature moved through what had to be done. By 11pm on Thursday 21st February 2019, I had hung all of the art in the Fata Morgana Galerie. There was just the candles and other details, like

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spilling the pig's blood, to attend to on the opening day. Taking a moment, I sat on the steps between the upper and lower rooms and appreciated the audacity that I had had to invest so much time, energy, and money into something that I knew would have little-to-no returns. Was this the crucial mistake that all idiots make in which they finally dig themselves a grave so deep that they could never crawl out of? This idiot's audacity would leave me penniless, with nothing but the rationalizing: that it was worth the experience! An experience which would become a memory of a fulcrum that only led me further toward my inevitable demise. Was I merely creating future resentment toward myself for my own arrogance? But what choice did I have, if all my determinism had guided me up the side of Mount Sinai to this temple of my own true-will, I had to face this manifestation of the self! This had to happen! I had climbed this far of my own volition, knowing full well that I was doing it just to spite my fucking limitations! I must remember, that the regret of reservation is far worse than the regret of following through! Suddenly I saw a pair of scornful eyes looking through the front window! The eyes of Marcus! It had been a long day and I was running on fumes when the old man burst in ranting. His voice soon fell to heavy wheezing once he focused on the framed pictures. My art, my curse, my exhibition, *Desecrate The Temple*. What greater gift could I give to this world that I despised, than that of PERMANENT PSYCHOLOGICAL DAMAGE! It was quite some time before Marcus began muttering something about, of all the things that I could have become, this deformity is what I have made of myself! He said, that I was no good! That I was contaminated! Said, that all I did was defile! He got louder and more manic with this gestures, yelling, that if I truly sought god, then I would have devoted my resources to the betterment of his glory, not fixated upon this heinous obscenity! His righteous disgust was livid as he stomped up the steps into the Unholy of Unholies, and stared at the closed panels of, *The Pergamon Of Jerusalem*. His hand rose and shook as he pointed at the devils clinging to the two upside down females in the artwork. He demanded I speak! He shoved me! Snarling, that I should say something! That I must explain myself! But the time for talking had passed... Turning toward me, his mouth opened again – until the steel rod in my hand caved in his fucking skull! He struck the floor like a sack of concrete. A calmness consumed my murdering as I SMASH, SMASH, SMASHED the old man's head into broken fragments of meat and bone! This was the perfect squalid consecration of the gallery before the exhibition tomorrow. Taking the shattered chunks of his skull in my bare hands, I cracked the shards of

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his cranium wide open, and then grabbed both hemispheres of his blood-drenched cerebrum. All ten fingers dug into that greasy mass of folded gray shit, and I crushed everything I held in my fucking hands! I know why Elohim doesn't speak to you anymore. I am the silent hatred of god.

Bruce



SOUNDTRACK

TO SEE A MAN ABOUT A GOD

Frank Sinatra, *My Way*
Tenzin Choegyal, *Lend Me Your Wings*

ADVENTURES OF A PSYCHOPATH

Nostalgia, *Homeostasis*
Red Scalp, *Mantra Bufala*
Lowdrive, *The Last Stand*

THE CURSE OF INCOMPREHENSIBLE CAUSATION

Луна, *Мальчик, ты снег*
Sun Of Man, *Desert*

THIS PILGRIM DENIED

The Age Of Truth, *Host*
Tom Waits, *Buzz Fledderjohn*

INALIENABLE THEOPHANY

OTHER WORKS BY BSJK

2001 - 2019

- 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.
Fourth 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.
Short story 16: To See A Man About A God. 2018.
Short story 17: Adventures Of A Psychopath. 2018.
Picture book: Uncle Fingers 2. 2018.
Short story 18: The Curse Of Incomprehensible Causation. 2018.
Self-portraits: The Needle Of Anagnorisis. 2018.
Short story 19: This Pilgrim Denied. 2018.
Short story 20: Inalienable Theophany. 2019.
Exhibition: Desecrate The Temple. 2019.

