



THE MENTALLY DIFFERENT CANNOT BE MODERN

NICK PERRY

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Nick Perry
nickperry.neocities.org

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“Do not distress yourself nor fear, for God loves courage, even if it be in killing a snake, which snake is nothing other than yourself.”

ibn al-Arabi

The Organism is the First Fallacy

Aware that something was in need of change but unsure of what exactly was in need of change, I approached an adult female on the outskirts of town, where she stood in short jean shorts and a white cut-off sleeve t-shirt, not doing much of anything at all. I'd known Corinne for some time; she was my first girlfriend, so to speak, at the age of eight years old. The two of us, at the time, were the quote-unquote ethnic looking kids in the heavily Anglicized third grade, although, by today's standards at least, it's very possible neither of us would be considered ethnic at all, assuming the word ethnic was ever assigned a coherent meaning in the first place.

The world as it stands, Corinne said, as our conversation progressed of its own accord, is entirely objectionable on multiple fronts. We sit, and perhaps you know this as well as I do, and attempt to deconstruct this or that political faux pas, this emergency, that injustice, obsessed with our categories, but it's precisely our categories that must be done away with. It's our categories that suffocate us. It's our categories that send us on these spiraled sojourns of deconstruction, where we emerge exhausted and useless. It's not the various categories and subcategories of human beings that must be deleted but the concept of the organism itself. The organism, Corinne said, is the first fallacy. History begins with the organism, and history is the most pernicious envelope of them all. I stood there, my thirst steadily mounting in the humid air, but not necessarily in disagreement with anything she said.

It'd been quite some time since I'd seen Corinne. The last time was in a dream where she mothered a small child, where I found myself waiting an elongated period of time for my oil to be changed, only to discover two of my tires would need to be replaced, only to discover the

bodyshop failed to supply me with a detailed receipt of the quite costly repairs, only to take a right turn onto the expressway and find the expressway dissolved into fragments of molten rock.

Prior to leaving, I'd asked Corinne, in my dream, to give me her phone number, not because I wanted to pursue a sexual relationship, which I did in the dream, but just in case we ever needed to contact one another in the future. You know, I said, you were technically my first girlfriend, and I guess that means something to me. I feel as though we've drifted unnecessarily apart from one another. Well, she retorted, there was always the whole race thing. I wondered what she meant, but before I could give the comment all that much thought Corinne denied my request for her phone number. In the dream, I felt as though she denied my request purely out of spite, perhaps holding a grudge against me for not doing more, in our youths, to maintain a connection, a friendship, an acquaintanceship. And now it was too late. When I left the bodyshop to find the world in disarray, on the precipice—or perhaps in the midst—of apocalypse I wasn't surprised in the least.

Do you mind if we go inside, I said to Corinne, who was still standing on her lawn, I'm a little thirsty.

Inside, Corinne continued as we sat at her dinner table, both of us drinking ice water with lemon.

The organism, as I said, Corinne said, and I still believe it, is the first fallacy. To do away with the notion that we're physical organisms—a notion that has arisen purely from sensual evidence, sensual evidence that is only corroborated by the senses which, of course, sense themselves and, in turn, generate a completely absurd system of observation—to do away with this notion is to do away with all history. And to do away with history is to annihilate our culture. Of course, Corinne continued, this is happening as we speak. But it's happening under the guise of doubling down on our organic imperatives. It will never be proposed that all of these categories are, in

fact, essentially fictitious. All categories of identification are essentially fictitious, but that will be the last thing to be proposed by these faux-revolutionaries that dominate headlines today. These faux-revolutionaries use these essential fictions only to further their own ends, but that's exactly what can never be said today. Yet to fully commit to this notion isn't, in fact, to defend the one culture over another culture, it's to annihilate all culture. Everything, all culture, must be not only destroyed but annihilated.

I took a sip of my water, which had a strong tint of lemon, which I enjoyed. Do you really believe that? I said.

Of course not, she said, to believe it would completely contradict the theory itself. And to acknowledge the possibility of contradiction, for that matter, is beside the point.

What is the point, is I guess what I'm asking, I said, although I feel like I know exactly what the point is.

There is no point, she said. There never has been. This entire conversation is simply motion, it's nothing more than motion, the two of us as conduits for necessary motion that can never be reversed or repeated. Or recalled for that matter. And I can say the same thing for every other conversation and text ever performed, because they are only performed—they have no static existence in themselves.

As I stated previously, I didn't necessarily disagree, but I wasn't sure how much it mattered that I agreed, if I did in fact agree. The interior of Corinne's house was well maintained, yet essentially reminiscent, in its structure at least, of other working class row houses in the neighborhood. Above the sink a window displayed a small backyard with unevenly cut light green grass. On the unevenly cut light green grass sat a red Cozy Coup with a yellow roof, with its driver door ajar, and a plastic slide with a moderate amount of dirt visible from the distance of the kitchen.

Corinne ambled to the cupboard and retrieved a bag of Cape Cod potato chips, uttering the words *Want some?* just as the large gray bag became visible in my periphery.

No, I said, but you go ahead—I have a bad habit of completely overindulging when it comes to potato chips, especially when an entire bag is put in front of me.

She chuckled and brought the bag over.

How are you going to be sure you don't indulge, considering the bag will more or less be right in front of you? she said, tossing the first chip into her mouth.

It's a good point, I said, but I've been fairly diligent over the past few months—since I came to the conclusion my consumption of potato chips was bordering on the absurd.

Corinne smiled at my statement. I feel like everyone eats too much these days; our caloric intake is absurd across the board, she said.

I agree, I replied, we're all getting fat, but I'm not even sure how much it matters.

We agreed it hardly mattered. The average caloric intake of the average American indeed bordered on the absurd but acknowledging this absurdity, never mind actually caring about the absurdity, was even more absurd.

The sun seemed at its peak as it glared into the kitchen through the sink above the window and the sliding door that led to the small wooden deck. The kitchen remained pitch black save for the extreme stream of sunshine from the window above the sink. One washed dish sat at the bottom of the sink. Corinne ate the potato chips one by one at a slow to moderate pace.

When I woke from my dream, after attempting to trudge up through the fragmentary expressway with no idea where I should go, I experienced an intense feeling that everything I'd been quote-unquote doing with my life was not only essentially misguided but indubitably

wrong, as if I'd been too close to my life for years, that I'd fallen into a rut that I was unable to recognize as a rut by dint of being in said rut, that perhaps it was too late to alter my course, but if I failed to alter my course my life would be irrevocably wasted.

Lying in my bed I felt paralyzed by this revelation, unable to move and weighed down in a way that was almost entirely impalpable. It seems it's only in dreams where this type of impalpability is at once specifically horrifying yet broadly libidinal. There's an excitement adjacent to this impalpable horror that's distinct from any conscious experiences of impalpable horror. It seems more and more obvious to me that the horrors I typically experience when dreaming feature more complex ripples of intensity than almost any of my so-called conscious experience.

My conscious experience seems further and further removed from my corporeal body, almost as if my consciousness is derivative of my experiences in dream rather than my so-called physical body.

You sure you don't want any? Corinne asked, smiling almost in a sarcastic fashion, preparing to wrap up the bag.

Don't tease me, I replied gleefully and glanced toward the front door.

Do you have to go? she asked.

While it was true that I glanced at the front door with the intention of conveying the possibility I may have, in fact, had to leave, I didn't have to leave and conveyed as much to Corinne.

Do you remember seeing me at your college and not saying hello, she said.

With Junior, yeah, I said, referring to a person I'd genuinely forgotten existed prior to Corinne asking me if I recalled seeing her at my college.

Those days were such a blur to me, I said, especially looking back. While I admit it's cliché to say, I do feel as though I was a different

person during that period of my life, perhaps at various periods of my life. It seems as though a good amount of my memories, especially when I recall them at random, seem increasingly sensational to me, regardless of how mundane in nature they may be. Which is fine, supposing that I refuse to try and reconcile these memories with my current conception of myself, but when I do, then I find myself entering a dark mood, almost as if I'm entering a region that would be better left unvisited. Not the memories themselves mind you, but the reconciliation of these memories, the attempt to knit these memories into some sort of cohesive, continuous whole.

I don't disagree, she said, staring out the kitchen window into her compact backyard. The memories I retain of my childhood and young adulthood for the most part induce nausea. Not to beat a dead horse, but this world—it's difficult for me not to find it entirely contemptible. Yet as I age my contempt is increasingly void of rage, yet it doesn't fade into resignation either. In many ways I still want to see this world destroyed completely, but I don't have any vested interest in seeing it done while I live, or while I experience consciousness in this particular manner. It'll occur or it won't, or it's already occurred and it'll occur again, or it's already occurred and will never occur again, or it's occurring as we speak in an entirely imperceptible fashion. Every aspect of my life is essentially antithetical to how I imagined it as a child, but so much of what I remember of being a child is at this point imagined. Maybe that's the true source of my contempt. At times I try to search for this source, and it's this absurd search that makes me feel, if I believe in anything, that this organism is a lie, a fallacy, and a pernicious one at that. Nothing this incongruent can be considered whole. If this is logical then it's more or less obvious to me that our logic is entirely illogical.

When I left Corinne's home that afternoon, I returned to my apartment and almost immediately searched for her name on the

internet. The only result populated was from a website that was widely known for disseminating misinformation. The site alleged Corinne to be six months older than I, which surprised me, not only because I'd never thought of Corinne as older than I was, but also because I'd always, perhaps unknowingly, associated her with the Scorpio Zodiac sign. The site also alleged she was married, Asian-American, and Christian.

I thought back to her saying *There was always the whole race thing* in my dream, and the racial identity of Corinne and I within our childhood milieu puzzled me for some time. The data seemed mistaken, the question seemed as though it should have had the most obvious answer, yet for some reason I believed the data to be true, knowing that I'd most likely never be in a position to ask Corinne to verify one way or the other. I believed the data to be true, despite the fact it directly contradicted what seemed to me to be the most obvious answer. For a reason that eluded me, it seemed completely absurd that Corinne and I could be of disparate ethnic backgrounds.

Later that week I found myself traveling toward my apartment on the deck of a commercial ferry as the sun set in a way that seemed overbearing at the time. I stared indiscriminately into the vast ocean, which extended unimpeded toward Western Europe, gazing at the seemingly infinite rippling of the water, attempting to perceive this body of water in its entirety, suddenly terrified of the possibilities of what potentially existed underneath this body of water, which seemed to extend to a distance so gratuitous in magnitude that it seemed an absurd proposition that it existed at all.

I felt myself absorbed into a muted fissure, longing for the comfort of a home I now knew to be a pernicious lie. This home, it occurred to me, had been stripped of its integrity piece by piece, organically dissected, until all that remained was the residue of habit, a severed limb twitching in dwindling muscle memory. Conversely, I now knew the ocean, which I continued to gaze into with increasing

intensity, which I now realized expanded into cavernous regions far beyond my comprehension, to be authentic beyond reproach, that what I'd previously known as comfort, the land I was traveling toward, was constructed in a wholly artificial fashion, for reasons I could no longer recall.

Hot Club

—So anyway we were at the Hot Club for the first time in ages, a bartender I hadn't seen in at least four to five years was still behind the bar, she recognized me immediately, with a new purple dyed haircut that, although probably a smidgeon young for her age, suited her nicely, I thought. She poured me a healthy amount of Mezcal into a short glass, and only minutes later I'd notice her carrying a bottle of Del Maguey Vida, my favorite brand of Mezcal, back to the bar, and right then I surmised that I was drinking my favorite type of Mezcal. Of course healthy pours are double edged swords when you have a tendency to chug whatever's in front of you, which for better or worse is a tendency I've never entirely managed to discard, especially when in social settings. Socially, historically, I've always found myself sprinting toward liquor, with reckless abandon almost I perform fifty yard dashes toward whatever my spirit of choice is that month, and even though on balance I've reduced these excessive tendencies with age, I'd be lying to both myself and you if I said I'd discarded them completely. And to be honest I'm unsure if I'd wish to discard them in totality, to extinguish my child-like idiocy once and for all, because sure from a certain vantage point I suppose I remain a man-child of sorts, but on the other hand man-children are necessary, no? It's man-children who make the greatest philosophical strides. To think like an adult is to take on the guise of utter rationalism, which hardly ever if not never innovates, which refuses to become idiotic enough to alter fundamental axioms, as axioms are inevitably created by the child-like thinkers, by idiots of the spirit. Even God Himself allegedly said Let there be light, which is a man-child like statement in my opinion. Personally I still refuse to sleep in the dark.

—The dark is contemptible in my mind.

—There's something inherent in being itself that's synonymous with light in my opinion.

—But how was Hot Club?

—It was interesting, intriguing, better than I anticipated, given the last couple times I'd been I felt the atmosphere to be a bit too clubby for my tastes, a tad too adolescent for even my man-child palette. I saw the doorman from The Parlour there, because apparently he works security at Hot Club as well? In any case as the party increased in size Dara and I ended up engaged in an extended conversation with a petite fair-skinned female who adamantly claimed to be of New York origin, yet when an appropriate opening emerged for me to ask her what part of New York she was from specifically she prevaricated, saying she was quote-unquote from all over, but then saying The Bronx. She was from The Bronx? She didn't strike me as someone from The Bronx, and for someone whose identity seemed to be so tied with being from New York, a New Yorker, which is the case with so many people from New York, it's actually kind of sad to me, this violent melding that seems to occur with people who identify themselves with New York City, yet this female, who for the record I found pleasant, oddly enough refused to explicitly claim a borough, until she reluctantly said The Bronx, which I think struck everyone as totally misguided. She wasn't from The Bronx, that much was clear. She could be from anywhere in the world except The Bronx. This idea that this female's origin story began in The Bronx was completely absurd. Which borough she was from, assuming she was from a particular borough, now that was still ambiguous, but it was clear she wasn't from the Bronx. Queens, that I could give some credence to I suppose. It might be a reasonable speculation to suggest she was from Queens. Perhaps from an opulent family in Upper Manhattan, now that was even more likely—because

she certainly struck me as someone who came from money, there was no trace of a New York accent in her speech, or of any accent in her speech, and the geography of Upper Manhattan is close enough to The Bronx that she could, in her mind at least, perhaps justify claiming The Bronx as a borough, even though I find that to be a bit ridiculous, to conflate Upper Manhattan with The Bronx, to think any thinking person would buy the idea that Upper Manhattan is in any way synonymous with The Bronx. Staten Island and Brooklyn strike me as more remote possibilities of her origin, and then we could also speculate on outer-areas as well, because while Yonkers strikes me as a stretch, I think Westchester County or Long Island are both certainly in play.

—Do you think it possible that she could have been from, say, Westchester County, which would explain her moneyed demeanor, yet moved to The Bronx for work later in life, and now, and I agree that this is misguided, feels as though that working experience justifies her claim that The Bronx is a place she's actually from?

—Giorgios, that actually strikes me as perhaps the most sensible explanation of all. I also noticed, and I think it's worth noting, that when she sat her posterior was a tad more ample than I'd imagined, that this posterior along with the ambiguity of her origin began to strike me as almost ominously out of place, as if another plane of existence was forming.

—That happens at times—posteriors and their relative amplitude can vary widely from expectations, the posterior is almost impossible to estimate based on face alone.

—I guess it's reasonable to assert that we often look at a person's face and almost algorithmically create a simulation of their body from this

face, that our mind works essentially algorithmically, we should admit that, that our minds are probably just composed of algorithms, and that we perform a similar process with voice, which actually happened to me just recently as well, where I spoke to a person on the phone and inevitably created an algorithmic simulation of her face in my mind. When I saw her face at last online I was struck by how much this picture differed from the simulation I'd made in my mind—who was it I believed I was speaking to? I look at someone's face and then I ruthlessly algorithmically simulate their body without consent, whereas I hear someone's voice and then I ruthlessly algorithmically simulate their face without consent, but in both cases my accuracy is totally stochastic, and by stochastic I mean terrible.

—From voice to face and from face to body, we make ill-advised, ruthless speculations regarding everyone who enters our periphery!

—In this sense the simulation of the human begins with voice. From voice alone we algorithmically simulate both face and body, because from face we simulate body, as you said. In any case as the conversation progressed we—myself, Dara, and this female—began to touch on the topic of what exactly this female had been doing since leaving New York, and in the midst of this it came up that it just so happened that her and I were actually the same age, that she'd been finding locales she liked at our age, although she noted how difficult it was, compared to New York, where she knew the ins and outs of where to patronize and when, what establishments she enjoyed and which ones she despised. I agreed immediately, noting that at my age, at our age, it was one of the main deterrents to moving to another city, particularly New York, which I'd strongly considered moving to more than once, but as I said explicitly to her to have to relearn every single place that I like to go, and how to get there, to relearn which places offend my palate, at my age, it just struck me as way too daunting of a task to take on. It struck

me as a task that would consume so much of my energy that it would essentially mute all of my philosophical energies for at least five years. She mentioned a Lebanese bar where “you walk downstairs” that she liked a lot. I said the entire city of Providence has become essentially one extended hookah lounge, which I admitted to her, full disclosure, appeals to me deeply, which, full disclosure, seemed to genuinely surprise her, that the entire city of Providence was an extended hookah lounge. I said the city is littered with Greek and Lebanese places like that, which of course Giorgos we know isn't true in the least, that there are only a fraction of Greek locations compared to Lebanese locations, yet I stated it with so much aplomb she didn't question it at all, although she did immediately question whether Greeks smoked hookah, to which I simply said Ottoman Empire, to which she said of course, immediately connecting the dots.

—My goodness, I have to say that's fairly impressive, that a fair-skinned female from New York would connect those dots that quickly. The Ottoman Empire, I mean at this point it's basically a piece of arcana. No one knows anything about the Ottoman Empire anymore.

—Oh I completely agree! I totally feel like there are just very few people in our general age range who know anything about the Ottoman Empire, and I'd one hundred percent wager that not one other person at Hot Club that night who knew anything about the Ottoman Empire, never mind its very specific ethnic components, who could put the pieces of Greeks ancestrally smoking hookah together by the utterance of two words: Ottoman Empire. In fact it seems to me that the Ottoman Empire is maybe the most neglected empire of the past half millennium, that it inherited its Byzantine predecessor's characteristic of being completely discarded by modern scholarship. No one knows what you speak of when you so much as mention the Ottoman Empire, people are flummoxed, except apparently this female

who may or may not be from New York, but certainly isn't from The Bronx. In short I quickly found that the ambiguity of what New York City borough characteristic was inherent in this female became reflected right into the ambiguity of the ethnic blocks of the Ottoman Empire, in a post-Ottoman American diaspora, in an America that is itself multi-ethnic, and not entirely differently than the Ottomans, Ottomans who were only trumped in their importation of African slaves by America's out of control love affair with the African slave. No one imported more African slaves than the Ottoman Empire, except of course the United States of America. The ambiguity of the traits displayed by a Greek versus a Turk versus a Lebanese versus a Kurd versus an Armenian in the seemingly limitless Providence Hookah Network was suddenly a direct analog to the ambiguity of the New York City borough characteristics inherent in a person who perhaps dubiously claims to be from New York City. In one instance we're unsure if we're witnessing a Greek, a Turk, a Lebanese, a Kurd, an Armenian; in the other instance we're unsure if we're witnessing a person from The Bronx, from Manhattan, from Staten Island, from Brooklyn, from Queens; in both cases the overlapping characteristics, outside of their original context (of the Ottoman Empire and New York City, respectively), become vague enough in their nuance that the identity of each bleeds into the other, until the individual identities are erased completely. The New York City diaspora in Providence can reflect characteristics associated with Staten Island, with Manhattan, with The Bronx, with Brooklyn, with Queens, while the median hookah smoker this New York City transplant may encounter in the extended Providence Hookah Network may display characteristics of the Greek, of the Turk, of the Lebanese, of the Kurd, of the Armenian. In both cases what's Staten Island, what's Queens, what's Kurd, what's Greek, what's Brooklyn, what's Manhattan, what's Lebanese, what's Turk, what's The Bronx, what's Armenian all bleed into one another until they're essentially indistinguishable from each other, until they're

essentially extinguished, until we reach a fundamental oneness of an Ottoman New York City, a legitimate plane of existence that came into being only at the Hot Club via conversation this past Friday night.

—This is a physical plane of existence now, the Ottoman New York City of Oneness.

—It can no longer be denied, an Ottoman New York City where all identity has been extinguished into a monadic Oneness came into existence on a Friday night at the Hot Club.

—Yet that girl—could she have actually been from The Bronx?

—With one hundred percent certainty I will assure you Giorgos, that the girl I spoke with Friday night was absolutely *not* from The Bronx—

Names Consist of Letters (Which Are Shapes)

A.

I said It came to me this morning. Namely that in the modern world. What's distinguished us from the pre-modern?

Olivia said What is it?

I said Well. If you'll let me finish?

Olivia said Of course! Go on.

I said It's that the modern world. It's distinguished by this merging with the individual and thought.

Olivia said What. What do you mean by that?

I said Well. If you'd let me finish the thought. Um. What I mean in particular. Olivia. Is that we view ourselves as one with the thought and/or thoughts that enter our. For lack of a better term. Minds. We have a thought and we. Now. Inveterately. View this thought as us. Now. For my part. I've never particularly felt this way. And I've.

Olivia said You've always viewed yourself as a bit of a nutjob because of it. No?

I said I mean. I don't know if I'd say. You know. Fucking nutjob! But I've viewed myself as unique because of it. But in a deep sleep. Emerging from a deep sleep. Sometimes it. Sometimes things become apparent to you. In my case. It's become apparent that. For lack of a better phrase. Maybe I'm right. That thought is essentially an exterior phenomena in principle. That there are things. Or entities. Or phenomena. That at the very least are present in thought as it occurs to us. That continuing down this line of. You know. We think things. Thoughts belong to individuals that they reside in. Or pass through. That this is fundamentally flawed. That it also.

Olivia said What? I said That it also essentially. Eventually. If you subscribe to this notion. It make the notion of God absurd. This idea

that we own our thoughts. It. More than anything else. Has so-called killed God.

Olivia said Well. It's an interest theory. You took melatonin again?

I said I got this new Trader Joe's version of it. I feel like it's more potent?

Olivia said It's probably cleaner at least. Where did you get the previous.

I said Walmart.

Olivia said Oh well. Obviously. The melatonin you were previously using was probably. Like ninety percent high fructose corn syrup or something.

I said It didn't seem to have a great effect. Unless I took like at least five milligrams and shit. Quote-unquote five milligrams I should say.

Olivia said Yeah. Exactly. Quote-unquote!

I said In the modern world we've subscribed to this notion that we're. You know. Fused to our thought. Fused to our organism. Yet it's always struck me as absurd! Fused to our nuclear families. Fused to this notion of a genetic lineage.

Olivia said You're against genetic lineages now?

I said Maybe. Somewhat! What. Ipso facto you believe you're descended from your parents and shit?

Olivia said I don't know Cemal. Kind of? I guess I. I never really questioned the assumption.

I said That's your issue Olivia. You're over here refusing to question assumptions. Over here fuckin like. Doing everything you can to prevaricate the necessary questioning of all assumptions. These assumptions. The assumptions that underpin our world views and shit. Fuck that.

Olivia said Well to be fair to me being pregnant doesn't exactly help Cemal. Sorry!

I said There's a small hair. On this fucking red pear. Which I guess is also somehow. An Anjou pear?

Olivia said I thought Anjous were green?

I said So did I Olivia. I fucking thought Anjous were generally. Or I mean. Always and exclusively green. But this particular grocery store. In my neighborhood. I love it there. They market the so-called reds. The red pear as actually the Anjou pear.

Olivia said That's. It's actually unheard of to me?

I said There seems to be a small. For lack of a better word. Hair on it now though?

Olivia said On the skin of.

I said No. Not the skin. The uh. It's on the. Interior?

Olivia said It's probably.

I said It has to be mine right? My hair? Maybe like. A fucking eyelash perhaps? Or some shit.

Olivia said It looks um. Vaguely pubic to me?

I said I'm just gonna. You now. Fucking blow it off the pear? Fuck it. Right? That makes sense to you?

Olivia said Sure I guess.

I said It doesn't?

Olivia said You're almost done with it anyway. So.

I said Halfway done. About. But point taken.

Olivia said Just eat it.

I said You know what? Fuck it. You know. Sorry. Just let me.

Olivia said Finish chewing? Please do!

I said It's just. Kind of funny now that I think about it.

Olivia said What is Cemal.

I said I've been so averse to. For lack of a better term. Skin care products of late? For. Like. The last few months maybe. Give or take.

Olivia said Well. To be fair. You have oily skin anyway. That makes it. It can make it somewhat difficult.

I said But it's purely. Fuckin because I just. I've been avoiding topical ointments of this sort. Solely because I stumbled on this post. Online. You know. What I just happened to be using a decent amount of a moisturizer and shit.

Olivia said Right.

I said And the poster. He made this completely unsubstantiated claim. This bold assertion that so-called Big Skin Care. That they're essentially peddling products that actually degrade the skin. In order to just sell more skin care products!

Olivia said Was this on Reddit Cemal?

I said But it just uh. I think it struck me as logically sound. As cogent in a sense. That I couldn't outright deny it?

Olivia said People say similar things about doctors. Pharmaceuticals.

I said And I really haven't used any topical creams since. On some level. After reading the post. I came to believe that Big Skin Care. That it's collectively degrading the quality of aggregate skin. Even though I have absolutely no evidence to back up that claim.

Olivia said But anyway. You were going to tell me about.

I said About Ophelia?

Olivia said Right. Yeah. Like your mom. And everything with like. Your uncle?

I said Well. I don't know if I'd call him that. But yeah.

Olivia said Well. You know what I mean. Like what's the latest?

I said She still. I mean. She still wants me to try and become the Lunar Sultan and shit. But ugh. It's just like. Fuckkkk.

Olivia said You don't want the responsibility Cemal?

I said It's not even that. It's just. The administrative side. It's like. Such a fucking drag you know.

Olivia said No. I get it. It's like a big burden.

I said Plus with all this simulation legislation.

Olivia said Oh. Is that actually going through?

I said Apparently. Officially recognizing our reality as a simulation. What a fucking crock of shit!

Olivia said I don't know. I find some of the literature convincing.

I said No. It's totally off as a concept Olivia. You can't. What? No. It's the folly of analogy. Just because we've created a system for ourselves that indulges in various elements of so-called simulation? Then we think that ipso facto the entire universe as a whole must follow suit?

Olivia said Well. I said No. The only way you could get me to buy into any simulation legislation? Is if we acknowledged that the universe takes shape of whatever we tend to view it as. That's the only way. As some sort of the act of measurement as altering the measurement type legislation. But actually believing the objective universe is a simulation because we jack off to simulated anal gapes? No. That's pure folly. And the technocrats who get sucked off for postulating it? It's so idiotic it's actually maddening.

Olivia said But really Cemal. If you feel so strongly about it. Then why not take your mom's advice? Couldn't you do more to fight it from.

I said From the seat of a Sultan. Sure. If I had any interest in actually fighting the battle. But just because I feel vociferously that something is idiotic. That doesn't mean I feel vociferously that it's my job to counteract. Or that I even care if it's counteracted at all.

Olivia said Okay. But then what are you going to do.

I said Do with what?

Olivia said Your life?

I said You're presuming that's my decision.

Olivia said Presuming it is. What would you lean toward pursuing?

I said Hypothetical extrapolation of absurd presumptions. Is that the best use of our time anyway?

Olivia said Absurd presumptions seem to be the most fruitful breeding ground for thought. No?

I said Maybe I'll sell drugs.

Olivia said Oh really? I mean. If that's the case. Have you ever considered going into investment banking?

B.

I said But no. That's always been the ultimate end-game. Of everything.

Mort said Of what? Um exactly?

I said It's annihilation. The end-game. You write words. You create things. But there can ultimately. In origin. Only be the one thing. As end-game. So while the one thing is irreparably in all of its exaggerations. All of its creations. Extrapolations. In the end the end-game is always annihilation. It can't be otherwise can it? A return to the one thing.

Mort said It's not. Well. Exactly the most uplifting thing I've heard today but.

I said But really Mort. Think about it for a second. Why isn't it? We're a part of the one thing. Right? What's so bad about returning to it. Is that that bad? Why is that so objectionable exactly? We toss and turn about fucking. You know. The potential annihilation of the things that we love. But what do we really love?

Mort said Um.

I said What? Insemination of near strangers? Nintendo Switch Online? Getting fucked up three nights a week. Doing our nails in pretty colors. Yet why shouldn't everything ultimately be destroyed? People really talk about future generations. Like if the planet. Or the solar system just burst into flames. Like that's some terrible apocalypse and shit. But not to the infinite it's not!

Mort said Yeah. Perhaps that's a fair point. But.

I said How could the one thing not extend to everything that extends from it Mort? In perpetuity. It's nonsensical to assume otherwise. The infinite is by its very nature what can't be created. Or destroyed. That's what's infinite. It has to be. It's what we can't fucking conceive. It's what strikes us as absurd when we come across it. When we see a fucking sign of it and shit. It's what we think about after we jack off. After we bust a fucking nut and shit. After we come across some cunt or another. We think back to our origin. In infinity. Back in the infinite. Where we belong. And then we fucking laugh. People spend their days talking about nuclear families and rain forests and shit.

Mort said Yeah. I get where you're going. But.

I said I mean. Don't get me wrong. Those are totally valuable causes! Nuclear families and rain forests? They're totally worthwhile! But it's just like. At the same time? Fuck everything. The current solar system means absolutely nothing in the face of what's ultimately infinite. We're extensions of an infinite being. Fuck do I give a fuck about a solar system? I'm an extension of the infinite. You know.

Mort said No. I mean. It totally makes sense.

I said It only comes when its ready Mort. What are you? Gonna squeeze it out like a toothpaste tube? Roast it like gyro meat and scrape it off whenever some drunk kid orders a sandwich? Just shave it off a giant kabob and shit. No. That's not the nature of the infinite.

Mort said Oh. I totally agree.

I said Did we tell this hoe to get us the check already?

Mort said Um. Yeah. I'm pretty sure we did. We told her at least like five. Ten minutes ago I'd say?

I said Then where the fuck is she? How many Modelos did I have again?

Mort said I counted about. Four I think?

I said That sounds about right. Let's see. Yeah, I had about five Coronas earlier. And now. Yeah. Now I feel like I'm about to puke. So. Yeah. That about adds up I think.

Mort said Here she is. Ah. Thank you so much honey! Yeah. Just give us a second then come right back. For the cards.

I said Let me see?

Mort said Here. Looks. At a glance it looks reasonable.

I said Hmm. Did they. There's. What. Is that an automatic gratuity they added here. Of fucking. What? Twenty percent in there?

Mort said Let me see.

I said Yeah. There is. That's.

Mort said That's a little odd no? Like.

I said Automatically adding gratuity? For a party of fucking two people? It's a bit unorthodox.

Mort said Well. I guess. What? Leave no tip? Split it but just leave no tip?

I said Yeah. That's fine. A bit cunty either way. But it's fine. Seems reasonable. Makes sense.

Mort said So what's the latest. On the deal.

I said On the deal you mean?

Mort said Yeah. On the deal. Idio Eight. With them. Are. We're fucking bailing them out aren't we? I knew it!

I said I don't know if I'd say bailing out. But.

Mort said But what?

I said But we're securing funding for them. Essentially yeah. We're going to give them. You know. A little cash infusion and shit.

Mort said Fuck that.

I said Well. What're we supposed to do Mort? What? We should let a fairly major regional bank just fucking fail? Because that would look good?

Mort said I'm just saying Alec. Like. If Ray wasn't.

I said Don't even say it Mort. While we're waiting for this little waitress hoe to pick up the credit cards. Don't even say it. Don't you dare Mort. Because I know what you're going to say Mort. Oh. If Ray wasn't getting his balls tongued by Michelle. Would we be bailing them out then? And the answer is. Do you know what the answer is?

Mort said Thank you hun! Yeah. Fifty fifty is fine.

I said Do you want to know? The answer Mort?

Mort said I actually. Actually I would Alec. So why don't you tell me.

I said If it wasn't Ray getting his balls tongued it would be somebody else getting their balls tongued. Or. If it wasn't a pair of balls getting tongued then it would be a pair of cunt lips getting fucked. Or a sole asshole getting munched. What are you? Brand new now? It's always one or the other. This or that.

Mort said I'm just saying Alec. At some point. Like. It's fucking taxpayer money isn't it? Shouldn't we at some point view it through that prism?

I said Haha! Don't make me laugh Mort. Oh. Taxpayer money? That's what you're worried about now? Seriously? The taxpayer?

Mort said Well. At a certain point?

I said At a certain point what? The Q3 black budget of the damn CIA alone is enough to cure domestic homelessness overnight. Yet who gives a shit about that? Even the so-called best and brightest. They don't give a fucking shit. They're too busy causing an uproar about some kid who scraped his knee in Indonesia? They're on some campus lawn right now demanding a band-aid be air-mailed to Indonesia Mort. And do you want to know why?

Mort said Oh. Please Alec. Do tell!

I said Because that's what gets their collective nuts tongued! There isn't a single man on this planet who's got laid because he gave a fuck

about a homeless veteran. There's nothing less sexy than caring about what could easily and logically be cured. It's supply and demand man.

Mort said No. I get it. I'm not saying it doesn't make sense on a some level Alec.

I said Well. Either way. The fuck are we gonna do? Even if I agreed with you it wouldn't make a difference. Plus. It's not like it's taxpayer money technically.

Mort said Well if it's coming from The Fed.

I said The Fed is diluting the taxpayer's dollar in theory. They're not really spending it. They're making it worth less. In theory. Sure. But as long as we're shoving a bayonet up the ass of anyone who refuses to price their oil in dollars then it's not even technically a linear dilution! I mean. In a strict sense it is. In the sense that. You know. If they didn't print trillions of dollars the taxpayer's dollar would be worth more? Would it? Maybe. Geopolitics is difficult to assess price-wise. But maybe. In theory it would be. Yet! As long as we engage in a sort of ruthless imperialism geopolitically the net effect is basically fucking neutral.

Mort said Shut the fuck up Alec.

I said Because you know I'm right!

Mort said Are we tipping on this? Tipping on the tip?

I said Tipping on top of the twenty percent that was already included?

Mort said Yes? Or no? It's like ten bucks either way.

I said Fuck no man! I already get raked over the damn coals on taxes. Ten bucks means nothing but on principle it means something. Now I'm getting double dipped on my bar bills? The service wasn't even that good!

Mort said Oh. So now. Now all of the sudden.

I said Well. When I'm the taxpayer. Yeah obviously I give more of a fuck Mort!

Occasionalism Pt. 8

A.

01—Even the notion of narcissism is ultimately a shallow one, I said to John K as we both sat idly on a mid-morning Amtrak headed to Midtown, this idea that you are intrinsically yourself, that I am intrinsically myself, so that an examination of said self is ipso facto inherently self-serving—this notion that a severe internal examination of yourself, your so-called consciousness, which you have greater access to than anything else around you, that this is unwarranted, that somehow this search won't inevitably lead you to see a doubling or tripling or quadrupling when looking inward?

I guess what I'm saying, I said, sitting in the aisle seat, because I felt a little claustrophobic, is that the entire understanding of narcissism is based on a totally false premise, to which John K nodded his head, sitting next to an overweight young man sleeping in the window seat.

I said, Examining an obscure tribe on an underdeveloped continent is considered the height of science while an extended foray into the nature of your own caprice is considered trivial, to which John K said, In the bloom of my youth and the prime of my life, from the time I reached puberty, before I reached twenty until now, when I am over fifty, I have constantly been diving daringly into the depth of this profound sea and wading into its deep water like a bold man, not like a cautious coward. I would penetrate far into every murky mystery, pounce upon every problem, and dash into every mazy difficulty.

I said, To become a student of your own self is to wade into the murkiest of conundrums, I think we would both agree that it's necessary to understand the universe as such, that, as it's been previously said, He who knows himself knows his Lord, that all of the Prophets have basically hinted at such, the so-called exterior as

metaphor for the so-called interior, the interior as little more than an inside-out exterior?

John K somewhat nervously handed both our tickets to the attendant, and I said, It's only the rationalists that take this concept of individuation as axiom and then proceed exclusively outward.

02—I said, It was actually only a few short months ago that I was driving down Reservoir Avenue, on my way to my first visit to a Masonic lodge, which meant absolutely nothing to me, when a peculiar thought occurred to me, yes, it became apparent to me in a ubiquitous way that my consciousness was in no sense my actual self, but it's difficult to verbalize this. I was still pitifully clinging to my alleged consciousness—I was hoping that this consciousness would somehow continue without ceasing, despite the fact that this consciousness clearly only existed in fits and spurts, that there was nothing known of the origin of this consciousness, that it wasn't even a sure thing that what seems apparent as this consciousness is actually this apperency.

Even its apperency is dubious in its apperency, I said to John K as the Amtrak sped into Connecticut. All rational knowledge stems from this consciousness, I said, yet it's entirely opaque in origin. Every aspect of my existence is a mirage, I thought to myself while driving down Reservoir Avenue, while simultaneously noting a new Indian takeout spot to my right, briefly and baselessly speculating upon the quality of their hypothetical Lamb Biryani.

Yet despite the fact that I'd occasionally tacitly acknowledged that existence is itself a red herring—these thoughts weren't entirely foreign to me by any means—but that acknowledgement had always been a tacit acknowledgement as opposed to a true revelation.

On Reservoir Avenue, I said, for reasons I couldn't grasp at the time and honestly still can't, this notion suddenly transformed from a tacit acknowledgement into a true revelation, and as I approached the lodge I felt my interiority begin to evaporate in a way that was oddly

matter-of-fact. I felt the essence of myself disappearing somehow, yet it's actually difficult to verbalize this.

It became an indubitable truth that, sans some immediate anchor, I would perhaps simply disappear into a mist, and it was only the notion of creating aesthetic portals—dedicating myself, continuing to dedicate myself, to these aesthetic portals that allowed me to escape this fate of disappearing into a mist, that permitted me to exist in a social setting among persons that I perhaps only partially believed to be there.

03—John K pulled a circular-shaped breakfast sandwich out from his backpack, unwrapping it slowly and taking what looked to be a quite satisfying first bite, and I said, Then it was the next week across the street in a jewelry shop in Garden City when my friend Anthony said, I was in the Taco Bell parking lot on Mineral Spring the other Thursday, and I thought about shouting up to you, see if you were up! To which I said, You should have—I probably would have come down and ordered a Bean Burrito, both of us laughing as I sipped an ice cold Peroni at the counter.

You ever go to the bar next door, he said, to which I said, I think I've been there like once, quite a while ago, to which he said, There was a dude there the other night, we went out for a drink after work, and I could have sworn he was you. I think you have a doppelganger out there, to which I said, I love the fact you guys serve alcohol here—then I went ahead and crossed the drizzling Garden City plaza to an Italian restaurant called Avvio, where I took a seat at the sole open spot at the bar counter.

I figured I'd drink probably just one more Peroni before returning to my apartment, I said. But prior to sitting down I briefly asked the person sitting next to the open seat if the spot was occupied, yet I also recognized that this person sitting down was my waitress from a month or so prior at Maria Cucina—where I bumped into a certain second cousin who'd been estranged from her immediate family for upward of

a decade, where she said hello to me, where I said hello to her, where the conversation concluded after a formal hello.

I was almost positive this waitress probably remembered me, just as I remembered her, but we both wisely chose to forgo any subsequent small talk. Sipping just one more Peroni, I said, I quickly took note of a potent aquatic odor penetrating my nostrils from a shrimp salad an older lady sitting on my other side was just served. To my one side sat a waitress responsible for serving me a questionable scallop dish a month or so prior, while to my other side sat a near geriatric lady consuming an equally questionable shrimp salad, one that looked to consist of simply romaine lettuce, shredded cheese, and shrimp—something I'd never seen.

On the Amtrak John K approached the conclusion of his breakfast sandwich as I said, Only moments later, as it so happened, as I continued to wince in moderate pain at the odor emanating from her meal, this older lady turned to me and said, Now I bet people tell you all the time you look like the FBI guy, to which I said, To be honest with you, I actually feel as though the majority of former US Presidents should be serving extended prison sentences, I said, Or is that a TV show?—to which she said, Oh, yes, he's the main character, she said, I really enjoy him!

I said, If you guys weren't finishing up your meals, I'd buy you a round of drinks! and after they left, I searched the phrase FBI show, somewhat narcissistically I suppose, yet analytically so, and stumbled upon a Wikipedia entry for an actor named Zeeko Zaki who I concluded, at a distance, could strike a certain type of person as vaguely resembling me.

04—You know, John K said, trailing off, this actually reminds me—Of the Malamatiyya? I said, and the so-called path to blame, I continued? I said, Because I actually had that in mind one of the last times I was on this shuttle. At the time I said, I feel like I haven't been day-drunk in

eons, as Dara, Jade, and I carried our bags right across the street from Madison Square Garden. Dara said, It's only been like two months, to which I said, I don't know, I'm just really excited to finally be in Koreatown, I said, I think not getting drunk for an extended period has really assisted my ability to contemplate the pros and cons of intoxicants.

Jade said, I need some street gloves, to which Dara said, I love street gloves! I said, What if I bought a street hat, to which Dara said, You need a new hat, and then, turning to Jade she said, You should see his snow hat, it's gross! I said, I realize my current snow hat is disgusting to you, but you know what?—do you realize that that hat keeps my head mind bogglingly warm when I go for winter runs?

Dara said, No it's gross, to which I said, I don't know, I guess I'm just not in the business of trying to impress people on my winter runs, it's tough to find just a plain snow hat at a reasonable price these days, no one sees me on my runs anyway, I'm freezing my nuts off on these runs, but it's also true that I guess I could use a new hat, I said.

Look, how about this one? I like this one quite a bit, I said, pointing out a bright red snow hat on a fold-out table selling for five dollars. Dara said, Sure, get that one in a tone that suggested she may have hated this hat. In the hotel room I said, I'll probably head out and see if there's some Soju we can buy around the hotel, to which Dara said, Why don't you just wait, we'll be ready soon, to which I said, Maybe, but, you know, I don't want to rush you, you'll probably be a bit.

Back in the room I said, You could make the argument that this hotel is excessively upper class, and, I don't know, I guess I do tend to feel more at ease in working class adjacent locales, although when you think about it, the proletariat has more or less completely disappeared in the median American city, the proletariat has been essentially eradicated in most urban areas, yet I actually like this hotel a lot.

I said, Anyone want to do a shot of Soju?—the bottles were surprisingly affordable across the street. Dara said, I'm down! I said, I knew you would be. I said, I know we want to traverse the streets of Koreatown, that we want to discover little trinkets in little overpriced thrift shops, and I'm perfectly fine with that plan, but with that said, on my way back from the liquor store I stumbled into a really nice little bar like three hundred feet, if that, from our room, the vibe inside is super cool, and they have a drink called a Soju Bomb, it's a shot of Soju and a Sapporo beer mixed together in a colostomy bag, it's great, and I think that needs to take precedence, I'm just going to say right now that this restaurant and its Soju Bomb should supersede any previous plans we may have had—at least to begin with. Dara said I'm down!

Sitting at the restaurant-bar she said, Eh, I don't think I'm going to get that Soju Bomb, it sounds kind of gross, to which Jade said, I think I'm getting a Sangria. I said, It looks like they have a Soju drink that's just pure Soju, but also served in the colostomy bag?

Meandering around Koreatown after a drink or two, it occurred to me that my recent sabbatical from alcohol had reduced my tolerance significantly, that I was actually surprisingly fucked up. Ah, this is actually a perfect day for this snow hat, I said to Dara, honestly I'm good with just walking around if you guys are, I said. Look, the sun's already setting, right after our late lunch, I said, to which Dara said, You should have had something to eat at that restaurant, are you going to be too drunk, you think?

My jubilation and inebriation molded into one entity, which was ideal for me at the time, I lifted a quick Empire State Building replica and gave it to my dad as a souvenir, and my new snow hat came in handy when I was briefly separated from Dara and Jade, when Jade spotted me in a crowd solely due to the hat. Let's just grab dinner at that bistro across from the hotel, Dara said, to which I said, Really, that bistro across the street?—do you think the food is good there, to which Jade said, It's probably basic, to which I said, That's what I would

assume, that it's probably some of the shittier food in Midtown, to which Dara said, Well, I don't know, we need to eat somewhere, and you're drunk! to which I agreed in theory. I ordered a chicken dish that was dry even to my inebriated lips.

05—You know, honestly, I've never had a great chicken dish, John K said—at all of the restaurants I've ever been to, I've never had a chicken dish that really blew my mind. I said, I never order chicken out—in fact, I think the last time I was with anyone that ordered chicken was this past Spring at Maria Cucina, when we went out to eat with our friends Rose and Carmine, and it was Dara who ordered it. She wasn't impressed.

In fact, I even said to her that night, as we drove on Broadway on our way to Maria Cucina, I said, You know, there's no redemption in memory—no, only in music, I said, yes, only in the through-composed single note composition, only in the taqsimi, in the unceasing and non-repeating stream of notes performed with the utmost agility, to which she said, That's cool, babe.

Man, I haven't been here in a dog's age, Carmine said as we approached the front door, I don't think I've been here since when it was an Italian only club—you know my dad and my grandad were both members here, they used to come here all the time!

And I'd come with them every now and again, back in the day you had to be a full-blooded Italian to come here, to which I said, I love the Fernet pour here. What can you say about the Sun, I thought as I opened the door for Dara, Carmine, and Rose—there's no point in even mentioning it. Prior to parking, a pale man with dark long hair was somewhat clumsily backing into a parking spot, and I made a moderately vulgar remark for no particular reason.

Oh wow! Carmine said, look at those t-shirts! Maria Cucina's official brand, too! I had no idea they made these—I'd actually want to buy one of those, those actually look like high quality shirts, Rose, look

they have polos and t-shirts! I wonder if they have long-sleeve tees, too? These comments were left more or less unaddressed, and the four of us were sat at a table upstairs.

After taking my Mezcal order just a minute or so prior, our waitress—the same waitress I would bump into in Garden City only a few weeks later—returned to say, Sorry, but we actually don't carry Mezcal. I said, Oh, you don't carry it at all? to which she said, No, I don't think so, sorry! to which I said, Is that like a new thing or? to which she said, Honestly, I'm not sure, to which I said, Oh, ok. Hmm, I don't know, I've really been drinking a lot of Mezcal of late, so let's see here. I guess I could, yeah, I'll just go with a Ketel One and water. As she walked away I said, You know what, now that I'm thinking about it—I actually have no idea why I ordered vodka?

I never order vodka anymore, I said, and honestly it's for good reason, because half the time I drink vodka I fucking black out! I could have ordered Fernet, I said, they have a great pour here, yet I have no idea why I didn't, but, you know what? I guess I'm drinking vodka tonight, and I don't feel all that great about it, but it'll probably be fine—if anything Dara can drive home. Now, would it be possible, I said to the waitress as she returned with my Ketel One, to order the octopus appetizer, but as a full meal? She said, No, you can't do that. I said, Oh ok, no worries, then I guess, hmm, I guess I'll go with the scallops and risotto special?

You know what, I said as the waitress walked away, I have no idea why I ordered scallops—why would I order scallops? And how could she be so sure that the octopus couldn't be an entree? to which Dara said, I'm sure she, like, knows, to which I said, Is that a question they get often here, are that many people ordering the octopus in such large quantities, to which Dara said, Maybe that's just how they do things here, to which I said, I don't know, it seems like at the very least she could have asked the kitchen, at least from my vantage point. And that risotto is probably going to be loaded with garlic too, Carmine, they

usually make risotto with garlic, is that correct? to which Carmine said, Honestly, I have no idea, to which I said, I don't think I've ever even had a scallop, plus the pork chop is great here, Carmine, you're going to love that pork chop, it's fucking delicious here, to which Carmine said, I fucking love a good pork chop, to which I said, And I could have easily gone with that, now that I think about it, I said, there's almost no chance I would be disappointed with the pork chop.

I know I'm going to love the pork chop, Carmine said. I said, I've been delaying receiving a proper diagnosis for a digestive disease I may or may not have contracted, and honestly, I've begun to consider the possibility that I could be rapidly dying, that my life could be abruptly concluding sooner than later.

Rose said, Honestly, I had something similar happen to me not too long ago, and it's scary! I said, one of my second cousins, he was just three hundred and sixty four days older than I am, he dropped dead earlier this week. Is that sun going directly into your eyes, Carmine said. I said, Yeah, ever since we sat down it's been more or less shining directly into each of my retinas. Between us and the window sat a table of six, where four of the patrons, about sixty six and two-thirds percent or so, I thought to myself, struck me as distinctly East Asian, while the remaining two members of the party, about thirty three and a third percent or so, struck me as of purely Nordic descent.

Ugh, good thing I didn't order the octopus, I said after the waitress laid the plate on the table and walked away, there's barely any octopus here, even as an appetizer! Rose said, I know, it's not even that good. It's not terrible, but it's not something I'd order again. I said, Are you kidding me, after the waitress laid our entrees on the table and walked away, four scallops?!

As an entree?—shrimps and scallops are essentially equivalent, right, they're one-to-one, Carmine? Carmine said, There was more octopus in the octopus appetizer than scallop in the scallop entree! to which I said, I think that's about right—in your opinion, would you

say, shrimps and scallops? Oh yeah! Carmine said, You could never get away with a four shrimp entree, and I think a four scallop entree is just totally unacceptable, to which I said, Purely from a portioning perspective, shrimp and scallops are absolutely one-to-one. Rose and Dara ordered the beef and chicken marsala, respectively—and neither found the dish poor in quality, but neither felt that the dish brought anything new to the marsala genre.

Honestly, this pork is a little dry, Carmine said, and I ordered it medium, to which I said, Well, that makes me feel a little bit better about these scallops, because if nothing else they're perfectly succulent, to which he said, But there are only four of them!

06—Honestly, John K began, I've always found scallops to be an ambiguous seafood, at least as it relates to meal preparation—because they're heartier than shrimp, but, for the price-point, I just don't think they can provide enough girth to veer into entree territory.

He said, Is it an entree fish or an appetizer fish? It seems like it has to be somewhere in between, that scallops just can't compete with most fish or beef on an entree level. I said, One hundred percent I agree. scallops are completely ambiguous as an entree, I said, we don't recognize scallops as so-called main event meats, and we bump into second cousins we haven't seen in years, and they're then equally ambiguous to us as blood relatives, I said, we no longer recognize them as actual relatives, despite the fact they sit on a plate before us as a blood relative—and we bump into the waitresses that served us these scallops in the same building as our estranged second cousins, I said, and we recognize them and they recognize us, yet we mutually choose to pretend that we don't recognize one another, we manufacture an ambiguity, realizing we have nothing to say to one another.

It was only a few brief months after this Maria Cucina dinner, I continued—I was actually standing matter-of-factly in the middle of a

dive bar in Worcester for reasons I'll refrain from going too deep into, because it's really kind of irrelevant.

A taller Cuban female briskly sauntered past myself and a group of co-workers who were also drinking beers in this dive bar, to which I said, I think a girl I went to college with just walked to the bathroom right past us, to which one of my co-workers, Cristina, replied, Oh, Julie Isaac?! Yeah I saw her too!

I said Oh wow, yeah! and she said, I went to high school with her! Perhaps emboldened to an ill-advised degree after Cristina's statement, I shouted out, Julie, over here! as she walked past us again—then I engaged in what, in retrospect, strikes me as perhaps a peculiar bodily thrust toward her general vicinity, I decided to go ahead and move my body toward this person I now believed to be Julie Isaac. Oh ... hey, she said nervously, and referred to me by a name that wasn't mine—as I continued to attempt to strike up a jovial conversation, it became clear that Julie retained almost no recollection of our acquaintanceship, she called me the incorrect name, which forced me to recite my actual name aloud to her.

That was awkward, I said to Cristina as the conversation with Julie brusquely concluded, then again, I said, how could I possibly believe that trying to catch up with an acquaintance from college, who I haven't seen in over fifteen years, was an appropriate idea? To what conclusion could this potential conversation possibly have arrived at? Oh, Julie!—great seeing you! Children who were literal sperm cells the last time we saw each other will be able to legally drive by the end of this calendar year—but please enjoy the rest of your life!

Cristina didn't disagree with my assessment as we reentered the larger group of coworkers in the dive bar. In general I attempt to avoid catching up with people whenever possible, I noted to another coworker, Allison, who was approaching blackout drunk, which made the entire exchange all the more puzzling to me, I said. And just to be clear, I said to Allison, there was no tangible physical attraction

between the two of us, and honestly, I mean, let's be honest, if there's ever a reason to try and rekindle a long gone acquaintanceship it's usually due to some latent, borderline inappropriate physical attraction, no?

If you're rekindling an acquaintanceship it's almost always to attempt to stumble into some unexpected, regrettable sexual exploit—the entirety of the high school reunion industry is built upon this premise. Not that I would ever do that, I said to Allison, who seemed to be comprehending my statements. How was it possible that I'd miscalculated our proximity to one another to this degree, I said—you know, she actually called me by a different name when I first caught her attention, I was actually forced to recite my own name for her, aloud.

In retrospect, I said, I suppose it was a little humiliating, having to recite my own name to a person who I approached with a nonsensical enthusiasm, as if we would embrace and instantly start recalling all of the great times we shared together, only to instead have to recite my own name in the face of a puzzled expression.

The price of a Coronas here is actually pretty impressive, even for a dive bar, I said to Allison, who agreed, and told me she used to come to this dive bar all the time before they renovated the bathrooms, that one time someone accused her of snorting cocaine in the bathrooms, but that she actually just had a head cold. I feigned interest at the anecdote as I surreptitiously scanned the dive bar for this acquaintance, Julie Isaac, praying she'd already left the premises—never to be seen again.

07—He will say, *Each will have a double, but you do not know*, John K said, smiling devilishly as the train made its stop at Bridgeport, the chubby young man beside him was now passed out and snoring just slightly.

I said, Exactly correct—and it was only weeks later, I might as well just finish at this point, when we were landing in Baltimore, I said, a

city with probably an equally dreary reputation as Worcester, that I stood up as soon as the plane landed, at two-ten pm, somewhat worried that our connecting flight boarded in about a half an hour.

We only have, what, half an hour? I said to Dara, who said, Yes, half an hour, in an irritated tone, perhaps annoyed at having to repeat the brief time we had to connect flights, repeating the brief time only annoying her more than the brief time itself was already annoying her. You know what, I continued to Dara, these people love taking their sweet ass time, grabbing their bullshit bags, look at this, what's this guy doing right there? What is he, stretching his triceps, now?

These overhead compartments should be illegal, they should be outlawed, at least on connecting flights, I said, most of which she pretended to not hear, yet I couldn't help but notice that there was an older African-American lady standing behind us, one who seemed equally anxious to leave the plane. I felt somewhat of an obligation to now continue to speak out about this issue, for her sake if not mine. I made brief eye contact with her, nonverbally communicating that we were on the same team.

Oh look! Our flight is delayed, Gabe, Dara's brother, who was flying with us to Chicago, said, displaying his phone in front of our faces, which clearly showed our departure pushed back by half an hour. Oh, great, yeah, that's good news, I said, no big deal then, that's a relief. I was standing in the middle of the aisle gripping my laptop bag like a teddy bear.

Yet even with the good news from Gabe relayed to us, I was already in the mode of becoming agitated—my agitation had already reached a decent pace of forward motion, plus there was still the African-American lady behind us, so I gently allowed my agitation to progress somewhat unabated as we continued to wait, making a few snide remarks under my breath that I knew Dara would overhear and fail to ignore.

We arrived at the Baltimore gate with plenty of time to spare, and I said Hey, there's a sushi spot right there, to which Dara said, Oh, do they have drinks, to which I said, Oh yeah, I think they have saki and beer, pointing to the establishment's sign, which was filled with pictures of saki and beer. Sitting at the sushi spot, a waiter told us to just take whatever we wanted from the fridge, where there were stacks of beer, wine, saki, and mixed drinks in cans.

I'm ready to cash out too, I said, pulling out my credit card as we selected and opened our own drinks at the counter, and he presented a cash out screen to me, which prompted a selection of a gratuity of eighteen, twenty, or twenty five percent.

As we sipped our drinks Gabe said, Was that for us? in reference to a gate change that had been broadcast two or three times since we entered the airport. Yeah, I think it is, Dara said. I guess we should probably chug these drinks, I said, you know, I said, I left a twenty percent tip on this round, but technically, I don't know, did the waiter really serve us these drinks? to which Dara said, Yeah I think we need to go right now. We scurried across the Baltimore airport to our updated gate, which was in a similar state of inactivity as the previous gate.

Oh wow, look at that, I said, Zona Cocina! Dara said, What's Zona Cocina, to which I said, It's right next to our gate—it looks like a Mexican restaurant? They probably have Mezcal, I said, to which Dara said, Should we get a drink, to which I said, No, no, that's too much—I don't know, should we have another drink before we even get to Chicago?

As we made a decision to relax and wait for the connecting flight to board, I couldn't help but take note of a light-skinned black-bearded, possibly Hispanic man wearing a maroon hat as he walked away from our new gate toward the center of the airport. Immediately, I said to John as we entered New York state, his face rekindled a distinct, yet fuzzy memory for me—I felt strongly I'd seen this man somewhere before, yet I wasn't sure if it was a person I'd actually known in my day

to day life, or if it was, like, a supporting character from a TV show. This uncertainty gnawed at me while we waited across from our new gate—I took a quick detour to the men’s room, and the name Larry Nance Junior came to me mystically.

Larry Nance Junior, a role player in the NBA. I thought about it, I said, yes, Larry Nance’s face resembled the face I’d just seen walk away from our gate like a ghost. Ah, Larry Nance Junior, I thought at the gate, that’s who it is, or that’s who this person reminds me of. A calm came over me.

On the plane I sat diagonally behind a middle-aged woman who boldly made no attempt to put her phone into airplane mode, instead checking her Instagram notifications repeatedly as our captain prepared to take off, a middle-aged lady who took out a MacBook and, once in the air, proceeded to open her Instagram yet again, now on her personal computer, and crafted a caption for a selfie she was apparently preparing to post, perusing a plethora of emojis in the process—but she didn’t realize she was still in the emoji search field, and she typed a portion of the caption into the emoji search box, which caused the page to search for an emoji that clearly didn’t exist, which caused the entire page to freeze.

She exited the page and nonchalantly logged into a Yahoo mail account that, to my eye, consisted of hundreds of unread messages. In flight, the face of this doppelganger with the black beard yet again flashed before my eyes, and I realized that while this person, sure, may have displayed a passing resemblance to Larry Nance Junior, that passing resemblance was just that.

No, this doppelganger wasn’t the doppelganger of any NBA role player—no, it was a doppelganger of either an acquaintance I used to know personally or a doppelganger of a fictional character from a film or TV series. Yet even as I speak to you now, John, weeks afterward, long gone from Baltimore, now almost to Midtown yet again, I can

honestly say that I've obtained no further clarity as it relates to the identity of this doppelganger.

B.

—01 Abu-Hamid and I had acquired a habit of conversing over an espresso together every other Thursday in my favorite coffee shop on Broad Street, and while waiting in line at our last meeting, while still standing in line waiting for the barista's attention, he turned and said to me bluntly: All Western science is sprung from this singular notion, that perspective and observation should be for lack of a better term deified. It's for this reason the mentally different have no true category in our society—we've achieved a state of existence where perspective and observation have become unquestionable facts, where any questioning of perspective and examination must now lie outside of existence itself, as we understand it at least.

The mentally different, recognizing the flaw in this fundamental axiom, that there is no perspective and there is no observation, at least in the sense we mean it, for this reason can have no place in our social milieu. They're accounted for in no minor or major identitarian box. They're shunned from society and essentially have no choice but to spiral into insanity, but not in our sense of the word, no, for the mentally different it's an entirely separate form of insanity that's endured.

It's impossible for us to identify this insanity, it always escapes our categories. Those who question this notion that observation leads in a linear fashion to truths which lead in a linear fashion to the refinement of perspective which leads in a linear fashion to progress—by definition these people must be excluded.

To this I replied, yet while to progress may be wholly ill-advised, I should also note that to return is perhaps even more so, that a return can occur across time, in the form of memory, and in space, in the form

of the doppelganger. To begin with, yes, I continued while still waiting in line for the barista to clock out of her shift and allow the subsequent barista, who, as it so happened, was basically monolingual in Spanish, to begin her shift, I suppose it was with a muted jubilation, following a serious romantic falling out, in the midst of a for lack of a better term total reset of my life, I said, that I told myself I was returning to music.

I actually phrased it in exactly this way, a return to music, which to be clear was actually embarrassing, and I approached the task with a rapacity of someone with no intent of failing, who outright refused failure, who would prefer a slow death to even a minor setback, I continued to Abu Hamid as he struggled to place his espresso order with the monolingual barista, yet I also understood intrinsically, at the same time, that there was no realistic path to success available to me.

The entire idea was nothing beyond a pure fool's errand, to be honest, and I knew it, despite the fact I was fully committed to transforming it into anything but a fool's errand. But to quote-unquote return to music after a person's thirty third birthday by definition can't be identified as anything other than a completely idiotic idea—unless of course you intend on truly dedicating yourself to solely composing.

But of course, Abu Hamid, I had no ability to solely compose—no, to abandon performance entirely is and was something totally beyond my capability, I should admit that much upfront, because where there's a venue, even a microscopic avenue to a venue to perform, I'll inevitably choose to meander down that path at some point, even if I abstain from said path for a moderately impressive period of time, there are only momentary breaks from it. In short, it wouldn't be entirely inaccurate to suggest that I'm essentially a performance artist by nature.

—02 And even leaving that aside, which by itself set my project up for failure, I still had no practical means whatsoever, even if I had the

intent, which I did not and never would, of my compositions being performed by anyone else.

I barely understood Western notation, and even if I'd taught myself Byzantine notation and the Maqam modal systems, which I did, and even if I generated a half-decent sui generis systems of notation that deviated from traditional common practice notation, which I did—because ultimately no serious composer still composes in common practice notation, no, it's all graphical notation, or half-notation, or back-engineered improvisation—even if I had a decent understanding of theory, I'd positioned myself in the proximity of absolutely no one who could perform said theory.

And, leaving aside the total lack of capable performers in my immediate vicinity, even if I had had the interest in fully automating these compositions, which of course I had no actual interest in, I possessed neither the technical know-how nor the required patience to execute said compositions in any fully automated form either.

In any case, in my mind, and you know this Abu Hamid, screamo is perhaps the only truly classical American music, and to front a thirty-something screamo band, to be even tangentially involved in screamo past the age of, say, eighteen, is probably the most gargantuan of absurdities, even in America, where absurdities grow to sky high heights every day, yet a thirty something screamo band is still too absurd, even for America!

Yet this was more or less in line with my historical character, as achieving something obviously impossible has always irrationally intrigued me, because even as it's being torn apart piece by piece by blithering idiots on both sides, America still remains impressively dedicated to extreme levels of absurdity.

—03 To this Abu Hamid said, I don't disagree with a thing you said, your return to music was clearly ill-advised to an extreme degree, but allow me to just say this, because we live in an era where we want to

trace our bloodlines, this fascinates us, we're constantly gazing into the past for verification of our presents—yet America, we know this, brutalizes identity to its lowest common denominator at all times.

But history can only be fabricated to a limited extent, we can't fabricate history in an infinite fashion, if a population integrates itself into another we can certainly brutally rename them, but we can't necessarily change their essence—sure, a name is profound, naming is perhaps profundity par excellence, yet I think we'd both agree that there must be more to things than simply a name, that things exist in attribute form prior to a formal naming.

For example, if you don't mind, I'd like to indulge in a quick aside to examine the lives and namings of two historical figures: Sheikh Bedreddin and Gregory Nazianzus, both revolutionary figures of the Eastern Mediterranean in their own rights—Bedreddin was born in Thirteen Fifty Nine, Nazianzus in Three Twenty Nine, their lives separated by almost exactly a millennium. Bedreddin was born in Serres, in modern day Eastern Greece, to a father of Turkish descent and a mother of Greek (Christian) descent, while Nazianzus was born in Cappadocia, in modern day Eastern Turkey, to a mother of Christian origin and a father of Greek (pagan) descent.

In the era of Three Twenty Nine the term 'Greek' was synonymous with paganism while, by contrast, in the era of Thirteen Fifty Nine the term 'Greek' was synonymous with Christianity, in the era of Three Twenty Nine Gregory's mother was considered Christian yet implicit in that identity is that her not so distant ancestors were probably Greek (as in pagan), yet in the era of Thirteen Fifty Nine Sheikh's father was considered Turkish yet implicit in that identity is that his not so distant ancestors were most likely Greek (as in Christian).

Is this understood today? In America, absolutely not! Not even close! In America our understanding of lineage is so consistently blockheaded that we're always bound to fall back onto a false notion of pure duality—so it's not at all surprising that we would consider

Gregory a literal Greek father, in the Christian sense, while his father was a literal Greek in the pagan sense, while at the same time we would consider Bedreddin a figure entirely removed from the Greek tradition, despite the fact he was born in Greece and was at least half Greek, in the Christian sense of the word, despite the fact his Islamic pantheism offended Mehmed One so much he had him executed in public.

Both were revolutionary figures, and both sprung from one parent that was authentically ‘Greek’—with the obligatory caveat that ‘Greek’ came to mean diametrically opposed things in the interim of a millennium, and continues to somehow transform into diametrically opposed things even to this day. Gregory was a revolutionary thinker in the era of Christianity with a Greco-Pagan underpinning who was purely ‘half and half’ in terms of his so-called ethnicity, while Bedreddin was a revolutionary thinker in the era of Islam with a Greco-Christian underpinning who was purely ‘half and half’ in terms of his so-called ethnicity.

We traverse periods of time where pagans disappear to be replaced by Christians and Christians disappear to be replaced by Muslims, with few to no actual people being physically replaced—yet we view these two historical figures essentially antithetical to one another, yet while historical erasure is, as we said, to be expected and, to some extent, even necessary, there’s a limit to said erasure—history can’t be fabricated in an infinite fashion—and it would be entirely nonsensical to view Nazianzus and Bedreddin as anything other than two sides of the exact same coin.

—04 To this I said, Abu Hamid, your notion of false dichotomy is well-noted, but the best examples of false dichotomies, I think we’d both agree, are without a doubt ones encountered directly through lived experience.

I continued on and said, It’s just like, when you really think about it—there are almost without a doubt specific instances of our own lives

that we encounter, instances that crystallize instantly, to the extent that said specific moment in time transforms into something akin to a snowglobe, to be sold at convenience stores on the side of interstate highways—where an intangible distortion overtakes our immediate surroundings, where questions like where do the Masonic secrets lie come to our forefront, whether consciously or otherwise. With this in mind, a somewhat tumultuous memory was jostled within me as we passed by the Bankers Trust on Mendon.

A vague memory of smashing one of my car tires against this very Bankers Trust suddenly returned to me, despite previously having no clear recollection of it, and it transported me instantly to a different period of my life. Driving by this Bankers Trust I now sat in a dive bar next to Chiara Naccarato, an African-American acquaintance of mine who was reluctantly informing me of her most recent attempt to take her own life, and I couldn't help but note that a certain intensity emerges between two persons who have no regard for their own lives.

Yes, while the utter disregard for distant lives occasionally makes me livid, this American indifference to the countless lives compromised by our barbaric foreign policies, which no one even follows closely enough to critique anymore, a similar disregard for my own life and people in my immediate orbit is actually a point of intense bonding. We sat in a cramped booth in a dive bar, Chiara arriving after she'd finished her shift, after I'd already been out for a moderate amount of time, so she ordered her first drink as I placed my fifth and then went on to say something to the effect of, Honestly, you should probably see a therapist, and I didn't disagree in the least!

—05 Because there was absolutely a time in my life where I wanted nothing more than to kill myself, where almost every waking moment of my life was consumed with this fantasy of throwing myself out of a window—with the hope of achieving an instant death in the process.

Of course, it's rarely noted that the people with the most intense urges to kill themselves are in fact totally incapable of slitting their own throats, of jumping off tall buildings, of pulling the trigger of a firearm into their mouths—no, there's a distinct difference between wanting to kill yourself and actually committing suicide.

As it's been said elsewhere, He will guzzle it but he will not swallow it. Death will come at him from every direction, but he will not die. And beyond this is relentless suffering. Obviously, having never committed suicide myself, it's difficult for me to say for certain, but I would imagine those that do manage to successfully complete the task of killing themselves perform the act immediately, without pause, in an almost automatic fashion, a particularly strong urge perhaps never even overcomes them, that killing yourself and wanting to kill yourself are almost two entirely distinct states.

Suicide is perhaps always an act of caprice? And perhaps the people that miss this window are the same people, such as myself, who fall prey to this infinite loop of desiring to kill themselves with an inability to actually complete the deed. For my part, it was only when I began to tackle this notion that every problem of freedom begins with an assumption of individuation—it was only when I became cognizant of this issue, when I began to approach this problem from both a philosophical and practical vantage point that I managed to wiggle free from this loop.

It was only when I became cognizant that the organism is the first fallacy that I escaped from this infinite loop of self-terrorism. Unfortunately, by the time Chiara arrived I was a tad too inebriated to truly expound upon this point with any sort of precision. The moment, I had to bluntly admit to myself at this dive bar, had officially passed us by—the moment where I was capable of expounding upon these types of ideas in any sort of mellifluous fashion.

We were approximately half an hour to maybe forty five minutes past this stage. Prior to Chiara arriving I'd been sitting at the bar

meekly, somewhat involuntarily making the acquaintance of its patrons—I watched an episode of Jeopardy sitting next to a regular patron who exhibited an impressive array of general knowledge. At the same time, I remained aware on some level I would in all likelihood never set foot in this dive bar again, that I'd have no regrets about never entering this establishment again, that I'd experience no regrets about accidentally under-tipping the incongruently jovial bartender on my second tab, and that the notion of joining this community, or perhaps any community, was totally far-fetched, nothing less an absurd notion!

—06 And then, of course, Abu Hamid, I can and probably should talk about the avant-garde jazz show I attended the other week—because, well, the truth is that I'd already felt a little self-conscious even as I took brief note of the scene outside of the venue, which on this night was a local bookstore.

I was playing Supreme Clientele at an extremely loud decibel out of all of my open windows on the temperate summer evening, on the fairly residential street where the bookstore was located, and I wasn't entirely certain if the venue's clientele would resonate with RZA's proclamation of fornicating with knock-knee hoes, of passing crack to young African-American females, of reminiscing on copulating in the midst of menstrual cycles.

I subsequently approached the bookstore door gingerly, as many patrons seemed to be congregating outside, for reasons that would soon become apparent to me, including the saxophonist, Dave Filipino, visiting from New York City, who I'd come to see, who I recognized from his bandcamp photo. I paid ten dollars for a ticket to enter the venue, genuinely excited to see Dave Filipino play his alto saxophone in person, reaching into my pocket and pulling out ten one dollar bills that I'd stuffed into my small wallet the last time I'd attended a gentleman's club—the thought occurring to me that I may have, in

fact, been better served spending those ten dollars at a strip club as opposed to Dave Filipino's avant-garde jazz show.

I'd assumed in a buffoonish fashion that the bookstore would have assembled some sort of makeshift alcohol repository for the purpose of this avant-garde jazz show, yet no bar was to be found—instead the inside consisted mostly of a two seat couch with an adult male doodling into a notebook with a self-aware body language that seemed to suggest to me that he was in the midst of something quite important, as if—instead of being a grown person doodling onto pieces of scrap paper in a bookstore that lacked any sort of air conditioning whatsoever—this man was instead in the midst of something culturally critical.

—07 A younger Caucasian male sat down next to the visual artist and began to assist in said doodle. I was scrolling through my phone in a manner that, if it were to be described as idiotic, wouldn't be entirely inaccurate.

The Caucasian looked at me curiously—the doodle had become a collaboration of sorts. Scrolling perhaps idiotically, the Caucasian struck me as someone I knew as he shot me a puzzled look. Eventually, taking into account the douchebag-adjacent eyeglasses he balanced on the bridge of his nose, recalling the venue I found myself in, overhearing a person in the room call him by name, I recalled that we'd exchanged emails about a year prior, that I'd actually reached out to him with regard to a project that, in retrospect, was totally ill-advised—a record I was working on under the influence of Ottoman classical music.

The younger Caucasian man had posted a few instrumentals on the internet that at the time piqued my interest—we exchanged messages regarding a possible collaboration, if he required a fee to use said instrumentals, and so on, he asked for, yet never replied to, my description of the project.

With that said, it was difficult for me to hold any ill-will toward the situation, as I'd ultimately arrive at the exact same conclusion as he did, that the project belonged in a dustpan, that it was completely ill-advised. Clearly, if anything, the younger man in the glasses was totally ahead of the curve—I more or less owed him an apology for even emailing him in the first place.

I found myself actually enjoying his doodles. I felt at the time that his particular doodles were making the overall doodle slightly less moronic in my mind. Standing awkwardly against a bookshelf in the poorly ventilated bookstore, absurdly sober, I realized that the four to five people I'd invited to the show would have even less interest than the already minimal interest they'd expressed when I mentioned the show earlier that evening.

A solo saxophonist I was unfamiliar with, I assumed the opening act, sat in a desk chair and asked if it was possible that the hardly audible background music of the bookstore be muted, then proceeded to perform an unfettered style of free jazz on his saxophone while sitting with his legs crossed on the office chair.

Beads of sweat began forming on a variety of sections of my epidermis. I realized there was no chance I'd get to see Dave Filipino this evening. Sure, I could have gone completely rogue on my previous plans and stayed alone at this bookstore, but unfortunately I had no interest in doing that.

A guitarist named Ryan Grant from the relatively well-known local rock duo Thunder Butt walked in. He looked curiously like Dave Filipino. For a second I actually thought it was Dave Filipino.

I'd been familiar with both Ryan Grant and Dave Filipino as instrumentalists for some time, yet I'd never considered their physical appearances to be similar to any noteworthy degree, yet at this bookstore it was difficult for me to tell one from the other as they stood maybe six feet at most from one another. Grant opened the bookstore

door for a younger female with dyed hair and informed her she didn't have to pay for a ticket.

—08 But in any case, Abu Hamid, and by the way this espresso is terrible, just absolutely atrocious, I did want to run this one thing by you, something that's somewhat haunted me to various degrees in the interim since it occurred, and I'd love your opinion on the matter.

It was only a few weeks later that the thought occurred to me to just relax on a Friday evening in my favorite red leather chair, sinking into said red chair and allowing my mind to wander freely of its own volition, yet—just as it had about a year prior—a curious conversation somehow ensued, one that I'm to this day still hesitant to speculate on the nature of.

Because it was a year prior that I had a curious conversation with an entity I believed to be Athena Dasalan, a person I'd never met but nevertheless knew quite a bit about—and as she continued her brutally unrelenting inquisition of me, albeit in my case telepathically, I finally retorted to her, at that point a bit fed up, that I was in fact a Sultan.

Yes, I informed her, albeit telepathically, that she was speaking to a Sultan, yet perhaps the most confounding part of all of it was that Athena, who would obviously know better than any of us, accepted this assertion without question, the only assertion of mine that she would accept was this assertion that I was a Sultan.

I suppose this was something that stuck with me in retrospect. In fact, it was the only damn thing that removed the lady from my case for just a second. Of the assertions I expounded upon, this was the only thing she accepted without question, that I was in fact a Sultan who would ultimately be making the final decisions here, everything else she'd pushed to the side in the service of continuing her diatribe.

It was only later on that I'd discover the ten Sultans—Ahmed One, Ahmed Three, Suleyman Pasha, Bayezid One, Bayezid Two, Ibrahim One, Murad One, Murad Four, Mustafa Two, and Selim One—who

were of confirmed fifty percent ethnic Greek ancestry, not to mention the Second Mehmed, who was rumored to be of the same, much like the man he replaced in Constantinople.

—09 We spend large parts of our lives believing we're an Eleventh Constantine when, in actuality, the people that can confirm these things only come to accept us as a Second Mehmed. We spend significant chunks of our lives blindly believing in distinctions that are disingenuous in character, insofar as these distinctions attempt to take what's in essence one thing and inauthentically make it into two.

Our first act after we overtook the City was to force the Rum to shave their faces. We took the city and our primary edict was to shave the Rum, we imparted upon them all just a little razor burn—but to distinguish them, we forced the Rum to shave their faces to distinguish them from us.

To us, the Rum became a refraction of us, all of which is and was ill-advised—it reeks of a certain European informalism, if we're being honest. Prior to discussing these matters with Athena, I'd taken note of the two ornamental hawk wings in my apartment, that they were now pointing in distinctly different directions—whereas previously we'd noted that a forking path was present, yet in the interim, since our last discussion,

I'd rearranged our furniture and now one hawk wing was clipped by the corner wall, while the other pointed in a singular direction. Yes, the previous forking, for the previous year with Athena Dasalan, had concluded, albeit totally unintentionally.

—10 In any case, the one hawk wing pointed in the direction of a thread-based painting of a tiger crouching into a grassy knoll, protecting itself and perhaps something behind it, for all I could tell, and from my perspective at the time, due to the particular threading,

the knoll itself was encapsulating the tiger in a way that the tiger seemed to be, at first glance, being pulled into the knoll.

Of course, an analysis of a painting is never complete at a first glance, but in my eyes at a first glance the knoll consisted of a certain darkness, a death-like lack of light. The mural of the tiger was a work I'd inherited from a certain Constantina Demas, and I held it in high regard, as it was allegedly the work of a well-known German artist, which I didn't really care about one way or the other.

Apparently it was left with a neighbor of Constantina, one who'd passed away and apparently gifted it to her posthumously. There was no doubt in my mind the tiger and Constantina Demas were, at this time, sitting in my apartment in this red chair, of the exact same essence. There was no doubt that this hawk wing was guiding me in the direction of Constantina, now also dead, and sitting in my red chair following this sole hawk wing, I recalled the days of Constantina annoying everyone at the table when she refused to admit defeat at Monopoly, mortgaging every property she owned just to spite the inevitable winners of the board game, considering that, in retrospect, this was an important element in Constantina reaching ninety eight years of age? In any case, now that she was deceased and buried, and now that I was sitting in my red chair insouciantly analyzing this threaded tiger, I felt a tinge of regret at my failure to attend her funeral, while at the same time acknowledging, on the other hand, that I despise funerals.

Alone in my apartment, sitting in my favorite red chair, I felt as though I was with Constantina once again, that perhaps we were brought together, I thought, by this mystical hawk wing, I thought, in order for me to make amends for missing her funeral or something?

As I continued to analyze the painting I began to consider that the enveloping nature of the black knoll was perhaps an optical illusion—I noticed this as I studied the painting from a separate angle, as I poured myself a drink at my counter, concluding that, no, the tiger was in fact

frozen in this defensive position, that this tiger was in no way being subsumed by any darkness, that the passing of Constantina didn't symbolize this at all.

It became apparent that this tiger had been unwittingly juxtaposed against a painting of my own, which was hanging on the adjacent wall—just as I'd previously failed to notice the clipped hawk wing, I'd also failed to notice the position of this threaded tiger, that the tiger was placed in a defensive position against my very own painting, which hung on the wall adjacent, displaying my regrettable tendency toward European informalism.

For decades we view ourselves as Constantine, only to discover the ones who would know more intimately than anyone only recognize us as Mehmed.

The first thing we did when we took the City was to go ahead and shave the Rum to distinguish them—the Sultan and Rum of course just being refracted variations of the exact same thing. To this Abu Hamid replied, It's possible that you should look into the incoherence of the philosophers.

Zeus & Hera

I said: Ugh. Son of a cunt. I mean. Really. Son of a fucking cunt man. I am. Ugh. Extremely hungover! Like I actually might not. I might not be okay. I may actually have a real. Like a debilitating illness or some shit. There might be something seriously wrong with me.

Zeus said: Πελοψ! What the fuck man!? Are you fucking kidding me bro?

I said: Zeus?

Zeus said: It's grandpa you fucking cunt. What did I tell you about that. What? You think. What're you doing the Asian thing again? Calling me by my first. No. I fucking demand respect! And only the utmost respect at that! You realize you pissed in my chariot last night right?

I said: Wait. I was in your chariot?

Zeus said: Uh yeah. You fucking pissed in it. Pulled your cock out and sprinkled all over my upholstery and shit. Asshole. Was that really necessary. You could have pissed. Off! The chariot. Into the wind or some shit. Instead you literally stood up. Turned around. Pulled your fucking wang out and pissed on the seat you were just sitting in! Then you sat back down in it! What the fuck is wrong with you man?!

I said: Ugh. I need. I think I need a minute. Just a quick pause here. Would you hate me. If I went back to sleep for a few?

Zeus said: A little pause?! No. How about going and cleaning the shit up? Then you can take another catnap. You really. I mean. I like wine as much as the next guy. But damn. You really should consider. Maybe cutting back a tad? Seeing somebody about the amount you drink? It might actually be a problem.

I said: Now? Clean it now? I don't know.

Zeus said: No. Fucking tomorrow. I can already smell the piss seeping into the upholstery Πελοψ! Do you know how much that costs.

Do get a Spartan to clean that shit after it's seeped in? No. Now! Clean it. Please!

I said: Alright. Alright! Got this headache. I'm actually actively battling it. It's unbelievable. It stretches the realm of believability Zeus.

Zeus said: Grandpa.

I said: Grandpa.

Zeus said: Don't forget that.

I said: Is there. Any Windex around here?

Zeus said: What the fuck? You really think Windex can clean piss off of my upholstery?

I said: I thought.

Zeus said: No. Fuck those assholes Πελοψ! Windex. What're you. Out your goddamned mind? Here. Take this bottle of Pine Sol. Use like half of it at least. Just on that seat. Shit should be smelling like Retsina by the time you're done.

I said: Retsina. Ugh. I might. I might have to puke again. Plus I feel like my pee had to be mostly water.

Zeus said: Try mostly wine and you'd be correct. After that's done. When that's done we're taking some hair off the dog. Then I wanna go out again.

I said: No. Nope! No. Absolutely not! I'll clean the seat. Of my own pee. That's fair. But going out again? What're you? Fucking crazy man! I need to sleep this shit off!

Zeus said: No. That's the exact thing you don't need. What? Sleeping off wine? No. The only cure for a wine hangover is more wine son. We'll have a few pops. It'll be fine. But we won't get too fucked up. Then. And only then! Will it do you any good to sleep it off. Lightweight.

I said: Lightweight? You just said.

Zeus said: Yeah. You should take a step back. Or. Or start to fucking actually handle your liquor! What a couple bottles of the good stuff gets you all discombobulated and shit. That's pussy shit.

I said: Ugh. Fuck me.

Zeus said: You'd have been better off doing that last night. Haha!

I said: What?

Zeus said: Fucking yourself I mean.

I said: Ugh.

Zeus said: You told us all that you made her squirt son! Hey. Good for you. Even I've never bagged a girl who had over thirty pounds on me! Although I'd probably make her squirt too if I did. To be fair.

I said: Don't even tell me.

Zeus said: Of course it was Hera's friend! Haha! She set you up Πέλοψ! Classic! You don't think your grandmother has a sense of humor. That's your problem.

Hera said: Why? Why did I stop driving chariots? For good you mean? Well. That's a bit of a nuanced question I suppose. Or maybe it's a straightforward question that unfortunately requires a nuanced answer? Either way. Have you ever been in the sky. Driving. Not even a necessarily high-class chariot. It could be totally middle of the road. Have you ever been driving. And just kind of. I don't know. Lost yourself? Lost yourself in the sky? Almost finding yourself outside of your body in a way. You suddenly wonder to yourself. What if I drove this thing right into the fricking ground? Would I survive? Of course in my case. Right. But could I mangle myself? How badly could I? Mangle myself? What would the scene be like after? And you're actually completely sober. And you're not even sad! It's just a thought that somehow comes to you. Arrives within you. Almost like from some exterior force. You're no longer yourself. You're not even sad. You're just. Somehow calculating ways to irreparably mangle yourself while insouciantly driving your chariot? None of it makes sense! And a part of you realizes this. You begin thinking to yourself. Wait. Why would I want to do that? Slam my chariot from thousands of feet in the air. Directly into the ground? No. That's not what I want to do! Yet it's

almost like. If the time was right. You could be duped into doing it! You could forget for some period of time that you don't actually want to drive your chariot into a ball of flames. And you might actually do it.

I said: So that's why you don't drive anymore grandma? Wow.

Hera said: More or less. It's a shame that it's resulted in the entire female race being barred from driving. Yet. You know how your grandfather is Πελοςψ. When he gets an idea in his head. He's not one to take half measures.

I said: Fuckin tell me about it. But that's. Kind of weird. That you would feel like that?

Hera said: Perhaps. Then again. Perhaps not? We always start with this presumption that health and prosperity are what's actually good for us. What we desire. Yet is that necessarily true? How should we prove it? How could we? Of course you can give me some rhetoric Πελοςψ. I'm sure you could make a fairly compelling case! In any case. It was fairly obvious what occurred. In actuality.

I said: What was it then. That occurred.

Hera said: Well. It was clearly Zeus. He was willing me to crash my chariot into the ground at a fairly high speed. That was clearly the exterior force. Yet. At the same time. Even Zeus Himself wasn't necessarily aware of it. Just as I felt outside of myself. So to speak. As I was on the precipice of crashing my chariot on purpose. Well. Zeus feels the same all of the time. Outside of Himself in some way or another.

I said: Yet in this case that state of being resulted in women being barred from driving vehicles.

Hera said: You shouldn't necessarily try and make sense of it so literally Πελοςψ. Or legalistically. I'm not sure that's the best way to approach it in this case.

Zeus said: No. I think it's shameless personally. More or less shameless consumerism. That's what I think about it. Going to these different

amphitheaters to view performances. Oh you like Euripides? No. Fuck that man. That's gay. It's materialism. It's materialist faggotry. There's more respectability in just getting totally fucked up and driving chariots in the night-time sky you know. The stage. It's not the genuine article. The stage is always a derivative. Its essence is always derivative. Then again?

I said: Then again what? You know I'm trying to build up the whole scene here. In Pisa. So then again?

Zeus said: No. And I totally support that Πελοψ! By shameless consumerism. I don't mean that in a bad way. Materialist faggotry. That's not ipso facto bad! I'm just saying it offends my taste from time to time. Like when I'm all fucked up and like. Ughhhhhhhh. Let me fucking drive this chariot into the fucking atmosphere and shit. You know? I'm just like. Fuck art. What can art possibly express that isn't being expressed to me directly via being extremely fucked up. I'm like ughhhhhhhh. You know?

I said: No I get it grandpa. Ugh. I'm still hungover! I actually think that's one direct benefit of amphitheaters really. No hangover after. As opposed to the booze.

Zeus said: Yeah. Maybe. Anyway. I didn't want to just take some hair of the dog here.

I said: You wanted to just shit on my ambitions to build an artistic community in Pisa as well?

Zeus said: No. Not even that. It's really. It's about Tantalus. Your father. Listen. I know. I get it. You haven't seen him in a while. For obvious reasons! I realize that. I get it. It's a touchy subject.

I said: Honestly grandpa. It's been so long. I hardly even really. Consider him a father?

Zeus said: Which is actually a great segway. Because I actually. I told Hermes to meet us here? If that's okay?

I said: That's fine. Why would I object to Hermes popping in? I have no qualms with Hermes.

Zeus said: No. I wouldn't think you would. Why would you really? It's Hermes. Who doesn't love Hermes? But you know. I just. I like to be.

I said: Considerate? Do you? Like being considerate? What's going on here grandpa? Is there something I should know about? Ugh. I actually might be ready for a wine. This headache is. It's just fucking unrelenting!

Zeus said: No. I actually wouldn't mind being considerate in this instance. From time to time I get the urge. So yeah. I asked Hermes to come over here. I asked him Hermes. Can you come meet me and Πέλοψ. At this really quaint wine bar in Pisa? This afternoon? And he was a bit reticent. But I convinced him.

I said: Why would he be reticent? To come to a wine bar? Hermes loves drinking wine doesn't he?

Hermes said: What's up Zeus? Oh.

Zeus said: Hermes! Welcome! Come on in. Join our table. I insist. Please!

Hermes said: Okay.

I said: What's up Hermes?

Zeus said: Hermes. You remember.

Hermes said: Screw you Zeus.

Zeus said: Whoa! Hermes. C'mon man!

I said: Whoa! Hermes. Really?

Hermes said: You know what you're doing. Don't try and fucking play me right now. Asshole. Don't be an asshole. Come on.

Zeus said: Now hold on. I said: What's going on here guys?

Hermes said: Well. Why don't you tell him Zeus. Since you decided to bring us all here.

I said: Grandpa?

Zeus said: Okay. Well. Listen guys! I wanted to have a few glasses of wine here first. Be social and whatnot. You know. Lubricate us a bit. No homo.

I said: The fuck is going on?

Hermes said: Just tell him already! I don't need any wine! I've been drinking all day!

Zeus said: Okay. Okay! Jesus Christ. You guys are fucking relentless aren't you. Can't keep any secrets with you two huh? Yeah. One more Retsina please. The fucking 14 oz glass too! Not the 9 oz again. Fourteen okay?! God. That waitress is a fuckin bitch man. Okay. So about.

I said: What the fuck grandpa?

Zeus said: Listen. Bottom line. Πελοςψ. Hermes is your dad Πελοςψ. Not Tantalus. That's what I got us together here to say. Okay? That's what I wanted to broach. I wanted to broach is with a certain element of delicacy. But clearly! Clearly that's not going to happen!

Hermes said: You know. Maybe if you brought it up that that was what you wanted to do. In advance? Instead of ambushing me! Then maybe I would have reacted differently!

Zeus said: No. No it's fine. It's all out in the open now. This is how it was meant to be!

I said: So wait. My dad. Who chopped me up into little pieces and attempted to feed me to you all. In a soup. He's. Not my dad?

Zeus said: Correct. Basically. Yes.

I said: And Hermes. He is?

Hermes said: Well.

Zeus said: Correct!

An Analysis of Mr Bevel

Listen, Clara, let me tell you this: As Curt sat with a small stain on his Transformers t-shirt distraught, I couldn't help but reflect how I'd been glancing at the exact same rotting porcupine corpse on Route 146 for over a month on my rides home from work, how the porcupine corpse was taking so long to decay, how it to this day hardly looked decayed at all when Curt said, sitting in the corner of the bar, looking at the guy from across the bar, I wanna beat the shit out of that guy, and we could do it, but the only downside is, after he woke up, I'm pretty sure he'd have us both killed, to which I replied, leaning into the corner of the bar, looking at the guy from across the bar, I don't know, I wasn't that offended when he told me to go fuck myself.

Even prior to discovering the guy could ostensibly have us murdered if we beat him up, I remained surprisingly unoffended that he told me, unsolicited, to go fuck myself and had no interest in resorting to physical violence.

At the time, I was in the midst of playing pool with an attractive grandmother, the most attractive grandmother I'd met to date, and she was defeating me handily, to the extent it should have been embarrassing, but much like being told, unsolicited, to go fuck myself I was surprisingly unconcerned about it. I wasn't embarrassed at all.

Having lost the game of pool handily, I had to buy the grandmother a beer, but that was fine, the days of being ill-tempered and petty, hot headed and cheap, they were clearly behind me. It was almost as if, those days, they never existed. The grandmother told me, for the third time that hour, I physically resembled an immature guy who dated one of her friends, and I said That's impossible, I'm actually incredibly mature, as I witnessed, out of the corner of my eye, Dave swirling two handfuls of barbecue wings into the pan of party pizza,

placing the barbecue wings like pepperonis onto the party pizza. That's why he wasn't losing any of the weight he wanted.

However, that night wouldn't be the last night I'd bump into this grandmother, no, about nine months later I'd bump into this very same grandmother again, this time at a holiday party where I had no intention of bumping into her, or any other grandmothers, at all.

This grandmother remembered me, just as I remembered her, and at a later portion of the night, after witnessing one another from across the party, we sat at the bar, and I believe, if I'm recalling correctly, she bought me a beer. The last thing I needed was another beer, but I appreciated the generosity. Of late, if you're interested at all, I've been attempting to really scale back my consumption of alcohol, as I feel like, at times, I just go completely overboard, and it needs to stop. In any case, this grandmother. She says to me, My boyfriend is driving back up from Florida, and I was just wondering if you'd like to accompany me for the night.

Well, of course I'd have loved to accompany her for the night, she lived legitimately right around the corner from my apartment, but the only problem was, as you know Clara, at that time I had a girlfriend. And that girlfriend was AT this holiday party with me. She was literally less than fifty feet away from us when this grandma made this bold proposition. So, short of breaking up with my girlfriend on the spot, there really didn't seem to be any way that I could accompany anyone other than my girlfriend for the night.

Well, that's all fine and good Tim, and I guess I'm glad you're not ageist? Like, I'm glad you're not discriminating against women because they have kids who have kids, but at the same time I don't think it's the most commendable thing in the world. Oh, just because you almost had sex with a grandmother, that all of the sudden makes you a commendable person, even though you were in a committed relationship when you almost had sex with this grandmother.

Oh, I know that, Clara, I just, it's just this was the most beautiful grandmother I've ever seen. Do you have no appreciation of beauty? With all due respect, I feel like you're missing the point of this anecdote.

No, I do, I appreciate beauty. I'm an aesthete.

Well, it's like, maybe to me beauty isn't the girl in the online magazines, or the porn star with the biggest breasts or butt, maybe beauty to me is a grandma who just has something about her, you know?

And I respect that, Tim. I'm just saying.

No, I know, of course. I'm being silly here. But I'm being serious, too! If I ever see this grandma again-

You'll what, Tim? You're gonna ask her to spend the night with you, quote-unquote? Excuse me, grandma, but would you be interested in accompanying me for the night.

Maybe I will! No. That's not my thing, I can't just approach girls like that, even though this isn't a girl, and even though I do have a history with her, or at least I know her to speak to.

What's her name?

I'm not sure. It begins with an S.

So you, Timothy Stomachio, are telling me you're in love with a grandmother, and you don't even know her name? Well, let me tell you this, Tim: that's ridiculous, perhaps one of the most ridiculous things I've ever heard, or at least heard of late.

Fuck you, Clara. With all due respect I mean. Can I have this moment? I mean, for a guy like me, who's pushing three hundred pounds, who is by all accounts morbidly obese, who you know as well as anyone else has always struggled with being big-boned, for me to have a female of this quality, and a grandmother no less, approach me and essentially straight out ask me to have sex with her? That's a big deal. And it's not something I'm just going to let go. Ask Curt, he was there, I'm telling you true facts, true facts right to your face. Is it

possible there's something mystical about this grandmother? That she could change my life in a way that it's hitherto never been changed? Maybe I've been going about things all wrong, Clara, maybe I've been eating too much, weighing too much, dating the wrong people, being the wrong person. Maybe I need a complete overhaul of my life, once and for all though. Not just an overhaul that will be eventually overhauled by a subsequent overhaul, but an overhaul that is a permanent overhaul. An eternal overhaul. Maybe this grandmother is the bridge to this overhaul, this permanent, eternal overhaul, the overhaul I've been waiting for my entire life. Now do I sound so ridiculous?

Yes, in fact, you do Tim. You sound more ridiculous than you ever have! Let's face it, love, in its truest form, which is the form we all pursue it, is an impossibility, and I'm not speaking from an embittered point of view, you know me well enough to know that, yes I've taken my lumps with regard to relationships but I don't, I've never succumbed to resentment for extended periods of time, but love is, when we look at it with impassioned eyes, at best a waste of time and at worst a fallacy. Love will never last. Long-term relationships are recipes for disaster. You know this, I know this. Love, what are we truly to do with it? Does it ever truly disassociate itself from lust, or is it all lust, lust leads us to cesspools, we know this. The entire concept of possession disgusts me, Tim. It really does. Yet how can we realistically disassociate the yearning for possession from love?

We can't!

Of course we can't, love is this yearning for possession, while attempting, in the most futile fashions of course, to fend off the tangential urges to continue, to persist in engaging in sexual conquests. Love is this urge to possess, and in the event possession occurs we immediately become disinterested, we immediately find ourselves in positions where fending off these illicit urges, currently illicit, formally natural urges, we find fending off these urges to be a necessity. But

fending off these urges comes with its own price. We become despondent, we suspect our partners are fending off these same urges, perhaps unsuccessfully. Perhaps our partners are unsuccessfully fending off these urges, while we're successfully fending off these urges, and when we discover our partner unsuccessfully fended off the same urges we successfully fended off we become jaded and indignant, yet why so? Does fending off the urge excuse its existence, or does it call into question the entire structure of these relationships? Fuck these relationships, Tim. You think courting a grandmother will excuse you from these imbroglios, maybe that's what you think, but you're wrong. You couldn't be more wrong, and you've never been more wrong. Grandmothers are people, too, just like us, Tim. And these grandmothers will soon be put into these same imbroglios; in fact, look at the very grandmother you're courting now, just last year at this holiday party! Did she not have a boyfriend?

Yeah, I guess she did . . .

And what was she doing? Asking you to quote-unquote spend the night with her? Of course, she was! Because the fact her child had a child in no way exempts her from these imbroglios, this structure is broken, Tim! Listen, I get it. You played pool with a grandmother, and she took your breath away. It happens. And now you think this one will be different, because at some point things have to be different. But nothing's ever been different, Tim. Heraclitus talks his shit about the river being all different water, but the truth is Parmenides was right. Nothing changes, it never has. But the truth of the matter is they both were right, if things never stop changing or never change at all it's always the same. Nothing ever changes, Tim, and I'm not sure why you seem to think courting a grandmother will be an exception to this rule, because it seems obvious to me that it won't.

Love, what is it, Clara? It seems like such an age-old question, but is it? Is it really? What is history, I guess we have to ask that before we ask about anything being quote-unquote age old, don't-

Oh please, Tim!

Clara. Clara. Just because, yes, I may or may not be somewhat in love with this grandmother doesn't mean these philosophical questions aren't at work. Because these philosophical questions, it seems to me, may in fact be incredibly at work, at work as we speak.

Do you think you'll ever see her again?

Time will tell.

You know I've talked to Dave about that whole night, right?

Oh, really?

Does that make you uncomfortable?

I wouldn't admit it if it did, but no not really.

Well, DAVE told me that this girl, this grandmother, she actually did think you were cute, and she did think you dated one of her friends previously, but now she realizes it may not have been you after all. But honestly the last time I spoke with Dave was a while ago, and at that point she still had a boyfriend, but you know how Dave is, he thinks the fact she has a boyfriend doesn't even make a difference! But I would advise you that, if in fact she does still have a boyfriend, that it does make a difference, a big difference! You may be single now, Tim, but just because you're single doesn't mean enabling cheating isn't a form of cheating, and I hope you're aware of that. You're older now, so I hope you're aware of that. And if this grandma comes back around, telling you her boo is out of town for the night, and she'd like you to quote-unquote keep her company for the night, then I hope you'll politely decline the offer.

Well, that'll be tough, but I agree in principle.

And you should agree in principle. If there's one principle you of all people should agree with it's that. Stop fucking these girls who have relationships or God forbid marriages, because it's terrible karma. So what are you going to do if this year you go to this same holiday party and this grandma is there and she wants to get freaky?

Well, I mean, what are the chances?

Well, you're a philosophical guy, Tim! So, philosophically speaking, what if this grandma grabs your junk and asks you to come around the bend for the night, what are you gonna do?

Well, first of all, Clara, I'll ask her, politely of course, if she has a boyfriend.

And what if she does?

Well, in that case I guess I'll have quite the decision to make, won't I?

Don't be a piece of shit, Tim!

I'm not being a piece of shit, Clara! I'm just being honest, don't go all being high and mighty with me, it's not like you don't have skeletons in the closet, even if I don't know about them, that doesn't necessarily mean they're not there.

I'm not saying I don't have skeletons in my closet, but if I do have skeletons in my closet I wasn't preparing to put them there. I wouldn't prevaricate if you asked me if I'd fuck some hot guy with a wife!

So it's not murder unless it's premeditated, is that what you're saying here, Clara? So unless I prepare to go out and slice some poor moron up to pieces, then that's ok? If I just end up at a holiday party and, whoops, end up shoving a butcher's knife into someone's neck, then that's-

Tim, this is why I can't have these conversations with you, because they turn into these asinine arguments.

How is this asinine?

Because you're talking about slicing people's throats when I'm just trying to, in the most friendly way I'm capable of, suggest you avoid putting yourself in what anyone with half a brain would agree is a less than stellar situation.

And that's fine, but-

Plus, you want to discuss the true nature of love, but how is this true love, if you're already admitting you're possibly, and let's be

honest, probably going to pursue this grandmother even if she has a boyfriend? Is that romantic?

Lust is very romantic in European countries, yes Clara.

It's immoral is what it is, and let me tell you this now, if this comes to pass, and you bump into this grandma, and she still has a boyfriend, and you go ahead and do freaky things with her, I'm telling you now, don't come to me crying when it all falls apart. Plus, who knows who her boyfriend is, assuming she has a boyfriend, which she certainly could! He could be an incredibly unsavory character, you could be putting your security at risk. Plus you live a mile from her!

I'm not saying you're wrong, Clara. And I'm not saying I don't appreciate the concern, because I do. I definitely do. I appreciate your concern more than you're capable of knowing. But I don't need to be, I'm just saying, at what point does all of this become just a little condescending on your part? At the end of the day, am I aware love is pointless and impossible and all of those other synonyms? Of course I am! The entire concept of romance is perhaps more alien to me than even you imagine, what is courtship, after all, if not a radical misinterpretation of fatigue, a race that believes it can run forever. Yet even long-distances have their limits, Clara! Eventually it all just gets so boring, so unbelievably tired, and there's this residue of intimacy, there's this build up of a history that finds itself continually undermined by the regenerations of urges, of sensations, of this need for something new! It's a balancing act that can only stay balanced for so long, balance necessitates imbalance, and when imbalance occurs in a courtship we either abandon or double down.

Sure, we both realize that hitting eject is the only option, Clara, but it's never the easiest choice, is it? And I'm aware that this imaginary courtship I have with regard to this grandmother will move in accord with these eternal patterns, of course it will. How could it not? The idea that courting a grandmother would somehow be immune to the vicissitudes that undermine love and romance and sincerity and

genuine feeling at every step of the way, the idea that the fact a woman is a grandmother, that her children have children, the idea that any of that could alter, even for a second, the immutable laws of nature is absurd!

Yet what choice do we have, that's the question I ask you, Clara. To enter every courtship we come across with this air of cynicism that undermines the courtship even before the immutable laws of nature have a chance to? So when things inevitably go awry we can say, smugly: Oh, I knew this would happen. Oh, I knew this would happen! Oh, how smart we are, Clara, we're just the fucking smartest people we know, aren't we, Clara? No! That's simply no way to live! There's absolutely a possibility, as minuscule and ridiculous as it may be, that my courtship of this grandmother will be the road to a relationship of perfect harmony, of inscrutable geometry, that courting a grandmother has been the thing missing from my life this entire time.

There's a chance of that, Clara, and if you refute that chance, then I have no choice but to deem you a cynic simply too far gone for me, never mind anyone else, to save, a person who would prefer to sabotage her rocketship than run the risk that it could implode of its own accord. But blowing up of your own accord is the best. There's nothing better than blowing up of your own accord. In any case, you'll never find a man with that attitude, Clara. So you can say what you will about my grandma, but at least I'm not so pathetic that I've given up the possibility of love, even if it's just for six months or a year, even if it's three months, so what, better than sitting in my room and jacking off every night.

What am I going to jack off in my room every night because human beings have a natural tendency to lie, cheat, and deceive when in each other's presence, because the pangs of lust are too much for most of us to resist? Should I renounce the world once and for all? Maybe I should, I don't know, I've thought about it many times, renouncing the world, more times than you know and more times than

I'd care to admit. I've thought about losing weight, I've thought about renouncing the world, I've thought about having a second dessert, but eventually I start to think that thinking will get me absolutely nowhere, that thinking is the bane of all existence, that every person over the course of history who's made the choice to think seriously is a total moron, and then I go outside. I take a walk. Because fuck it, that's why.

Are you familiar with the Bevel case at all, Tim.

No, why?

Just wondering.

What's the Bevel case?

Well, it's actually quite the curious case, Tim, it involves this guy Bevel. I'm not sure how much I should really be disclosing regarding the case, as the testimony is still under deliberation, and I don't think the case will be adjourned any time soon. In fact, I know it won't, there's no way. The way things are going right now? But this Bevel case is interesting, Tim, especially for someone like you who's so intent on looking for love.

I mean, I wouldn't say I'm-

Because Bevel, he was probably a guy just like you, realistic yet not profoundly pessimistic, but now he's in rough shape, let me tell you. And this is what I've been telling you, Tim, but you don't seem to want to hear it. You don't know people until you know people, Tim, and by then it's too late. By the time you get to know anyone, at that point you're in too deep, and this Bevel learned that the hard way.

Well, what happened to him, Clara?

The person he was involved with hurled herself off a building, and he had to identify the body, because the head was essentially disintegrated. Her head was a soup, Tim. That's what happened to Bevel, and now he's testifying before the court about the whole thing, and now the court won't adjourn until they get to the bottom of the case.

Well, that sounds like it's the court's problem, not Bevel's.

But that's not how the court works, Tim, once these things get into process they're very difficult to adjourn, cases can stay open for years, decades at a time.

What does the court want from Bevel, Clara, this doesn't even sound real. Are you playing around with me again?

Oh, it's all too real, Tim. Either that or maybe it is all illusory, who's to say? The court needs to establish motive. Why would a young female in good health, in a seemingly good enough relationship, I mean maybe her relationship with Bevel wasn't perfect, but no relationships are perfect Tim, you know that as well as I do, why would someone like that hurl herself from a very high building? It's questions like these that keep courts from adjourning, and now Bevel, as the most likely cause of the jump, is in the midst of it all. He can't escape.

But do you think he's really responsible?

We're all just pieces of fate, Tim, what do you think? Even if, like I'm sure you're thinking, Bevel was just a victim of circumstance, that he was involved with a female who was perhaps mentally ill, although I think even Bevel would disagree with that statement, even if this girl was mentally ill and Bevel was just the straw that broke the camel's back so to speak, how can we verify that? Legal insanity is a farce, Tim, you know that. It's impossible to prove, all of these doctors are on the payroll, and if they're not on the payroll, they're probably addicted to the drugs they're prescribing. There's nothing easier to buy in this country than a doctor. Plus, Bevel himself has been attempting to convince the court that he's equally insane as the deceased, and that's if the deceased is truly insane in the first, and if she's not insane, then how do you explain her, a healthy female with a bright future, hurling herself to her death? And a gruesome one at that! Plus, it would be a mistake to assume Bevel's hands are clean himself, because, much like you, Bevel has dirt under his fingernails, too. Just like we all do, I have skeletons in my closet, you were right about that, Tim. But that's the

problem. It's all of these details that make the case so ambiguous which make the case more or less impossible to close. This is what I've been trying to tell you, Tim, that your belief that approaching sensuality is a natural event that will eventually work itself out, when it's actually the opposite.

Now I'm not opposed to your pursuit of sensuality, don't get me wrong, I'm simply attempting to clarify that this pursuit is ill-advised, and that if you choose to pursue it you should at least prepare yourself to be in the shoes of this Bevel one day, probably sooner than later.

Wow, Clara. I guess I should say that's seriously messed up, it's frankly unbelievable, about this guy Bevel, and in many ways, you're right, it does call into question my alleged intentions with this potential grandmother.

Tim, don't you see? That the only path is one of complete and utter renunciation. That all other paths lead to misery and suffering?

I hear you, Clara. I really do. They say there's no necessary antithesis between chastity and sensuality, but I wonder sometimes, like you, if the latter is-

Entirely impossible?

-not worth the effort. Having said that, I think one thing we have to consider here, that perhaps you're overlooking, is that grandmothers tend to be more mature and therefore immune to the caprice that is so prevalent in suicidal thoughts. Now I'm not claiming that there aren't any crazy grandmothers out there, because there definitely are, whether or not you or I have met them or not is irrelevant, because we know these completely insane grandmothers out there, but I just wonder if Bevel's case, if it's just apples and oranges with my own?

I think it's fairly clear just from the limited information I have about him that Bevel is of an entirely different character than I am, that Bevel is perhaps a dramatic, theatrical, but ultimately inauthentic romantic who shrewdly disguises himself as a kind of profound skeptic.

Whereas I'm a true romantic, truly looking for love in its most sui generis offforms.

First of all, I have no pride, so I have that going for me. Second of all, I stick it out through thick and thin. Women can feel free to treat me like pure trash, disregard me in profound and deep-rooted manners, and I'll stick around no problem.

Whereas Bevel is a man of principle, however inauthentic these principles may prove in the long run, which is why I've never subscribed to principles, Clara. Which is why when you speak of renunciation as a principle I can't help but cringe, because to me renunciation only exists in a purely unprincipled form. To subscribe to renunciation, Clara, well that's not renouncing anything at all, you're creating a new potential order to things, people will follow you into this realm of renunciation, and it will be monetized before you know it.

You know it.

Which brings me back to this grandmother. Why should I avoid sensualism when my instinct clearly tells me otherwise? All I have is instinct, unthinking instinct, because once I begin thinking I inevitably become principled, and once my principles become ingrained they run the risk of being adopted, and once principles are adopted they inevitably start down the path of being monetized. Which is what I oppose more than anything.

What I oppose more than anything is disingenuous opposition, Clara, I guess you could say I'm more or less severely ascetic when it comes to opposition, renunciation, and the like. And once commerce enters the fold the person of true ascetic character has no choice but to remove themselves, that's more or less the first trait of anyone of any ascetic character whatsoever, it's to avoid commercial concerns at all costs. So in a way my lack of renunciation, formally speaking, is actually one of the highest forms of renunciation. The seclusion of the monk is in fact now a commercial idea, true seclusion, true monkhood

is living in plain sight, wearing the garb of the common man and pursuing the objects of the common man with an ascetic detachment, Clara. A severe ascetic detachment in all common objects. This is the nature of the ascetic as I've understood it. By abandoning the common object the ascetic person betrays himself, it's only in the sight of the common object can the ascetic person achieve the highest form of asceticism. This Bevel, it's already clear to me he's failed, although he's definitely, perhaps even relentlessly, PURSUED, in obtaining the true nature of asceticism.

But perhaps, Tim, you're falling into the same error you believe Bevel has, if I'm understanding your critique of Bevel correctly.

How so?

Well, isn't the true downfall of Bevel, by your standard at least, and I'm in no way subscribing to this standard, as I'm sure you're far from surprised by, isn't the true downfall of Bevel that he's verbalized these concerns, that in the very act of verbalizing his concern, we instantaneously view these concerns, as they relate to Bevel, in an entirely different manner? The person who verbally pursues this sort of asceticism, he or she compromises him or herself egregiously by doing so. In fact, we no longer believe in the nature of their asceticism as soon as they verbalize their asceticism, as soon as they verbalize their prophecy they become essentially false prophets in our eyes.

Now do our eyes tell us the truth? That's another matter entirely. However, with regard to Bevel, and how Bevel relates to you, Tim, I think the fact of the matter is you both are falling, arguably precipitously, into the exact same error, that the very fact you feel the need to verbalize these aims causes you to doubt these aims, doubt the veracity of these aims, the sincerity of your so-called mission.

Are you suggesting I should just remain silent, Clara?

I wouldn't say I'm suggesting anything, Tim, I would just say I'm outlining possible repercussions from possible so-called actions. Possible repercussions from possible so-called actions, that's all.

Remember asceticism ultimately must be sold, it has no merit of its own accord, as it goes against the grain of the average person's proclivities.

And that's exactly my point, Clara, sorry to interrupt, but my exact point is that I'm not in the business of selling my asceticism, that as soon as asceticism is even recognized as a possible commodity it ceases to be asceticism, even if the practitioner doesn't sell it.

Asceticism can't be referenced, it's nature is of the sort that recognition alters it essentially, that recognition of it changes it so essentially that recognizing it in fact consists of changing it to the point it's no longer recognizable. That's the nature of the ascetic as I understand it, Clara, and that's why when you speak of selling the ascetic I have to almost laugh to myself, because that sale by its very nature must be fraudulent. There's never been any point to selling the ascetic because selling the ascetic has always been impossible, when people reference selling the ascetic, Clara, they're actually referencing something else entirely. But that's the nature of commerce in general, it's nothing more than an elaborate bait and switch schema, and this schema is only getting more and more complex.

Commerce has become so absurdly expansive that it no longer has any idea what needs its extinguishing. Demand must be created and continually created and extended, because our physical needs are next to nothing. The true question of asceticism versus sensuality is: how should you spend your time once these minimal physical needs are met? And how should we?

Should we renounce sensuality like you suggest, Clara, because sensuality will always lead to misery of one sort or another? There's no doubt we should! No one is arguing with you there, Clara. What's being argued is how do we identify true renunciation, because we know asceticism is sold every day. Asceticism, ironically enough, is one of the greatest commodities known to man, more billionaires have been created from selling renunciation than anything else.

So when we ask ourselves how we should spend our time and immediately come to the conclusion that doing almost anything leads us to misery we think we've solved our issue, but we in fact haven't, far from. In fact we've only created a much larger issue by believing, falsely, that we've solved this other issue.

We pompously believe we renounce everything, but eventually even this renunciation process is called into question. Have we truly renounced anything in our solitude, we ask ourselves. We believe by turning away from the world and diving into our solitude we've achieved pure renunciation and therefore all of this suffering will finally cease, but within our solitude we find nothing but multitudes, to the extent our own mental experience begins to achieve a materiality of its own, and we then realize that the only evidence we ever had of this world we've turned out back to in the first place is our perception, and that our perception is of a physical character.

So we've turned away from nothing and we've renounced even less. To make matters worse, we realize we've become excessively fraudulent, we've congratulated ourselves effusively for so effectively renouncing everything and elevating ourselves above the fray, so to speak, but we haven't done that in the least! We've only introduced more multitudes!

We realize that our fraudulence places us even below the bozos and morons we scorn so much, the ones who renounce nothing and live lives of pure profligacy. Nothing is renounced and it never can be, this idea that we can renounce the world and make our suffering cease is a fraudulent transaction regardless of whether or not it's ever bought or sold. We sell it to ourselves, in our solitude, among our own multitudes, and we become the bozos we scorn without even knowing it, Clara.

That's why when you caution me about courting this grandmother I just have to laugh. I should renounce this grandma? No, the most authentic renunciation of my feelings for this grandmother

would be a full court press courtship of her, Clara, and I think even you would have to admit that.

Tim, I understand where you're coming from, I really do, and I wish you the best. I guess I'd like to just leave you with a few brief, very brief, thoughts, because I knew the deceased, which perhaps you knew, and I knew her well, incredibly well even. The deceased, she told me, would come home to Bevel in the most angelic of moods, she would be ecstatic to see him. She wasn't even aware of her own infidelity, Tim. The deceased wasn't even aware of the monumental disrespect of coming home to Bevel in these angelic moods, of telling him she loved him while two-timing him, of telling him she wanted his children, she wanted marriage, while messaging another man Good morning boo, while messaging another man I wish I could see you somehow.

In fact, this was the most foreign thing in the world to the deceased, and if someone were to try and make her aware of this infidelity, as Bevel did, she wouldn't even believe it herself. And when she finally came to believe it, because it occurred, she was destroyed. She couldn't believe her own actions, Tim, because she was wholly unaware that coming home in these angelic moods while conducting illicit relations with this other man was something she was actually doing. Which put Bevel in a bit of a sticky spot, didn't it? Because the deceased was destroyed by Bevel, by Bevel's insistence of making the deceased aware of her own actions. Now Bevel must live with the fact he destroyed the deceased, because the deceased was the happiest person on the planet when she was entirely unaware of her own actions, but when Bevel made her aware of her actions, which were entirely despicable, because they were despicable, the deceased was destroyed. And Bevel then identified the corpse.

Lying in bed with Bevel the deceased would send illicit messages to another man, she would meet with this other man, and she wasn't even aware of it, Tim. You scoff at the case of the Bevel and Bevel

himself and believe your pursuit of sensuality is the purest form of renunciation, but do you understand this? Do you understand the deceased? I doubt it. The deceased was a piece of fate, Tim, a collection of urges that were never in communication with one another. She hurled herself from that building for that reason, which is no reason, the deceased never understood reasoning, but she, in the eyes of Bevel, was the pinnacle of purity. And that's the main point I'll leave you with, the element you seem to be blatantly overlooking with regard to Bevel's case, that Bevel believed the deceased was the pinnacle of purity when she was, in fact, the opposite.

Corinne, you know we have our issues, Bevel would say, but I can trust her. If nothing else I can trust her, Bevel said. I've never met a girl who was more committed, more honest and caring, I can just tell by her actions. You can't fake that, Bevel would say. And he was totally wrong, Tim! The deceased was buying things for other men, she was explicitly expressing genuine feelings for other men, while being the pinnacle of purity in the eyes of Bevel.

It's true the practitioners of the ascetic are for the most part fraudulent, utterly fraudulent even, and maybe this fraudulence is more pronounced because it disrespects the almost holy aim of renunciation. But the pursuit of sensuality will never lead you any closer to renunciation, Tim. The pursuit of sensuality, as in the case of Bevel, will leave you stranded in the realm of your senses, true, but the veracity of these senses will be slowly and excruciatingly torn from you. Bevel can no longer trust his sense, his good sense is, in fact, bad sense. He has no sense. He believed the deceased was loyal to him to an incredible degree when she was disloyal to him to the extreme. The deceased sat in a bed with Bevel and discussed their future children, all the while messaging another man good morning. Then she jumped from a building, and Bevel, who could no longer trust his sense perception to any degree, was forced to identify the corpse, the mutilated corpse. The terribly mutilated corpse. The pursuit of the

ascetic, you're correct Tim, will never achieve renunciation in the purest sense, and it will remain fraudulent to a great degree. The suffering will never cease. But the suffering can be mitigated, if not expunged. The pursuit of sensuality, Tim, annihilates perception while leaving consciousness. A person is left conscious, yet unable to perceive anything. All perceptions are immediately identified as false, or possibly false, the pursuit of sensuality leaves consciousness in a completely stranded state, aware of its own body but with nothing to cling to, free falling for an indefinite period of time.

The 2011 Chicago Bulls

A.

I said: Yeah. I was at the spot. waiting for fucking what's his name. Carlos Boozer? From Greater Toronto. The Canadian guy. Although Toronto is probably the most American part of Canada really. Well. Apparently his grandma sent a few late night texts to my so-called girlfriend. Just some inappropriate shit really. The content of the messages that is. Of course his grandma can text message my girlfriend whenever she wants. I don't particularly care. It was the other night. I think it was Christmas night actually. The actual night of Christmas she texts her this. Some bullshit about knowing how she feels. I quote-unquote know how you feel. How she was sorry she didn't know her sooner. Quote-unquote know her as a child. Mind you. My girlfriend's aunt just got murdered in cold blood at the border last week. Where the fuck does Carlos Boozer's grandma get off telling her she knows how she feels? I said to her. My girlfriend that is. I said to her she was obviously fucked up. Carlos Boozer's grandma that is. She was obviously one too many egnogs deep and shit. But even still. Is that an excuse? To send inappropriate text messages? Because you're whacked out of your mind on Christmas night? No. You're a grown ass woman! More than grown ass actually. You actually have one foot in the goddamned grave! Yet you're texting like a co-ed on the rag. Where do you get off acting like a twelve year old girl? In any case. Whatever I guess. Anyway. I was waiting for Boozer over at Dave's Place.

Luol Deng said: Okay. Go on.

I said: And obviously I was assiduously analyzing his produce section. I have an assiduous eye for produce. You know this Luol. I honestly. Honestly? I don't fuck around when it comes to produce. I really take the shit fucking seriously. It's not a joke to me. Produce. I was trying to see if he had any persimmons. If Dave did. His place did. I

love those fruits. They're so smooth man. Although I bought a few not too long ago. Persimmons. That were completely out of season. Actually inedible. I actually felt my entire mouth turn to literal cotton just by taking one bite actually. Obviously I threw them out immediately.

Luol Deng said: Ugh. That's the worst!

I said: But Dave's produce section on that day only had some weird ass tomatoes. That looked vaguely like persimmons from a distance I guess. That's what got my mind onto persimmons in the first place I should say. Well either way. I'm waiting for Carlos. Waiting and waiting. For Carlos. As I'm waiting. I know Dave's usually has some free coffee. Like from a jug in the store. Right by the soup bar. Which I think is also free? Or maybe I stole it once? I was feeling slightly decaffeinated so I went to take a look. No dice. Jug was empty by mid-day. We're supposed to do a quick plutonium deal in the back. Me and Carlos. But Carlos's fucking like. What? Maybe half an hour late already?

Luol Deng said: So typical!

I said: Dave's Place has some seedless lemons I notice. I pick up a few. I'd already put about four seeded lemons in a plastic bag. At first I was like put those back? The seeded lemons? Should I? Even though I already had them in the damn plastic bag? Nah. I told myself fuck it. I'll just get a bag of the seedless in addition.

Luol Deng said: It's not like you're not gonna use them?

I said: Exactly my thinking as well Luol. You can never have enough lemons! Fuckin use an entire lemon for almost every major meal. Granted I only usually eat one major meal a day but still.

Luol Deng said: One entire lemon per meal?

I said: Oh yeah. I use fresh lemon juice as an olive oil substitute. Generally speaking. I need maximal caloric density you know. And frankly. The oils just don't cut it on that front. Not even olive. Which sure is nominally better for you than various vegetable oils.

Luol Deng said: I've never. I don't think I've ever heard of that. Using lemon as an olive oil substitute? But I'm not entirely against it.

I said: It adds a great tang. And it lubricates the grains and legumes you know? In a way that they really need. I wanted to kind of. Like I said. Really limit my oil usage? But at the same time I can't be eating. I have no interest in consuming dry ass grains and beans either. It's fucking disgusting.

Luol Deng said: So Carlos? Does he show up?

I said: Eventually. Sure. Yeah. Carlos shows up. Tells me he forgot the plutonium at his grandma's house. Can we head over there quick? Can I head over to his grandma's house now. This is the question he poses to me.

Luol Deng said: Oh god. Seriously? Seriously what a fucking retard that guy is sometimes.

I said: I say sure Carlos. Let's go to your grandma's! But can we stop by a fuckin coffee shop first? I wanna grab a coffee. I need a cup of Jo to be honest. Believe it or not he actually tries to balk at this. Despite the fact I only even mentioned it as a courtesy. Of course I'm gonna get a coffee. He tries to tell me his time is tight. I say Carlos. I fuckin texted you about this at 10am yesterday. You didn't reply to me all day. Then you text me at 10am today. And then you show up late. And now you're putting me on a strict time limit here?

Luol Deng said: Typical. It's so typical! It's sad. Yet it's typical.

I said: If anything. I said to him. I'm on a time limit here. I need to get my fuckin mom to Mars by the end of the weekend and I told you yesterday I'd like to have this plutonium in tow by mid-day the next day.

Luol Deng said: Meaning the day you actually ended up meeting with him. At Dave's Place.

I said: Exactly. Because the guy never fuckin texted me back the day that I texted him. And not only that Luol. Not only does he not text me back. But then he texts me the next day. He texts me with some

arduous warm-up texts. Disingenuous courtesy texts. Hey mannnn. How's it going mannn. How you been mannnn. Then he asks me what I'm doing that day? Did I need some plutonium? I wrote back uhhhh. Yeah. I actually texted you about it over twenty four hours ago? Did you even get it. The text?

Luol Deng said: Let me guess. He doesn't even acknowledge it. The fact you messaged him and he never replied.

I said: Of course not. Instead it's right into. Uhhh can you meet me. Maybe at Dave's Place around three? Sure Carlos. Let me drop everything I'm doing. For your mediocre ass plutonium. Fuckin cunt.

Luol Deng said: I used. I remember I used his plutonium last year. Was planning a quick trip to Inner Venus with the family and whatnot. I had to stop at three space weigh stations on my way!

I said: See. That's exactly what I'm afraid of. I was actually thinking that while I was in the midst of perusing the produce at fuckin Dave's. I was like. You know what? I'm gonna wait around for Carlos and his shitty plutonium. And then my mom is gonna call me halfway to Mars like. Hey. There's something wrong with the mega-shuttle's gravity thruster. Did you get the diesel changed this month? And then I'd have to be like. Hold on mom. Let me check the damn plutonium levels. And then I'd have to schedule Quadruple E to go out there. On my own dime mind you. And service the damn plutonium! Luol Deng said: That's basically what we had to do when we were on our way to Inner Venus last year. It was ridiculous. Totally cunt!

B.

Carlos Boozer said: Yeah. I was at. Well I told him. Explicitly I told him. Sure I'd meet him at Dave's if he wanted to! Because he'd been bugging me. Like non-stop. About getting some of my plutonium for like a week or so. Just like nonstop with the texting. Hey mannnnnn. Can I have some plutonium mannnnnn. Could really use a trip to Mars mannnnn. I've told him. I feel like I've told him for years now that.

Dude. Fucking call me. I'm not on my phone like that. I'm not sifting through all the junk texts I get on daily, sometimes literally hourly basis. Just so that I can promptly reply to you and your apparent immediate need for my plutonium.

Luol Deng said: Oh yeah. Totally. Especially when it's so obvious that you have the best plutonium around. Like what does he think? You're an on-demand service.

Carlos Boozer said: I'm not even saying I'm the best Luol. I'm actually super humble. I'm just saying I'm the goddamned best you're gonna get on short-notice. At Dave's Place. In the back. While you analyze their produce.

Luol Deng said: Oh. One hundred percent!

Carlos Boozer said: you ever see this guy in the fruit aisle? He's a fucking nut! He thinks he has like a PhD in apples or some shit.

Luol Deng said: One time. One time I saw him examine literally every Asian Pear they had in the bin Carlos. There had to have been two dozen Asian Pears in that bin too.

Carlos Boozer said: I fucking believe it.

Luol Deng said: And he didn't even buy a pear! Touched every single one and every single one apparently wasn't up to his standards!

Carlos Boozer said: So he texts me like. You here? At Dave's. I write back to him. I say not only am I here. But for the last time. Please. Call. Me. You. Fucking. Cunt! Obviously I didn't text him that he was a fucking cunt. But I wanted to!

Luol Deng said: Carlos. You would have been totally within your rights to text him that he was being a fucking cunt.

Carlos Boozer said: I don't disagree! And what is it for? This plutonium. Why am I doing last minute plutonium deals you ask? Because this guy wants to send his mom to Mars before the weekend or some shit? I thought it was for him. That's what I assumed. Until the guy tells me at Dave's that it's actually for his mother.

Luol Deng said: Oh god. Are you serious?

Carlos Boozer said: Like what a fucking damn joke. You're telling me your mom needs to go to Mars? That quickly? Your mother? Come on man. My eight year old nephew can come up with better lies than that. And I'm pretty sure he has special needs. To Mars?!

Luol Deng said: What's possibly on Mars that his mom could need that immediately?

Carlos Boozer said: It's not like your trip to Inner Venus last year Luol. Like I get that. Sometimes families really want and even need to get to Inner Venus on short notice. That's totally understandable. They're not even remotely comparable. But moms to Mars? Mothers to Mars? Like how old is his mom anyway? Like eighty.

Luol Deng said: She has to be pushing eighty. If she's not in her eighties already!

Carlos Boozer said: First of all. I wouldn't send my mom to Mars by herself period. And my mom is barely even menopausal! She does tons of stuff by herself.

Luol Deng said: Oh. Never! I'd never send my mom to Mars alone either!

Carlos Boozer said: Second of all. The guy has the fucking nerve to ask me. He says to me. This is the good plutonium right?

Luol Deng said: He said that to you? No he didn't.

Carlos Boozer said: He says. This is the good plutonium right? Right in the back of Dave's Place. No. It's the shit plutonium. Jackass.

Luol Deng said: Right. Like what does he think?

Carlos Boozer said: Yeah. I'm selling you the plutonium that's total crap. And I brought it special for you! Fucking asshole.

Luol Deng said: Honestly. You should have! What a jerk man. What an immense prick he is sometimes.

Carlos Boozer said: I mean he's a great guy. Don't get me wrong.

Luol Deng said: Oh totally. I love him as a person.

Carlos Boozer said: But what a total and utter jerk-off he is too. So after I go into Dave's Place. Figured I'd get a free coffee.

Luol Deng said: It's such a nice touch they have in there.

Carlos Boozer said: A grocery store with free coffee? It's unheard of. The amount of people who go into grocery stores. You're giving them all complimentary coffee? It's amazing to me. That they can do that. Offer that service. And not have it completely taken advantage of by shitheads and scumbags.

Luol Deng said: And the coffee's actually half-decent!

Carlos Boozer said: It usually is. Except the place was all out that day.

Luol Deng said: That's surprising. They're usually.

Carlos Boozer said: Then again. It was mid-day.

Luol Deng said: But who doesn't enjoy a mid-day coffee?

The FBI & MUFON

I said: What do you think? About this one? Is this any good you think?

Bahira said: A deluxe professional razor? I mean. You cut your own hair. So. You'll use it right?

I said: Oh yeah. I guess the only thing is. The thing of it really is. I just got a new razor for Christmas. And then. Actually right after that. I actually bought a second one too. Just for the parts of my cranium that. You know. Really need super tight. Tight fades.

Bahira said: So you already have two then. Two new razors? I said: Yeah but the second one. It's not that great. So far at least. And I still have my really old one. My years old razor. From like years ago. So technically I still have three razors. Not counting beard trimmers.

Bahira said: Just as a backup you have the third? No I get it.

I said: Well specifically to shave my ass I kept the third one. But yeah. I guess as a back-up too.

Bahira said: Ew.

I said: But I guess. Now that I'm thinking about it? I could probably just take my new razor. The newer one that so far doesn't work that well at least. And I could move that to my manscaping razor? Rotate that one into the ass shaving slot?

Bahira said: I mean. If the other razor is that old. Maybe that's actually a good idea. Should you even be shaving your butt with a blade that's that old? Is that healthy? I don't know.

I said: I don't know. I mean it still works fine. But yeah. I get your point. This looks. Yeah. It really looks like the one that the pros use!

A man said: Pssst. Psssssst.

I said: Excuse me?

A man said: Pssst! Are you. You guys are the MUFON people right?

I said: Depends. Who is it that's asking the question?

The man said: For the time being. Let's see. You can call me. Hmm. Let's see. How about Joe?

Bahira said: Hi Joe.

I said: Joe?

Joe said: Yeah. You know. Now that I think about it, Joe's actually. That's my actual real name. Why don't you come with me? Or how about this? I'll buy you that deluxe professional razor you were looking at there. How about that?

I said: Sold. Let's go to the. Let's hit that self-checkout then Joe.

Joe said: Now. Let's see. Don't mind me here. Just gonna swipe my card real quick. Now. Alcibiades. You were saying something about shaving your ass earlier?

I said: Um. That's a little personal. Don't you think Joe?

Joe said: I don't know. You seemed to be discussing it pretty openly in the middle of a Walmart cosmetics aisle. So I kind of got the vibe that maybe you were comfortable speaking publicly on the subject.

I said: With my friend Bahira sure. But. Well. Actually fuck it I guess. I mean. You are buying me the damn razor aren't you? So then what about it?

Joe said: No. I was just gonna say. That you know you can get that professionally done right? They actually do that around here for you. If you were interested.

I said: What? Ass waxing?

Joe said: Exactly. There's a Dominican girl who does it right over on Broad St.

Bahira said: No. Alcibiades. That'll hurt! I don't think.

Joe said: Let the guy decide for himself. No? Anyway. Let's go out to the car. I actually have the girl's card in my car if you end up being interested at all. She's good too. Not that I've actually used her personally. But she gives me a kickback for referrals. I have a lot of Mediterranean friends I work with in my line of work. So it's really. It quite a mutually beneficial.

I said: Now what is your line of work exactly? Joe? That you would somehow be made aware that Bahira and I are both officially registered MUFON detectives? Because that seems.

Joe said: I'm an FBI agent actually. Does that connect the dots for you at all? I know it's not like. A cool thing to be nowadays. But I got into this racket quite some time ago. If I'm being honest.

Bahira said: Oh no.

I said: Oh dots are connecting for sure then. So what is it you want then? If you're a Fed. I don't think we've broken any laws that I know of. In fact. We don't even have what I would call a truly active case on our books at the moment! Just a bunch of ice cold cases we're probing around at the moment really. Kind of. Fuckin sucks to be honest.

Joe said: Well. I said I'm an FBI agent right? But technically. Right. Sure I'm an agent. But I'm also. I'm a bit of a rogue as well.

I said: Okay.

Joe said: And I know. Really? So are you Alcibiades. You're not a Fed. But you're a rogue. No offense Bahira. Because from what I can tell you're great too. But you're. You know. More of a traditional detective. Whereas Alcibiades. Anyway. I really wanted to loop you both into this. What I've been looking into. First of all. I have to say that I think we. The Feds. The Bureau. That we need to be working more closely with you guys. MUFON. Sure. We monitor the fuck out of you. We're always watching you. We see you when you're sleeping. We know when you're awake. We know when you take a piss and when you have a bowl of Wheaties. If you just switched to oat milk. And whether it's plain or fortified. But that's not collaboration.

I said: Right. It's un-American borderline illegal surveillance of law abiding citizens is what it is.

Joe said: Well not according to The Patriot Act. But either way. Long story short. I think we need to be working more closely with you guys. Forming more of an alliance. But obviously. Obviously! It's currently frowned upon internally. But then again? I'm a rogue baby!

But anyway. I wanted to broach something with you two. You mind taking a ride?

Bahira said: Um. I don't know.

I said: We're down for a spin. Sure Joe. Let's go. Tell us what's this about?

Joe said: Well. And full disclosure. I always thought this was total bullshit. Basically all of what you guys do. All the so-called paranormal stuff. I always classified it as obvious horseshit. As idiots leading morons. As total imbeciles leading the mentally retarded. Etcetera etcetera. Things like that.

I said: I'm flattered. Should I tell you my general classification of the federal agencies?

Joe said: But then I started talking to people. Internally. Hearing reports of things. Weird things. Certain unexplainable events. Then talking to more people. People slowly coming to confide in me on certain topics. Certain black budget topics so to speak. Topics that nobody. Almost nobody else. Was really being looped into.

I said: And what'd they say? These people.

Joe said: Long story short. And I can definitely circle back on some of the details. But long story short? We. Meaning the United States government at large. Segments of the USG. We have an active collaboration with certain off-world entities. Aliens! Basically. We're fucking working with aliens. Actively. They're actually. To the best of my knowledge at least. They're apparently technically fucking hybrids of us! Like a spin-off race of humans and stuff.

Bahira said: Wait. What?

Joe said: Basically. These. What we call aliens. Well I shouldn't get too far into this. But to the best of our knowledge. We think they might be descendants of a much older species. That surreptitiously. Gradually. Began a process of so-called hybridization with us. Human beings!

I said: Okay. So any ideas as to maybe who they were originally?

Joe said: We don't. Or at least I don't. Actually know that with any degree of certainty today. But they're basically. For all intents and purposes. To the best of our knowledge. Essentially human at this point. It would be difficult. Knowing what we know at least. To materially distinguish them genetically from us. But they're not us. That's the main point.

I said: Okay. This may be like a somewhat nut-busting. Nut-crushing type of statement for you. But within our circles. Within the Greater MUFON community so to speak. There's always been speculation about potential hybrids and US government collaboration with off-world entities. There's been speculation of that sort for decades now. In bunches. And with not a little bit of compelling data points to accompany it. So. I don't know. This isn't exactly new. And if you're jumping over the actual detail of the whole thing then?

Joe said: But what if I told you they did 9/11? The 9/11 terror attacks.

I said: Aliens?

Joe said: Well. They're. Sure they're aliens I guess. But they're also. Like I said. Kind of like us? Genetically indistinguishable basically. Like I said.

Bahira said: Right.

I said: So then walk me through this.

Joe said: You mind if we hit the Dunkin over here? I wouldn't mind an iced coffee. If that's okay? You guys want anything?

I said: I think I'm.

Bahira said: Do they have. Or could you ask if they have the sprinkles flavored latte?

I said: Really Bahira? Right now? We're doing sprinkles lattes?

Joe said: Oh that's one of my favorites! Do you think it's effeminate though? To order a sprinkles latte as a man?

I said: As an FBI agent? Bahira said: No way! I think it's actually kind of cool. Like you're comfortable with your masculinity. You're not trying to overcompensate.

Joe said: That's what I thought. Like being effeminate is the new currency?

I said: Eh. Maybe I'll get an iced Americano. Black. Regular sized if they have it.

Joe said: One iced Americano coming right up!

I said: But anyway.

Bahira said: Yeah so.

Joe said: So. Hold on. Let me just put my card away here. Yeah. So. Like I said. We can do a deeper download later. On all of the details. If that makes sense? But for now I just wanted to loop you guys in high level. Like super high level you know. I've heard from various sources. In my research into paranormal affairs. That you two are basically top in your field. Of paranormal investigations. That you're basically the real-life Mulder and Scully and whatnot. If you're familiar with The X-Files at all?

I said: I think it takes a really biased look at the field. But yes I'm familiar. Also. Not for nothing but Mulder and Scully worked for your agency. Not ours.

Bahira said: I don't know. I like the episodes I've seen of it.

Joe said: So obviously. Even to you guys. Like me saying. Oh an off-world based civilization could potentially be behind the events of 9/11. That sounds like some beyond Q-Anon conspiracy. Like totally crackpot. Beyond gone. Completely and utterly absurd and ridiculous. Yet hear me out. Just please. Give me a chance. Because I can lay it all out for you logically if you want? Not this second. But just give me a little time. And I promise you. I can make it worth your while.

Bahira said: I'd love that!

I said: Yeah. I mean. I'd need some type of logical.

Joe said: Hold on. Here are your drinks! Oh thank you! So anyway. Let's start from the top here. Let me see if i can get you two at least. If not totally on board. Then at least tell me if you think I've been duped internally by my own agency!!

I said: Okay. Start it up then.

Joe said: So let's start with thesis number one. There are civilizations that are. If not entrenched on Earth already. Then are at least visiting us. Via some sort of advanced method of traveling. That we're unaware of? At least officially we remain quote-unquote unaware of it. Agree?

I said: Mmmhmm.

Bahira said: Agreed!

Joe said: And if we believe there are non-human. Or quasi-human. Civilizations that are visiting Earth consistently. And if evidence pointing to this very scenario seems to be shut down by most governments. Then we have to agree that there's at least to some degree a cover up. To some degree! Agree?

I said: I follow.

Bahira said: Agreed!

Joe said: So then there are. For lack of better word. Aliens. And these aliens are here. On Earth. And their presence is being to some degree actively covered up. And the primary reason usually given for said cover up is that the government doesn't want to exhibit weakness of any kind. That any cover up must be rooted for the most part in national security concerns. Yet! Yet we know. In intelligence at least. That a stronger motivation to actively cover a matter up? It isn't to mask ignorance. Oh no! Because ignorance. Ignorance can always be leveraged. Nor would a motivation to cover a matter up be to avoid public panic. Oh no! Because public panic. Public panic is even easier to leverage than ignorance. Public panic is a central government's best friend! No. The motivation for a cover up is much more likely to be driven by an actual active involvement. Governments cover up matters

they're actively involved in. Not matters that they're ignorant about. Or matter that would cause a public panic. A government wouldn't cover a matter up because it would make it look ignorant. because it can always leverage its ignorance for further public funding. Ignorance. Plain and simple. Is a profitable enterprise for a central government. Nor would a government cover a matter up because it would cause a public panic. Central governments exist precisely because of public panic. Without a general baseline of panic in the public sectors then a central government lacks general purpose. If people aren't at least moderately panicked at all times then they'll inevitably start thinking about increasing their own individual independence. No. A central government engages in a cover up precisely because it's actively involved in whatever it is that's being perpetrated. That a lack of a cover up would make it look guilty of some type of wrong-doing in the public eye. An ignorant government requires a referendum for more public resources. A panicked public requires. Again. An increase in diverted resources toward the coffers of the central government. Yet a guilty government. What does that require? A guilty government requires a penalty. Requires a revolution. Requires a coup d'etat. Agree?

I said: I don't disagree.

Bahira said: Agreed!

Joe said: So we've now agreed that. For one. Aliens. For lack of a better word. Exist. For two. Aliens are here. On Earth. In some capacity. For three. Governments are to some degree actively covering up their presence. Actively! And for four. That the most acute motivation for a central government to cover up an alien presence on Earth is that it's somehow involved intimately with said alien presence. That the motives rooted in admitting ignorance or displaying weakness or invoking public panic are far less acute than that of deferring a guilty plea.

I said: So then they decide to fly two jet-liners into the fucking twin towers?

Joe said: Funny. But keep following me here. Allow me to string you along just a little further here. We know. Obviously. That there are many if not plenty unanswered questions as it relates to the actual events of September 11 2001. There are a myriad of conflicting reports. A maze of convolution that's never actually been resolved in any meaningful way. A reported third plane on live television that allegedly was seen crashing into one of the towers yet never to be mentioned again. How is it possible there's an eye witness account of a third plane? The fact hijackers' passports somehow avoided total incineration despite taking part in not only the planes crashing into the buildings. But then the buildings subsequently collapsing. And not only avoided incineration but were basically fully intact! And then of course there's the collapse of the buildings themselves. The idea that it was controlled demolition. Which on the surface maybe makes some modicum of sense. But even if it was somehow a controlled demolition? On two buildings that large? How was that possibly coordinated on such a short time frame? Was that built into the towers? If so why can't anyone seem to confirm or deny one way or the other.

I said: No. It could have been collusion. Easily. Collusion to set up a controlled demolition. Collusion to even allow an impending attack go through. Some type of plan to not block a punch. Just so you have an excuse to pull a gun. All of that is possible. But all the implosions of the buildings really show is that it's highly likely some element of your group was tangentially involved. If not actively involved then it at least knew about the likelihood of the attacks. And then for some unknown reason didn't engage in any material counteraction. That September 11 was to some degree. If not an inside job. Than a job that was allowed to occur with assistance from the inside. Depending on how you want to frame that in terms of individual motivations etcetera.

Joe said: Yet Alcibiades. You're leaving out probably the most compelling evidence of the true 9/11 fringe if you subscribe to that view.

I said: Am I?

Joe said: You are. Because of this one thing. Namely that Judy Wood's work shows. In my opinion. In quite a compelling fashion. That the buildings. The manner in which they collapsed wasn't even in the manner of a controlled demolition. No. But instead exhibited plenty of traits of what we would expect to see from a direct energy weapon.

Bahira said: Direct energy?

I said: Let's let him finish Bahira. But yes I'm familiar with Dr Wood broadly speaking.

Joe said: A direct energy weapon. Essentially a weapon that doesn't technically exist. Exist in a manner that anyone has acknowledged at least. That would be able to. In theory! Be able to. In Dr Woods' words. Dustify material. Based on certain parameters she outlines in her book and lectures.

I said: But.

Joe said: Just bear with me. Perhaps Dr Wood is a total crackpot. Yet the way she's been censored. Well. Given other historical censorship campaigns. It certainly makes you wonder. Because she's not putting forth any cohesive theory Alcibiades. And Bahira. No. She's simply saying. Scientifically. It looks like the towers were ultimately taken down with a direct energy weapon. Based on the evidence. She's not saying who or what would have enacted the direct energy. Simply that the evidence suggests that direct energy is the best explanation of what was actually employed. She's restricting her argument solely to the evidence surrounding the collapse of the tower. Nothing else!

I said: Okay Joe. So let's grant momentarily that Dr Wood is genuine and perhaps even correct. Then?

Joe said: Then let's do some simple addition. Some basic mathematics here. If the United States government is working with off-world. AKA Alien. Entities in some capacity. And the 9/11 attacks. Based on our best available evidence. The attacks seem to have at least concluded with a weapon of a direct energy variety. To take down the towers. Yet direct energy weapons don't exist that we know of. Not in open human society at least. So said weapons. Their most likely origin would have to be.

Bahira said: As some result of a human-alien alliance? If not just outright.

I said: Aliens outright shooting direct energy themselves. at the twin towers. Either in the service.

Joe said: Or the disservice! Yes. Of the American government.

I said: It's an interesting theory Joe. I'll give you that much. Although we should note that a direct energy weapon. If that was what was actually employed. Could quote-unquote not exist. But be entirely the result of black budget underground entirely human operations. With no so-called alien involvement at all. That's possible.

Bahira said: Agreed! It's quite interesting.

Joe said: So then. Should we continue?

I said: Absolutely. We can. But can you. Could you possibly drop us off at our car now? Then maybe. I don't know. We can meet at a designated location later this evening? If that works? Bahira. I don't know about you. But uhhh. I could use a quick shower. An expedient rinse. With all this 9/11 talk and everything.

Bahira said: No. I agree Alcibiades. I could use a quick breather.

Joe said: Yeah. A little intermission? For sure. Yeah. That works on my end. You're parked over by the Walgreens right?

I said: Yeah. Yeah. Just take the. Take the uhhh. Fuckin right. Right by the Baha Tex Mex. Yup. Great. Excellent.

Bahira said: Okay. Thanks Joe! We'll see you. Maybe later tonight? Alcibiades. Where should we meet anyway? What would be a good spot to

I said: Let's do Sapphire at seven. Right around that time? It's nice and intimate in there. In a heterosexual type of way you know?

Joe said: I'd assume nothing less. I'm familiar with that venue. I'll meet you two there. Right at seven!

I said: What the fuck is this?

Bahira said: Oh my.

I said: This guy. Could he have fuckin possibly parked any closer to me? What is this? A joke?

Bahira said: It could be a woman too Alcibiades. Who parked.

I said: Oh I know! Duly noted! Is this guy fucking kidding me with this shit? Look how close the back of our cars are? They couldn't be any closer together without touching. I can't even fit through them. Not even close! Bahira. I can't get in between the damn cars!

Bahira said: Should we go into Walgreens and see if we can.

I said: I'm gonna fuckin kick this guy's ass. This is just.

Bahira said: Maybe um. Alcibiades. Maybe I can fit through the passenger side. And at least get the car started? And pull it out so you have more space to get in?

I said: you would do that for me? That's actually sweet of you Bahira. Oh my God.

Bahira said: Give me the keys.

I said: Yup. There you go. Just move it forward. Just a tad. Yup. Just straight. You don't have that much room. Yup. Just keep it straight. This douchebag is about an inch from the car. Probably less than that even. Yup. That's it. Wait. Is this.

Bahira said: A guy is walking over Alcibiades. I think.

I said: Hey! Yeah. You! You fucking parked so close to my car I couldn't fuckin get in it!! What the fuck?!!

An Old Man Wearing a Black Constable's Uniform said: Huh?

I said: You parked. So fucking close! To my fucking car that I couldn't fucking get into it!!

An Old Man Wearing a Black Constable's Uniform said: I came up here. And I parked in between the lines! These lines!

I said: In between the lines?! The lines?! The whole fucking lot is open! And you park a half a cunt hair from my goddamned Honda Civic?!! You could have parked anywhere!

An Old Man Wearing a Black Constable's Uniform said: Well I apologize then!

I said: Oh yeah? Well apology accepted!! You have a great night!!!

An Old Man Wearing a Black Constable's Uniform said: Thanks!! You too!!!

I said: But just like. Fuckin watch wear you park next time!!! Bahira. Let's go!!!

Bahira said: Oh my god. Alcibiades. That poor man. He was so old!

I said: Well what the fuck Bahira? He was parked like a damn asshole!! That's my fault now?

Bahira said: But he couldn't even hear you at first. The poor thing. And you were like yelling. So loud!

I said: Well maybe. I mean. With all due respect. But if his motor skills are that decayed. Maybe he shouldn't even be on the damn road! If you weren't like fuckin five feet tall then I probably would have still been stranded there! Until that old fart finished getting his mentos in there.

Bahira said: Alcibiades. He came out literally thirty seconds after I got in the car. And then he apologized too. Oh my God. Awww.

I said: Well I at least accepted the apology. Give me a little credit for that!

Bahira said: Yeah but you like yelled it at him. You said apology accepted!!

I said: Well he was yelling too!

Bahira said: Okay. So should I just shower here? Or do you want to come pick me up at my spot later?

I said: Ummmm. Sure. You can. I'm gonna shower too though. But if you want to. If you have. If that's easier. I don't know. Are you gonna wear make-up again? Like do you have the whole kit to redo all that I guess is what I'm asking?

Bahira said: If you don't feel comfortable I can go home Alcibiades. It's no big deal. It's up to you. As long as you can pick me up. I just didn't know if you wanted to ride together. Because it's already almost five o'clock.

I said: That is a tight timeline. Yeah. I mean. I have an extra towel and shit. It's really not an issue on my end.

Bahira said: I still have my suitcase from our last trip in your supply closet right? So I figured.

I said: Yeah. Let's just go up. For sure. Let's make this a quick turn-around for these assholes.

Bahira said: What do you think about this guy anyway?

I said: My vibe is he's at least three-quarters full of shit.

Bahira said: I don't know. I think he might be telling the truth actually.

I said: First of all. I never trust a fed. And I don't even trust this guy's even a fed. He could be a faux-fed. A fed poser. I say. And this is just me. But I say let's see this fuckin guy's ID first. Before we start to believe a single mumbling word that's coming out of any of his orifices. Especially his mouth. You know?

Bahira said: No. I get that. But belief is about feel too Alcibiades. It's not just rote facts that make up belief.

I said: I don't disagree. And purely from a logical standpoint. His rubric is sensible. I'm familiar with Judy wood. I respect Judy Wood. I actually have a great deal of respect for Judy Wood. She's a reputable scientist in my mind. But while his rubric may be sensible in the abstract. I mean. There are a ton of other possibilities. Even if we grant

the use of direct energy weaponry. Let's say we grant that. There are other more plausible scenarios before the thesis aliens did the 9/11. To me.

Bahira said: Hmmm.

I said: And so far he has no real facts. Just rationalized speculations and hear-say. Syllogisms and rhetoric. He doesn't even have a name!

Bahira said: Hmmm. Yet at the same time. What's the actual motivation behind a troll of this level?

I said: Of this level?

Bahira said: I mean. He clearly knows his stuff. He's crossed t's. He's painting quite a vivid picture.

I said: There's always motivation for a troll though Bahira. Our entire economy is essentially a troll economy now. Our fiat currency is essentially virtual trolling at this point. Asking me what's the motivation for a troll of this magnitude isn't necessarily convincing to me. There's always a motivation for a troll of any magnitude. I'm sorry.

Bahira said: Yet in this space is there? You have to admit. His level of acumen is top tier. That if we assume that he's a troll then we have to assume that he's a true troll artist.

I said: Okay.

Bahira said: And a troll artist of his talent could obviously get much further plying his trade. I don't know. Literally anywhere else but with us? We're MUFON detectives. We're not going to get him any closer to any clout. Or any money! We're about as underground and under-funded as it gets. We're not getting him any closer to any true clout? Than talking to himself in a mirror Alcibiades! We don't have a YouTube channel. We don't have a podcast on Soundcloud or something.

I said: We don't have a YouTube channel. True. But we also don't have proof that he's not plying his trade anywhere else. This could all be a part of an elaborate ruse. We could be a mere morsel of it. And I wouldn't fuckin bet against that at this point. I'm always essentially

betting that things are. More often than not. Part and parcel of one elaborate ruse or another. But anyway. Let's. Why don't we go ahead and shower up? Let's wash our buttoles. Okay?

I said: So what? What are you saying?

Joe said: What I'm saying is they're plain-clothed civilians. A lot of them.

Bahira said: I think what Alcibiades. What's he's looking for Joe. Is just more detail. To flesh out your story. Because like. We both agreed that in concept. As an overarching theme. Your construction makes sense.

I said: But without detail you could easily just be. You know. Another deranged lunatic. A misguided troll artist and whatnot.

Joe said: Oh and I totally get that! I mean. Yeah. How would you know? But obviously. At the same time. In my position. I have to do. You know. Somewhat of the slow drip. I can just. For lack of a better term. Just bust my nut all at once.

I said: Okay. So then give us a long stroke then no homo.

Joe said: Well. Like I was saying. What you kind of have to understand about this situation is. It's not really like the movies. Or even in traditional Ufology. Which I'm sure you guys are even more well-versed in than I am. Because the deal with this arrangement. It's that. These aren't like some big-headed traditional alien beings. Not primarily at least. The beings we deal with could be right in here right now. In fact. I can actually tell you this. One probably is.

I said: Really? In here? This place? It's barely the size of a fat chick's cunt in here.

Joe said: That's what I'm saying though. You need to start taking what you normally think? And invert it completely. Even you two. You think this is remotely how you think you imagine it to be? How many hours collectively do you two think you've spent investigating and/or contemplating the so-called abduction phenomena?

Bahira said: Oh. I don't even.

Joe said: Probably tons! Yet. While spaceships and slippery eel-like aliens are all the rage. Would that really be indicative of an advanced agenda?

I said: The notion that alien beings may walk among us. It's not necessarily that obscure.

Joe said: No. I get it. But in the grand scheme of Ufology.

Bahira said: It's certainly less studied. That's true.

I said: But also. It's intrinsically more difficult to study Joe. How the fuck do you know if you're talking to a hybrid alien that passes for human? You could be one! For all we know. Shit. We could be hybrids.

Joe said: And that's exactly my point. What's indicative of an advanced agenda.

I said: Whereas if a spaceship drops down. Picks you up. And puts a chip in your head or gives you an anal probe. Well that's something people tend to recall a little more readily.

Joe said: These beings. The ones we're specifically dealing with? They're called Pelops. That's what they've requested to be called at least. And there's one sitting right at the bar over there. At the end.

Bahira said: How do you know?

Joe said: Know? Because I actually know her.

I said: You invited her here Joe? What the fuck? Is this.

Joe said: No. Nothing like that. Not like that at all Alcibiades. Her name is Julia Bond.

I said: Julia Bond?

Joe said: Correct.

I said: Did you ever watch Bang Bros. In maybe the early to mid 2000s.

Joe said: You mean the porn?

Bahira said: Alcibiades. Really?

I said: No. I'm serious Bahira. Because there was. There was an actress.

Bahira said: An actress?

I said: Yeah. Her name was Julia Bond. I wasn't sure if maybe this Julia.

Bahira said: I mean. She's sitting right there Alcibiades.

I said: I know. But it's been a while since I've viewed her filmography. You know?

Joe said: I've only known Julia for a few years. And while. Yes. I'm familiar with that production company. I don't think there's a direct connection in this case.

I said: Okay. You know. I was just inquiring. Because. I actually do. I do kind of see a bit of a resemblance. Are you gonna bring her over here at all?

Joe said: Eventually. Depending on your comfort level. I wanted to at least broach the topic. At least. But I know you both you were. We left the initial meeting with the two of you being somewhat adamant that you would need more detailed proof.

Bahira said: Okay. But allow me to play devil's advocate. Let's say we do tell you that we're comfortable. And you bring Julia over. You just said yourself no one would ever know one of these. What are they called?

I said: Pelops.

Bahira said: Pelops. That no one would know that they're anything but human. So. If you brought Julia over. How would that provide any further corroboration? Given that she's. By your definition. Essentially indistinguishable from myself. Or Alcibiades. And so on.

Joe said: Well. I said. To be specific. I said that the average person wouldn't notice. Not that they couldn't.

I said: So what? It's up to Julia to.

Bahira said: Whoa. I said: Oh okay. I get it. So she's going to make my Corona Light float in mid air. And then that's going to prove she's a hybrid. Can she turn this ice water to Retsina next?

Julia Bond said: Hi Alcibiades.

I said: Joe. This is?

Joe said: Julia. Please meet Alcibiades and Bahira.

Julia Bond said: I'm familiar with you both. But Joe. Thank you for the introduction anyway. The pleasure is all mine. I said: No. On the contrary. The pleasure is all mine. Really. Truly!

Bahira said: Alcibiades. Please. Simmer down.

I said: So then. I guess we should order another round?

Julia Bond said: I'll take a Don Julio margarita if you don't mind?

I said: It's on Joe's tab so whatever you want. Bahira. What? Another wine spritzer.

Bahira said: Actually. That Don Julio. That sounds interesting.

Julia Bond said: Oh. It's soooo good. You should totally get one!

Joe said: I'll just take another IPA.

I said: Shit. Maybe I'll fuckin switch to Mezcal over here.

Bahira said: Okay. So Julia. Mmmm. This is really good. Wow.

Julia Bond said: I told you. Once I started drinking them? I've barely drank anything else! Like at all!

I said: Yeah. I noticed you sucked down two before you moseyed over here? Is that a common trait of the Pelops? Alcohol tolerance?

Bahira said: If it was I'd personally start to question your humanity Alcibiades. In fact. There's actually quite a bit that.

Alcibiades said: Very funny Bahira. I've barely touched liquor for like a month. When was the last time you saw me blacked out?

Bahira said: I don't know about blacked out. But I'm pretty sure I can remember the last time you told me you peed the bed. But either way. Julia. I did want to ask you a question.

I said: Just for the record Julia. I haven't peed the.

Bahira said: Let's assume Alcibiades and I believe you and Joe at face value. Let's just say that we do that for a moment. What's the possible motivation for each of you to come forward to us? Of all people? Because it seems to me. And I was saying this Alcibiades earlier. It seems to me like if you're going for attention or influence.

Well, I mean. Here at MUFON. We're a pretty small player in this space all things considered. Sure. We're authentic. But we're not exactly. Especially at the detective level. We're not an incredibly powerful group.

I said: Well. Hold on here. Before Julia answers that. I'd just like to interject something ancillary here. I'd just like to ask. For one thing. To start. What exactly are the logistics here. Like. What's the fuckin background. On why your group of. I don't know. So-called hybrids. Why you'd possibly have anything to do with 9/11?!

Joe said: Well. Alcibiades. We're not going to get into that. Not tonight I don't think.

I said: Okay. Well. With all due respect. That's a large part. Respectfully. Of how you got Bahira and I to this fuckin table in the first place. So to now.

Julia said: But we will. I can definitely share those details. I'll totally share them. I think what Joe is alluding to. As far as tonight is concerned. Is that we should just focus on the basic logistics of the situation. And then move on gradually. Give you more of the overarching background? Before we go full deep-dive? If that makes sense?

Bahira said: And that totally does! But I think it would hearken back to my original question. Before Alcibiades kind of. Interrupted my train of thought there. As to why us? Why two MUFON detectives?

Julia said: Well. First why don't I tell you about how Joe and I met. And then maybe things will start to make more sense organically?

Bahira said: Please do. Julia said: So. I think it was about. I don't know. Maybe ten years ago or so. You see. One thing you should know about the Pelops. And this is part of Joe and my bonding personally. Which will make sense later. I promise! So the Pelops. We. Our race began. It began as obviously a quite pure race. I'm not going to necessarily disclose our exact origin at this time for security concerns.

But it's somewhere in this dimensional vibration. But over time. As races and peoples tend to do. We. The Pelops. We endured a variety of spiritual and genetic permutations. Now. When the Pelops. When we initially underwent our first conversion. We'll call it Conversion A for convenience. Now while Conversion A was. At the time. Quite the ordeal. It was far from an undisputed conversion. This Conversion A was far from undisputed. Yet Conversion A was nevertheless a complete conversion. Primarily due to the unforgiving nature of the conversion. Due to the lack of measure and utter tyranny of the conversion it became a complete conversion. So once Conversion A was finally complete. Which itself took hundreds of years. Well. Essentially once it was complete the Pelops were. Once again. For lack of a better term. Wholly Pelops-A. They were purely Pelops-A. Yet then. Of course. Inevitably there would be a second conversion attempted. There's a second conversion process that's attempted. Now hundreds and hundreds of years into Conversion A there's then a second conversion attempt. And we'll call this Conversion B. Conversion B now comes into existence. Now. Statistically speaking we know that large numbers of my fellow Pelops integrated themselves into Conversion B. Just as large numbers of Pelops assimilated into Conversion A. However in this case. Due to the more liberal nature of the Conversion B infrastructure. The Pelops-A subset was allowed to continue within the confines of Conversion B. They didn't face the same level of persecution and therefore subsisted throughout the conversion process. Yet this caused. As you might expect. Somewhat of a fracture. Or a fissure. Within the Pelop identity. Because while certainly there were Pelops-B developing. There were also a hearty amount of Pelops-A who still remained. Because by the nature of its process Conversion A was a complete conversion. Leaving the only Pelops as Pelops-A. The previous Pelops became. Essentially. Pelops-A and nothing but Pelops-A. So they were still essentially a uniform group. There was no material dissident group that could say with any

authority that. No! They were actually the authentic Pelops. No. If one were to assume a Pelops identity then one would claim Pelops-A. Only the Pelops-A people could realistically claim any sort of ownership on the Pelop identity. Yet the result of Conversion B was essentially an incomplete conversion. We know large numbers of Pelops essentially converted to B. Becoming. Essentially. Pelops-B. Yet Pelops-A. Now existing as essentially a dissident group within the structure of Conversion B. The Pelops-A movement lobbied quite hard within our planetary structure to make Pelops-B fictitious. That only Pelops-A could be Pelops. And any Pelops that converted to Pelops-B would no longer be recognized as Pelops at all. In short Pelops-A then made it axiomatic to its own identity that remaining Pelops-A was the only true path to remaining Pelops at all. That any association with B was essentially antithetical to the Pelops identity. That any Pelops that integrated in any way into Conversion B were ipso facto no longer Pelops at all!

I said: Yet. There's a logical inconsistency there. Isn't there? Because even Pelops-A. They're essentially a derivative of the original Pelops. No?

Julia said: Well. Now you're perhaps inadvertently entering politically flammable territory Alcibiades. Because there is no direct through-line from the spiritual genesis of the original Pelops to today. We know all of those. Or at least the vast majority of those Pelops became Pelops-A. But of course there were many other migrations and assimilations that were ancillary to Conversion A. And as it regards Pelops-B. If we even nod to their existence as authentic Pelops. Well then we have to recognize the existence of a linear progression of Pelops. One which has diverted into at least two legitimately distinct directions. Which would not only make the Pelops-A population an outdated iteration of Pelops. But it would also. By noting a linear progression. Acknowledge that Pelops-A were always. as you noted. Essentially derivative Pelops. That they were removed from the true

original essence of the Pelops. And as such not the natural final state of the original Pelops. So if we acknowledge the existence of Pelops-B we almost ipso facto reduce if not erase the existence of Pelops-A. It's this fear that motivates the spiritual leaders of Pelops-A to dismiss outright any notion of a Pelops-B. In the verbiage of the leaders of Pelops-A. The very word Pelops-B is a plain contradiction in terms. Yet this divisive rhetoric only inflames the spiritual leaders of Pelops-B to deny that they're even Pelops in the first place! instead referring to Pelops-A as a heretical dissident group entirely. And adopting the terminology of being a so-called Conversion B. No longer Pelops at all! All of which, I guess. It leads to a scenario where the true Pelops-B. The members of Pelops-B. Of which there are actually many! We're all left ostracized by both sets of our fore-bearers. To Pelops-A the existence of a Pelops-B is an impossibility. Yet the Conversion B movement as a whole has also essentially come to the conclusion that there are no true Pelops in the Conversion B movement either! The population that still recognizes our Pelop lineage denies our existence because we've become Pelops-B. While those in Conversion B. Who no longer want to recognize their potential Pelop lineage. Also shun any sort of Pelop identity as well. Instead identifying the Pelops-A as a natural heretical dissident.

Bahira said: So. Is that why you originally came here? Because you were a member of this persecuted Pelops-B movement?

Julia Bond said: The vast majority of emigration of the Pelop race. Of late at least. To here. To Earth. Correct. It's primarily comprised of those of us who identify as Pelops-B. Who've come here. To attempt to integrate into the human environment. Yet I should also note that. Yes. There's a concurrent movement. Maybe an even larger movement by numbers if not by percentage of population. Of Pelops-A that have been integrating into humanity as well. Because while Pelops-B. Which again strictly speaking doesn't exist on our planet. While Pelops-B is perhaps ostracized to some extent within Conversion B. It's Pelops-A that's more virulent in its denunciation of us. Pelops-A is perhaps the

true and actual sworn enemy of the Pelops-B. Which moved the Pelops-A intellectual leaders to emigrate first. To attempt at some assimilation into humanity to counteract our assimilation. To perhaps create a Conversion C before we could. In Pelops-B. One that would be as complete as Conversion A. That could lend more numerical authority to the Pelops-A movement. Creating a. For lack of a better term. Pelops-C that would masquerade as a Pelops-A? Joe said: Yet. To be fair, Julia. I think it goes even just a tad deeper than that.

I said: How so?

Joe said: Well. I think it was important for you to have that background. To understand all the basic aspects of the Pelop people. The historical divisions of the Pelop people. Into this Pelops-A. Into this Conversion B. And finally into this unrecognized Pelops-B. And how the relationship between Pelops-A and Pelops-B. And now potentially even a Pelops-C. How that informs the ground level of the hybrid-human relationship here.

I said: Okay. But again. You came into our lives. You specifically. Joe. Just a few fucking hours ago. And you were spinning fanciful tales about so-called aliens doing 9/11. Are we to then believe. Given this information. That 9/11 was some kind of inter-Pelop beef gone awry? Some sort of Pelops political dissidence spilled over into Manhattan? With our twin towers as collateral damage?

Joe said: Julia? Would you like to.

Julia Bond said: Alcibiades. With all due respect. I think you're missing the forest for the trees here. What we're saying is. Essentially the human race is itself becoming essentially Pelops-C. One way or the other. Now whether the progenitors of Pelops-C will originate in Pelops-A or Pelops-B. Now that's still an unanswered question of course.

I said: So you're. You're what? You're a Pelops-C?

Julia Bond said: No. I would still be considered a Pelops-C. An original Pelop. A person of a Pelops-A bloodline who integrated spiritually into Conversion B.

I said: But then if we boned and had a kid. Then that kid would be a Pelops-C?

Bahira said: So then. I mean. To that point. What exactly involves. Or uhhh. How are we becoming hybrids exactly.

Joe said: In short? By unknowingly fornicated with Pelops-As and Pelops-Bs? Who are surreptitiously integrating themselves into human society as we speak.

Julia Bond said: But it's my strain. The Pelops-B. That actually has the economic and technological capability to truly advance humankind Bahira. The Pelops-A strain of my people. They're relatively archaic in their ways. No offense intended to them. They're probably only maybe fifty years beyond where the United States was at the turn of the millennium.

I said: So then what? We should be rooting for Pelops-B to bone us?

Julia Bond said: Well.

I said: How the fuck does his have anything to do with 9/11?! I'm sorry. I've just. I've really gone down the 9/11 conspiracy rabbit hole previously. Like quite a bite. And I'm just a little skeptical of people. Especially a so-called FBI agent. Who goes around trying to reel me in with a juicy 9/11 conspiracy. Do the Pelops people. Do they have a lot of patience? Is that it? Because I don't!

Julia Bond said: The Pelop people are actually. In both the A and B strain frankly. They're generally regarded as some of the most hot blooded entities in the universe.

Bahira said: But like. More importantly. They must be essentially human? If they can procreate with humans with such ease?

Joe said: That's something. Honestly? We don't even know.

Julia Bond said: Even within the Pelop solar system. Frankly, well let's just say Earth wasn't the first society we tried to infiltrate. Yet.

I said: Well I mean. Obviously. I mean some societies. Just by looking at them you probably realized that they were essentially unfuckable?

Julia Bond said: You see. On that Alcibiades. You would actually be incorrect. All known intelligent life-forms in the universe. They all look essentially like us. They all take a humanoid form. Specifically humans with hair and knuckles and all of our typical accouterments. Yet some strains of for lack of a better term humanity. Of Greater Humanity. Across the universe. Some of these strains we've found. The Pelops. We can't procreate with them.

Bahira said: Okay but then what about all of the reports of like. Gray aliens.

I said: And ten foot reptilians and shit.

Joe said: Old wives' tales. That's all they are really.

Julia Bond said: Or. To be fair Joe. Or outright targeted disinformation.

Joe said: That's fair.

Julia Bond said: In any case. Bahira. To answer your original question. The reason why we've involved you two? Well. Quite simply? Because there's a mysterious element of this case. And after querying the relevant databases for quite some time. Joe and I. We finally arrived at who we believed to be the best so-called paranormal investigators working today.

Joe said: You two.

I said: That's the first fucking sensible thing you've said all day Joe. If that's even your real name. Which. Frankly? I feel like is highly improbable?

Bahira said: Okay so.

Joe said: There's been a murder.

Julia Bond said: Someone's been killed. A prominent Pelops-B. And this is where the link occurs. With what Joe initially spoke to you two about.

I said: With all due respect. Isn't that more of your jurisdiction? The two of you? I mean, Bahira and I. We had no fuckin idea what a Pelop even was maybe half an hour ago. And on top of that.

Joe said: Julia look. I think it's.

Julia Bond said: Time for us to go? Expeditiously I'd say. You two. Can you meet us at Nice Slice around noon tomorrow.

Joe said: Julia. Now.

Julia Bond said: We'll see you both there. Hopefully. My apologies for the short notice here!

Joe said: Just grab the tab for us. See you soon!

I said: Imagine Bahira. Just imagine if this was all an elaborate ruse to bilk us out of a few free drinks.

Bahira said: I didn't see Julia pay a tab over there either. I said: Yeah me neither. And she had like three fucking margaritas! I'm sure those will end up on our bill too. Wonder what those cost per glass.

Bahira said: Technically we could use the MUFON expense account.

I said: Sure. And get reimbursed sometime next year. If that. Not that I don't have the cash. Whole thing just kind of pisses me off though. This is just the cherry on top. Who the fuck are they? Start talking about 9/11. Alien hybrids. Fucking us up our asses and shit.

Bahira said: Alcibiades. No. None of this has anything to do with anal sex. I interpreted as just normal sex. Not like anal probes or something. But I do think it's interesting.

I said: It's interesting if it's not total bullshit. I agree with that.

Bahira said: Our caseload has been bone dry of late though. This. I agree. Could be total nonsense. Total bullcrap! But if it's not. This could be the most substantial case we've taken on to date.

I said: Might as well order another round I suppose.

I said: They said noon right?

Bahira said: They're not gonna show.

I said: Pessimistic now eh? That's. That's actually uncommon for you isn't it?

Bahira said: I don't know. I guess it's just how I'm feeling this morning. If I'm being honest about it.

I said: Because I'm usually the one feeling. You know. More or less apocalyptic here. Yet I'm now feeling. I don't know. Some kind of muted pressure to become quasi-optimistic here? About our obscure. Hybrid alien. FBI-employed. 9/11 conspiracy theorists?

Bahira said: Have you bumped into Ronnie at all of late?

I said: Colombo? That Ronnie? Hell no. And I hope the streak continues. Last I heard he was still on the damn moon in 2122!

Bahira said: This whole thing has me thinking about him again.

I said: Hmm. How so?

Bahira said: No Alcibiades. I'm not attracted to him. Physically. If that's what you're thinking.

I said: I wasn't thinking that. Guy looks like a total goat fucker. But the fact you tried to front-run me assuming you might be physically attracted to him makes me feel like you might actually find him physically attractive?

Bahira said: I'm just thinking. What if that whole thing. You know. The whole lunar Caliphate deal with your alleged great grandson. What he was telling us about. Your great grandson. What if. I mean if this is true Alcibiades. What if it's actually related?

I said: Well Ron wouldn't know shit about it. He wasn't in the loop half as much as we were. You know?

Bahira said: Are you sure about that? That he really wasn't.

I said: I mean he was on the dark side of the moon for a while Bahira. I wasn't keeping tabs on him necessarily. But he was over there as a prisoner.

Bahira said: Okay. I guess I'm just saying that experience. It seems equally likely that it was some kind of elaborate ruse as this whole thing with Julia and Joe. That one or both could equally be elaborate ruses? Right? That we could have actually interpreted that entirely incorrectly by taking your great grandson at his word?

I said: And here they come.

Joe said: Alcibiades!

I said: Joe. You son of a fucking bitch you! How the fuck are you?! And Julia. Julia Bond. Truly. The pleasure? It's all mine.

Julia Bond said: Wow. Aren't we peppy this morning?!

I said: You know. Some days. Some days you just wake up. I don't know. Steeped in sunshine? I suppose you could describe it like that. I guess the fact that I've recently learned there's potentially a whole other species I can fornicate with? It's simply filled my little mind with endless possibilities!

Joe said: This guy is a character Bahira. You know that?

Bahira said: Oh. He's something alright Joe. You don't even know the half of it.

I said: But let's get down to brass tax here guys. Unless you want to order a slice first? Get a quick prosciutto and arugula?

Joe said: I actually wouldn't mind.

Julia Bond said: No. Joe. Let's just get into it. After last night I think it's safe to say that time is at least somewhat of the essence.

Bahira said: So it's that urgent?

Julia Bond said: More or less yes. It actually involves my ex-brother-in-law. To just get into it.

I said: Now is he.

Joe said: Yes.

Julia Bond said: Alcibiades. I think we're about the same age? He was only a few years older than us. You may have actually known him. Or at least you might recognize him if you saw him? A picture of him I mean.

I said: Go on. Do you have one?

Julia Bond said: Now I'm not going to sit and pretend that he was a saint. My ex-brother-in-law. No. Not at all. But I will say that he was a good natured person. Certainly a good-natured person. Even if he had some prior involvement in the underworld.

Joe said: He was a bookie Julia. It's not like the.

Julia Bond said: But still. I just want everything to be above board here. So he recently died from an overdose. My ex-brother-in-law.

Bahira said: Oh my! I'm so sorry to hear that Julia. It seems all too common these days!

Julia Bond said: That it is. Way too common! But in the case of my ex-brother-in-law. Well.

Joe said: We have reason to believe that it may not be a pure drug overdose per se. That there may be.

I said: You think he was whacked?

Joe said: Well the timeline of the night of his death goes as such. You tell me. Because to me? It certainly leaves some doubt as to what exactly happened.

I said: Okay.

Joe said: So he flies back into Providence from Florida on a whim. Why exactly he does this on a whim? We're not entirely sure. But this became a federal case. I'll say that. Well, I should say I was able to poke my nose into it because of the Florida element. The interstate angle.

I said: That seems a bit of a stretch no? Guy just took a flight from Florida to Providence.

Joe said: We've done worse. In any case. He flies into Providence on a whim. Into TF Green. He's allegedly irate about something. Something to do with a female he was apparently involved with to some degree. An exotic dancer. Now. Now he's driving to his home in Johnston. At which time he's pulled over and he's booked for driving under the influence.

I said: Okay. So far.

Julia Bond said: Does the name Pete Fresco ring a bell to you at all Alcibiades?

I said: Oh this is about Pete Fresco? Yeah. I heard all about this. I know Pete. Knew Pete. Well. I mean I didn't know him. But my friend Giorgos was having sex with some girl he was dating like. I don't know. This was maybe ten years ago now? So I should say that I know of him via that anecdote. So he's dead now?

Joe said: He is indeed. But maybe you can see where we're.

I said: Oh yeah. The notion of a guy like Pete Fresco getting pulled over in Johnston is basically preposterous. It's a nonsensical notion. Never mind him being actually booked for anything. And of all things drunk driving? C'mon. No. That's just fucking nonsensical.

Joe said: So he's booked by the Johnston police. And then he's bailed out.

I said: By who?

Julia Bond said: That we don't know.

Bahira said: Wouldn't there have to be like a record of that? Don't the police have to keep those records public I thought?

Joe said: Apparently not if you're the Johnston police department. So anyway. At this point Pete Fresco is in town on a whim. He's apparently driving drunk. And he's so drunk that the Johnston police department pulls him over and actually arrests him. And then he's bailed out with no record of the transaction. No detail of the transaction that anyone can ascertain.

Julia Bond said: And then about two hours later an ambulance is called to his house. Paramedics arrive and he's dead on site of an apparent drug overdose.

Joe said: Pronounced dead at the scene.

Bahira said: Interesting. I mean sad obviously! But.

I said: So what? You want us to poke around this? Is that what you're implying here?

Joe said: Ideally yes. With a light touch of course. There are obviously a few moving parts here. In this case. For one. There's obviously Pete's prior connections with organized crime. His past life as a bookie. However loose this association is. With organized crime. And then there's the fact that he's a Pelops-A. Allegedly.

I said: Pelops-A? Pete Fresco?

Joe said: Correct.

I said: But Julia. If I'm remembering correctly. You're Pelops-B aren't you?

Julia Bond said: Correct.

I said: Okay. I just wanted to make sure. Um. That I'm following of this that's all.

Joe said: Then there's the tangential involvement of the local police of course. And the anonymous bail that was posted.

Julia Bond said: And the fact that it's rumored that the exotic dancer Pete was involved with. That apparently he was so enraged with her that he made a point of coming back to Providence impromptu. That she was at the scene at the time of death.

Joe said: And she's been basically invisible since.

Bahira said: Okay. But do we at least have an ID on her?

Joe said: Rumor mill only. Nothing definitive that we could ascertain. I have intel that says the stage name is Britnee. With two e's. Britnee.

I said: No definitive club location either?

Joe said: Negative.

I said: Fuck man. I thought the Feds. I thought you guys were plugged into this shit. That you'd be a little more up people's asses than this. From what you're telling us. You basically know this fuckin guy is dead and that's about it. No bail info. No motive. Do we even know the officer who pulled him over and booked him? This alleged stripper has nothing but a stage name at. What. Any of the seventeen clubs in the city? Although. To be fair. I know Pete. I don't know Pete. But I

know him well enough to know there's like a ninety percent chance he met whoever this so-called person of interest is at Dandelion's. Has to be Dandelion's.

Julia Bond said: See Alcibiades? You're providing a value add to this investigation already!

I said: So then what? You want us to go ahead and canvas every strip joint in town. See if we can come up with any leads?

Bahira said: Really?

I said: I mean. I don't have a problem doing it Bahira. But with all due respect. What's preventing you. Specifically you Joe. From just doing that yourself? You could canvas. Use Fed money to go further than I could on a MUFON budget. Which is a non-existent budget really. I would think a Fed badge would go further when interrogating a house mom than my measly MUFON pendant?

Joe said: You forget Alcibiades. I'm rogue here. I'm totally rogue! I have to keep this as low-key as possible. Even speaking to you right now is a risk. So as much as I'd like to start tossing my badge around this case. Unfortunately? That's not even a remotely realistic option for me. What I'm doing here. This is all essentially pro bono. There is no budget on my end either.

Bahira said: Okay. Then I suppose that's fair. So then. Alcibiades. If this is good with you. If all of this works on your end? Then I'm good with taking the case.

I said: I'm not averse to it. But we may have to take certain precautions on our end as well.

Julia Bond said: Okay then. Um. Great. So then I guess next steps will be. Hmm. How about this? What if we check in every Friday night at Sapphire. Under the auspice of quote-unquote grabbing drinks. Maybe around eight o'clock. Does that work for everyone? Let's just keep this as a weekly update if that works?

Joe said: Julia. That's a great idea. I think that totally works on my end. I actually have a backlog of stuff I need to get to in the meantime

though. Not that this isn't a priority for me but. I said: Right. Of course. Because you're an agent of the Federal Bureau of Investigation Joe. That totally makes sense. Just out of curiosity though Joe. Could we at least have a government name. No pun intended. From you? Not that I'm like. Fuckin trying to spy on you or anything. But just for our own peace of mind. So we can know with a modicum of certainty that we're doing work on behalf of a legitimate agent. Because we're going to have to keep this at least somewhat covert on the MUFON front as well. We have to take certain precautions on our end as well. You know?

I said: First of all. I'll believe that fuckin guy is an actual Fed when I start to believe you have a penis and two testicles Bahira. There's no way he's a federal agent in my mind. I don't know what scam these two are running but.

Bahira said: See? I don't know. I'm not quite so sure about that Alcibiades. I understand your point on Joe. Sure. Honestly I'm not sure who would strike me as an authentic federal agent. Especially on the espionage and/or misinformation side. But like I said. The outline. The overarching rubric of what Joe and Julia were selling us. I don't know if it's totally incompatible with our experience on the moon? On balance it strikes me as compelling in a way? In relation to our experience on the moon? Which in my mind is still the most. Obviously it's the most intense and convincing experience I've ever had as a part of MUFON? Or just in general.

I said: When we get finished here maybe I'll go ahead and reach out. See if Ron's actually around. That Colombo fuck. He might at least be able to do some research on any Joseph Campanelli. Any Joe Campanelli working for the Feds that he knows of at least.

Bahira said: Now. What exactly is the plan here? Should we talk to the manager on duty? In the club?

I said: Let's not make it that explicit yet Bahira. I'm gonna. I'm thinking it might be best if I just take one of these girls for a quick spin in the back. Probe her back there no pun intended. See what we can get organically. How about. It's just a matter of which one. How about. Hmm. That girl right there? She's um.

Bahira said: No Alcibiades.

I said: No good? I'm only three deep. I feel like I'm still on point? I think she's. I don't know. She seems okay? Suitable for our purposes today?

Bahira said: Alcibiades.

I said: I'm just gonna go see. Let me just meander over there quick.

Bahira said: Alcibiades. Her bottom half looks like two blow pops stuck together at a forty five degree angle.

I said: And? No. It's fine. We have to approach this from a business angle Bahira. This is just. It's simply for research purposes for the time being.

Bahira said: Did you at least get any intel?

I said: She was nice. Nice girl. No. I mean. Of course. I did ask a few questions. She actually knows Pete Fresco believe it or not. I mentioned the name Pete Fresco. I told her I was like bummed out. That I was getting a dance to lift my spirits. Lift my spirits because my pal Pete Fresco. Ever since he passed away. I'd been in a bit of a rut. That I needed a thorough dance to lift me right out of this rut that I'd been in. She seemed to recognize the name. Immediately. Oh Pete Fresco is what she said. Which is good. It's progress. Can we get two more. Yeah. I'll stick with the Stoli. You still have the unflavored? Sure. But yeah. So she recognized the name Pete Fresco immediately. Then I asked her how she knew Pete. She said he usually. That he had a tendency to come in here. That he was basically a regular. That's what they call people who are in here on a regular basis. Regulars. And obviously. Usually. Usually these regulars. They have set girls they'll come into see. That's what she said to me. I told you. All three of you. That I was sure

about that much. That if Pete Fresco was plowing a stripper that it would almost have to be at Dandelion's. And fuckin here we are. Bingo. So we have indirect confirmation that he was involved with one of these little whooirs. Right here. That's more or less confirmed. Now it's just a matter of trying to see if we can find out.

Bahira said: Which one it was. That he was potentially involved in. But how would we go about that from here Alcibiades?

I said: I could just go up and ask her? She doesn't seem. She's just kind of standing where she was before I approached her.

Bahira said: I don't know. Don't you think you could have ascertained that information. I don't know. Without having to.

I said: It's pay to play Bahira. Don't be naive here. MUFON will reimburse me you think? Nah. No. They wouldn't do that. That's why I'm trying to get bang for buck here and kill two birds with one stone. We need the information. Information costs money. But that money isn't going to be reimbursed to me. I think she had her ass done.

Bahira said: Oh you think so?

I said: It's something. It's a possibility that I'm considering. Yes. Listen. Bahira. I get it. This mode of information collection. This method of investigation. That it's not necessarily something that comes natural to you. Perhaps it offends your taste. But look on the. I mean. The other way we could play this is you're undercover? You wanna try and get on the pole instead? Because it has to be one of us. Honestly. That's probably more efficient. You going undercover as opposed to me poking around as a John. But I just felt like. With you? Your temperament? That you wouldn't be willing to. No offense. But that it wouldn't be in your wheelhouse to pop on the pole undercover.

Bahira said: Oh. That's how you're feeling Alcibiades? That I'm not willing to make the sacrifices it takes to achieve success at MUFON?

I said: I'm not saying that.

Bahira said: Because I'm pretty sure I was the one who really pushed forward and sacrificed to make the right decision when we were dealing with your great grandson!

I said: Yet was that the right decision Bahira? Because I still wonder sometimes. We potentially altered the trajectory of time itself to save Ron Colombo of all people from fucking ten years of minor inconvenience.

Bahira said: Alcibiades. He was imprisoned against his will!

I said: Did you ever get to the dark side of the moon? It was practically a fucking amusement park over there! It was no imprisonment!

Bahira said: Screw you Alcibiades! You know what? I'm going over to the precinct right now. I'll run Joe's name by detective Colombo myself. While you finish up whatever it is you're trying to accomplish here!

I said: Bahira. How are you gonna do that? I drove! Just wait for me.

Bahira said: I'll take an Uber that's how! Obviously! You're stupid! Meet me over there if you want. I said: But you didn't. You're not gonna finish the drink at least—

Basketball Reference Dot Com

—Initially a thin hipster with a full red beard was in the bathroom at Nick-A-Nee’s, peeing at the tall urinal, but when I went in, after he walked out, I made a point to pee at the kiddie urinal, a trademark of mine, for whatever reason I find myself more at ease at the kiddie urinals, as I’m long-torsoed in addition to being of only average height; yes, the kiddie urinals are essentially made for me, and peeing at the kiddie urinal I took note of what looked like a piece of asscrack lint connected inextricably to a long piece of ass hair. This is what it struck me as at least.

I thought back to parking on the street fifty feet from Nick-A-Nee’s, to my consternation with the driver wearing a snowcap in his maroon pickup truck cursing me through his windshield as I slowly scoped the one open spot on the street. At that time, with his perturbed expression and prehistoric facial features, he struck me as the worst person in the world and frankly still does.

I wished nothing but the worst things on this person as I pulled over to let him pass, haranguing him through my windshield as he simultaneously screamed at me through his windshield, then calmly hit reverse to move back into the middle of the street, to parallel park in the only open spot, just momentarily lodging the right rear wheel ever so slightly onto the attenuated curb.

In my mind this man in the pickup truck was a grotesque stain on the face of our planet. His face, in both its structure and expression, sticking with me at the bar in Nick-A-Nee’s, more or less revolted me in the most extreme of ways.

The man to my left ordered an impressively grotesque smelling soup from the bar—it was all I could smell at the time, and the stench was such that it struck me as frankly a little unbelievable it wafted from

a bowl a man was actually eating from, yet if anything this made me enjoy Nick-A-Nee's even more.

The band playing the bar employed a white saxophone player, and each respective instrumentalist was drinking a separate, distinct variety of alcohol—one whiskey, one craft beer, one some type of mixed drink, one nothing at all, all four frankly looking little like typical musicians, and I found it notable how easily the saxophone, I presumed tenor, sat in the mix with just a microphone next to it, given the accompaniment of electric guitar, electric bass, and acoustic drums that were played in a thoroughly rock, as opposed to jazz, style. I guess I never knew that about tenor saxophone. Rock drums have increasingly distressed me of late.

When I think of a style of drumming that offends my taste, rock drumming immediately vaults to the top of the list—in my opinion Stratos most rock music would be immeasurably improved with the simple removal of percussion, or at least with a more muted substitute of percussion. Maybe a tongue drum? Amplified tongue drum? Distorted tambourine?

But honestly that's just me, because I fully realize most people love percussion, that percussion is viewed as the so-called backbone of modern composition, that tons of listeners still venerate rock music. In any case I guess I should start to explain how I got here, shouldn't I?

—From your parallel universe you mean?

—Exactly Stratos. It now seems to me that I crossed over into this universe, or I should say I became aware that it had happened, precisely at the point where the bozo in the snowcap in his dark red pickup truck began yelling at me through his windshield, as I attempted to parallel park up the street from Nick-A-Nee's, where a man would then order one of the most disgusting smelling soups I've ever encountered from its bar.

It was obvious as the man, who I despised, looked exactly like someone from Alabama—he was wearing a snowcap despite it being a moderately temperate day in early April, and given these facts it was obvious something had shifted significantly, but I couldn't draw any conclusions quite at that point.

But these are the types of cues you have to take into account with regard to things such as these Stratos, parallel universe conundrums so to speak. How exactly it happens I'm not at liberty to detail at this time, as it's possible I'm ignorant of the mechanics of the process, or I'm aware of the process in a way I can only communicate in indirect ways.

—This makes sense, Markos. There's obviously only so much we can put into words when it comes to parallel universes.

—For example it was precisely at Nick-A-Nee's that I happened to log onto the basketball-reference dot com webpage Stratos, which only confirmed my suspicions, which had been steadily rising, which only acted as another clue as I delved deeper into the statlines I'll detail right now.

Specifically, as I recalled it, beyond a shadow of a doubt it sat in my memories, the Boston Celtic Jayson Tatum owned a statistical profile that exceeded that of Dallas Maverick Luka Doncic, whereas Luka Doncic had a statistical summation that lagged that of Jayson Tatum. And yet on basketball-reference dot com at Nick-A-Nee's, only moments after said bozo in snowcap in the Alabama-esque maroon pickup truck berated me through his windshield, it occurred to me that Luka Doncic had by far the more complete statistical profile compared to Jayson Tatum, despite both Luka and Tatum averaging above thirty points per game this NBA season.

Specifically, on this side Stratos, it seemed that Luka differentiated himself from Tatum by getting to the free throw stripe at a much

greater clip, by making plays for others at a clip that more than doubled Tatum's rate.

Where Jayson Tatum assisted on just twenty percent of his possessions, while turning the ball over on ten percent, Luka Doncic assisted on forty three percent of his possessions while turning the ball over on only twelve percent, while both rebounded just about thirteen percent of their possible possessions and shot an aggregate percentage of sixty (true shooting percentage) on their thirty points per game.

Yet I explicitly recalled Jayson Tatum being the far superior playmaker, by more than double, when compared to Luka Doncic, in those exact terms of assist percentage and free throw rate, yet when I logged onto basketball-reference at Nick-A-Nee's, to my great surprise, Luka Doncic separated himself from Jayson Tatum by his higher propensity of getting to the free throw stripe and by his stark contrast in setting his teammates up for made shots (especially when compared to his propensity to turn the ball over). It's only in the most minute of ways that we can detect these transitions Stratos, if that makes sense, that we can conclude we've traversed across potential dimensions, if that makes sense?

—Oh, absolutely!

—And to add to the confusion it was only a night later, in a vivid dream, that I found myself in a desolate house covered with orange wallpaper, curiously preoccupied with bathing myself, apparently getting ready for something I couldn't quite put my finger on—it was in this home with the orange interior that I felt again this psychic energy with near strangers, near strangers who seem to pop into my mental space unannounced, that has increasingly struck me as an actual physical phenomenon.

That I can actually think back toward these near strangers in a physical fashion. Yet this was before a particular shadow from my past

appeared to me yet again in dream, in the most vivid of manners, and I began to run from something, something I couldn't identify, while simultaneously reconnecting with this shadow without either of us saying a word to each other, until I stumbled upon what looked like a locker room in an open field. I entered the building, a so-called locker room in an open field, and realized all of its memorabilia was from nineteen ninety eight—and I realized I'd traveled back to nineteen ninety eight, that everything I touched was totally nineteen ninety eight, that my own so-called identity was just a clumsy block across something that could be traversed if approached properly, and then suddenly the thought occurred to me: Time starts in the middle and winds around, always in the middle, I thought, that this notion of time beginning at the beginning is entirely false, perhaps even nonsensical.

When awake I frantically wrote a note that simply said: Time starts in the middle and winds around. And as I encountered this idea streams of green for lack of a better word time shot out, like Nickelodeon Gack or something, various streams of time overlapping each other in joyous bursts of green, like the word Go, and it was a sort of joyous event even in its ambiguity. I was a little disappointed to wake up.

—Did you do shrooms at all?

—No sadly Stratos I was completely free from hallucinogens when I went to sleep, when I went to Nick-A-Nee's, when the red-bearded hipster peed at the adult urinal, when the man next to me ordered the disgusting soup, when the bozo with the snowcap screamed at me, when the saxophone was surprisingly high in the mix. No we don't necessarily need to travel in the traditional sense in order to travel great distances, that much we can be sure of.

—That makes complete sense to me, Markos!

MARKOS VAMVAKARIS: Emerging from a space just a single one away from the spot I'd parked in the previous Saturday I couldn't help but notice a younger Caucasian male wearing a Slipknot t-shirt while carrying an open box of Pringles, and only a second later, to my right, to my surprise, walking up the same street, was a female dressed in all black with gothic black leggings eating out of an open Frito's bag.

It seemed curious to me, in this apparent new universe, that spry goth adults were walking around a downtown eating from open bags of chips in the streets just feet away from each other—because I'd have thought eating chips while walking through downtown streets would have been almost black swan events.

Yes, there was certainly a glitch-like character to these goth adults snacking from open cans and bags of chips in the middle of the street; this was perhaps a three standard deviation event at least.

Rounding the bend into the parking lot I took note of a lady taking a puff from a long pipe on the patio and became enthusiastic about the prospect of Nick-A-Nee's adding hookah to its menu, which I was craving that afternoon, yet unfortunately as I searched for the source of the hose I soon realized this older Caucasian lady was just inhaling from her oxygen tank, and that hookah was still ultimately unavailable at Nick-A-Nee's.

Walking into the bar a cello was playing the melody from Yesterday by the Beatles at a loud yet not unreasonable decibel level, while two older ladies showed off, to my mind at least, considerable pool skills at the adjacent pool table, in an area where both Dara and I sat after the bartender, recalling our exact drinks from the week prior, gave us a Mezcal and Vodka on the rocks with water, respectively.

Sitting on this thin bench, I couldn't help but notice that the limes at Nick-A-Nee's consistently seemed to be completely dried out, that

they served desert-like limes that secreted no juice at all when squeezed—one of the older ladies playing pool had a look in her eyes that I associated with pure death as her black jeans sagged off her tiny body.

MANOLIS CHIOTIS, REINCARNATED AS AN ANTIQUE LAMP: Parallel universes, we should note, always seem to be peculiar in this way, Markos, don't they?

MARKOS VAMVAKARIS: Of course they do, Manolis, if we know nothing else we know this peculiar nature of the parallel universe!

The next day, after catching up with an old friend the previous night, perhaps having one too many Mezcal in the process, watching the New York Knicks eek out a narrow victory against the Cleveland Cavaliers in the first game of the first round of the NBA Playoffs, I'd find myself downtown, just maybe half a mile from Nick-A-Nee's again, faced with two homeless people who, with all due respect, emitted a terrible odor, only to then pass a gaggle of college-aged Caucasian females smoking cigarettes, followed by a middle aged lady walking her dog in a black t-shirt that clearly outlined both of her nipples.

Two Spanish speaking females struck me as perhaps lovers and when I noted this, this possibility that two Spanish speaking lesbians had just walked by us, well, Dara didn't take it all that great, as apparently the simple thought of me even noticing the mere existence of Spanish speaking lesbians was something that offended her palette—and of course, Manolis, I knew this already, that I could have just as easily allowed these Spanish speaking alleged lesbians to walk by us in peace, without further comment, yet against my better judgment I made the remark 'Were those Spanish lesbians?' which, to be fair, seemed to me at the time to be a reasonable inference, but which Dara had no interest in hearing, no, the mere mention of a Spanish speaking

lesbian, in Dara's mind, was somehow synonymous with my lusting for Spanish speaking lesbians.

The two homeless people were occupied with a film playing on an iPhone and—

MANOLIS CHIOTIS, REINCARNATED AS AN ANTIQUE

LAMP: And you thought to yourself: How do people who can't afford homes afford iPhones?

MARKOS VAMVAKARIS: Manolis, how did you know that?!

MANOLIS CHIOTIS, REINCARNATE AS AN ANTIQUE LAMP:

Markos, bottom line, I know you better than you know yourself, I'm reincarnated as an antique lamp!

Plus, it's an intriguing question, because it does seem a bit incongruous doesn't it?—A person forced to sleep on the street owns an iPhone that, from your description, seems to connect to the internet?

How is it that a person sleeping on literal rags in the crevices of downtown streets can afford a luxurious technological instrument, perhaps the most impressive technological instrument constructed to this point in human history?

It simply makes no sense that this would be the case, to the extent that I'm almost tempted to suggest the possibility that these two people were perhaps faux-homeless, that they were on this street in rags only to scam potential passers by out of their spare change, yet—

MARKOS VAMVAKARIS: Their stench was so strong that it seems implausible on that account alone?

MANOLIS CHIOTIS, REINCARNATED AS AN ANTIQUE

LAMP: Exactly, Markos!

MARKOS VAMVAKARIS: I've never personally noticed a stench that strong from a single homeless person I've previously encountered, and I've encountered innumerable homeless people in my life, yet none emanated that powerful of a stench, this stench was such that I, for a moment, questioned if it could even come from a human being, if the human body was even capable of emitting a stench that rancid, that all-encompassing.

To accumulate an odor of that magnitude would be a monumental achievement if it was only to scam passers by out of their spare change, and I'd go as far to say that—if that were the case—these two people deserve every single cent they receive, if they've accumulated that level of pungency to simply scam spare change.

MANOLIS CHIOTIS, REINCARNATED AS AN ANTIQUE LAMP: Yet, if that were the case, Markos, then I think we'd have to imagine that openly flaunting an iPhone would cut the opposite direction from the pungent bodily aroma, no?

What I mean specifically is: If a person is willing to go to the extent of accumulating an incredibly bitter and pungent body odor, to then accumulate maximum spare change donations, then this person is clearly dedicated to maximizing profit in the most extreme of degrees, this person has fully committed to the mask of a person sans domicile, a pitiful hobo—yet if a person encounters an allegedly homeless person enjoying an iPhone, the most advanced technology of this era, then that person would have to hesitate just slightly before giving any currency to that person, or giving maximum spare change to said alleged hobo, even if the body odor is off-putting enough to make the notion of this person perpetrating a spare change scam an incredulous one.

In short, the flaunting of an iPhone would decrease the expected profit of a so-called spare change scam, while the accumulation of

pungency strikes us as having no other purpose beyond the acute maximization of spare change scamming, which means the combination of the two would make the accumulation of the bodily pungency a sort of lost cause, almost an act of insanity.

MARKOS VAMVAKARIS: Insanity is often the most sensible answer in cases such as these, Manolis. At least that's my personal experience.

MANOLIS CHIOTIS, REINCARNATED AS AN ANTIQUE LAMP: Without a doubt something mysterious was occurring with those two bums, Markos, something that's frankly probably beyond our comprehension!

MARKOS VAMVAKARIS: And at this point, after imbibing a few Mezcal at Muldowney's, splitting a clean bottle of Soju at a hot pot spot just around the corner, then returning to my apartment to cook two pieces of Ahi Tuna, there's almost no way I'll ever be able to delve any further into this matter, Manolis.

I will, however, note just briefly that on our walk back to our car one of the two persons was saying something about a five hundred dollar hotel a town over.

MANOLIS CHIOTIS, REINCARNATED AS AN ANTIQUE LAMP: Yet even that anecdote leads us no closer to the true nature of these two people, don't you agree?—if anything it makes the matter even more convoluted!

MARKOS VAMVAKARIS: I fully agree—the true nature of these two people, leaving aside their physical odor, will ultimately remain unknowable to us.

Night Swimming

He said Yeah you wanna. Well. If you want. Because I know you were talking about Thursday. And. Just as it so happens. I never like to turn down my stepfather. So I think after work on Thursday I might be fuckin going to my mom's house. To do like a night swim? If that's of any interest to you at all?

I said Oh nice. On Thursday?

He said Yeah right after work and shit. Probably head there right from work.

I said Oh nice. On this Thursday then?

He said Yeah. I think you texted. The group about possibly doing something?

I said Right. Yeah. But I think Aaron replied right.

He said Right right.

I said Yeah about like. Getting drinks and shit. Yeah. I guess I'd be down. For like a beer at the pool at night. I don't know. You know. If I'll swim. At night. Might be a little cool to take a dip.

He said My stepdad's pool is eighty degrees.

I said Oh nice. Are you going to invite Aaron too or.

He said Well. No. I can.

I said Just because. You know I already kind of have plans with him?

He said Oh totally. I just kind of have a lot of events this weekend. I have this dinner on Friday. A little party on Saturday. I didn't want to get too gabagooled on Thursday and stuff. You know.

I said No that makes total sense man. I can't say that it's not totally fuckin sensible. It's just.

He said So for now it's just you.

I said Sounds like a plan. Night swimming. Not my favorite thing but yeah the pool is nice. It's just. You know. Aaron kind of already

replied? And I also said I'd be around to grab a drink. But no. We'll figure it out.

He said Right. And I'll probably end up inviting him!

I said Because. It's almost like. It kind of feels like you're asking me to. You know. Go swim at your mom's house. And ditch Aaron?

He said I also. You know I don't want to be inviting a bunch of guys to my mom's you know?

I said But at the same time. We are almost forty now.

He said No we're totally mature. But you know. What if we end up getting all fucked up and shit?

I said On a night swim? It seems doubtful to me. For my part I'll probably just have a couple beers and shit. If you. You know. As long as you don't try and rip a bunch of shots. Because you know I'll say yes if you ask me to take a shot.

He said Plus Mike has all that great wine. A whole cellar full!

I said I could probably have a couple wines with the beer. And still stay under control.

He said But we can play it by ear.

I said I just don't wanna totally crumb on Aaron last minute. With a total horse-shit excuse you know? And then be swimming and your mom's fucking pool and shit? Like a complete cunt. It just seems slightly disrespectful?

He said Oh no totally. That would be fucked up! I'll probably invite him if it's okay with my mom.

I said But I guess that's my question. Because Thursday is tomorrow and.

He said Is that a party at that point though? If Aaron comes too? I just don't know if my mom wants me to have a party.

I said Three guys having a beer or two? Doesn't seem that rambunctious to me. It doesn't strike me as definitive of a party per se. But at the same time I wouldn't want to impose. It's your mom's fucking house.

He said That's what I mean.

I said So your stepdad invited you. To night swim?

He said Yeah. He invited me over. So I figured I'd toss out the invite to you. Figured the pool is eighty degrees. You know it's salt water right? So it'd be nice.

I said It seems a little homoerotic for Mike.

He said How so?

I said Inviting you for a night swim? Two guys swimming in the dark of night. It just doesn't. It's not so much that I find it particularly homosexual. As much as I find it out of character for Mike. As closer to something that could be vaguely deemed gay than his norm.

He said Oh no. Mike loves night swims! You didn't know that?

I said I could possibly vaguely recall that. Now that you mention it.

He said You know. Actually. Wait. I'm just getting a text. Yeah. You know. Alicia. She's. Ugh. She's saying her neck is hurting? I may actually. I hate to do this. But I may actually have to take a raincheck on tomorrow. If that's cool?

I said Oh no totally! That's fine. Honestly. I'm not.

He said You're not really that into night swimming anyway?

I said I don't hate night swimming. But you know. I just. You know. I hope it isn't because I asked to invite Aaron? That you're. I know you wouldn't make up like a total bullshit excuse just because you don't want to invite Aaron to your mom's house.

He said Oh no way. I was totally going to fucking invite him! It's just. With the long weekend. And now Alicia's neck. I just wanna be there to help you know? Before all of our events.

I said That's not only totally understandable. It's actually. I actually find it fucking commendable! I find myself in actual. I feel a tremendous amount of respect for your character. You know?

He said I've really put a lot of work of late. Into. You know. Being like a good dad and shit.

I said And that's incredibly commendable.

He said I've finally started to realize that. Going out? And getting totally wrecked five or more nights a week. That it's just not conducive to being in a healthy relationship. To raising small children and whatnot.

I said Man. Like I've said to you previously. That's actually a conclusion I've come to at times myself. Like this whole notion. Of getting blackout drunk. Not remembering what happened the previous night. Divorcing myself from so-called reality in a really material sense. And doing it frequently! That it wasn't actually good for my mental health!

He said Oh totally!

I said Like when I was totally incoherent for good chunks of the week? As much as fun as that was. It actually took a toll on me mentally!

He said Same here man! Same here.

I said Even though. Yeah. Sure. I find coherence kind of sterile on balance. I think so-called normal reality is kind of. It leaves something to be desired for sure. But at the same time?

He said At the same time it's tough waking up the next morning. After drinking like twelve vodkas! And then driving home! And trying to recall what bullshit you said to people you barely even know!

I said Not that that would have happened. Had we night swam. I'm really just going to have a couple beers and call it. There's no way. Like. That I'm getting incredibly inebriated or exiting the world of coherence or anything like.

He said Oh same here! That's why. Honestly. I'm just gonna go home. Maybe have a bottle of wine or some shit. Take care of the kids.

I said Coherence is a useful resource in the rational world we inhabit.

On The Incoherence Of The Philosophers

Following my reasonably rewarding coffee with Curt, I returned to apartment and ate dinner, which I consumed voraciously, because I'd arranged to meet with an old friend, Tim Stomachio, on the East Side to discuss this incredibly vivid dream I'd had the previous Saturday. The more I thought about it, it wasn't that I necessarily despised Stomachio, it was that there was something intangible about Stomachio I couldn't help but despising, yet none of that stopped me, as we sat on separate barstools in Paragon on Thayer St, from bluntly informing him of my feelings on the matter, I said Tim, no word of a lie I was with her through three floors, I kept losing her then reuniting with her, she'd reappear out of nowhere, and finally we arrived at a set of rooms, we deliberated for what felt like an eternity, and it felt right, it finally felt like we'd truly reunited, and as soon as we found the right room we disrobed, and then all of the walls collapsed, and a group of what I could only assume were pleasure police stood armed in full on SWAT gear. Oh wow, Stomachio replied, perhaps missing the entire point of the story.

But listen to this, he said, Boom! He burst into the Men's Bathroom with the crude force, brute strength of a rhinoceros, headphones still stuck in his ears, with the cord dangling stochastically upon his rotund stomach—the urge to defecate was so intense within him (everyday, multiple times a day) he was physically incapable of removing his earbuds from his ears; instead he ripped the cord from his laptop and trampled, rhinoceros-like, into the First Floor Men's Bathroom, where he dropped feces from his butthole that were so potent a man could still taste the stench on his tongue just upon entering one foot into the First Floor Men's Bathroom—even twenty minutes after the defecation occurred! Simply put, it had gone too far, and Ben and I took the initiative; together we carefully crafted an email

addressed to the entire male population of the first floor—including, of course, the fecal culprit—and demanded a so-called courtesy flush when quote-unquote Going Number Two in the First Floor Men's Bathroom, as it was only fair to the other male employees of the first floor that they be able to enter the bathroom without encountering a stench that hit them in the face with the force of a pillow case filled with bricks. But in the end would it even make a difference? And was it possible the guy already courtesy flushed? As it so happened, we'd never find out; he was fired a week later.

Tim, I said. Tim! I said, Are you even listening to me, Tim? I'm trying to have a serious conversation here, I said, and you're talking about buttocks and courtesy flushes. Haha, oh yeah! Tim insincerely replied, then, before I could reply, went on to say You never see dogs laugh—have you ever noticed that? Is it possible that a lack of humor is the true trait separating us from other species in the animal kingdom? Is that possible? Furthermore, if I have a great sense of humor, as a decent amount of people seem to note about me, does that make me one of the greatest human beings—supposing a sense of humor is the trait that truly differentiates the human race from the barbarity inherent elsewhere in the animal kingdom? Like so many other Americans, I grew up with a family dog, yet I never got the sense the dog possessed a great sense of humor. For all I knew, the dog may have had a profound internal dialogue; his sense of smell was far superior to mine, there was no doubt about that—yet no humor. I've always been intensely skeptical of human superiority of animals in the conscious and subconscious realms, as consciousness (never mind the subconscious) seems impossible to verify on any granular basis outside of one's own species—even within one's own species. Yet laughter should be. It seems as though laughter—like anger, sadness, and excitement—should be somewhat uniform across species; if my family dog had a sense of humor, I imagine I would've most likely been aware of it. One thing so many people—people from all walks of life—note

about me is my sense of humor is truly exceptional. I just wonder about animals ... is a sense of humor the one trait separating us from the barbarity innate to the animal kingdom? Is a sense of humor perhaps of the highest value—among human beings and within the totality of the animal kingdom?

I intentionally withheld any direct response to Stomachio's comment, instead, without directly addressing his comment, I said When passing Tina's Italian Kitchen's former location, which is now not only knocked down (the entire building) but also demolished to dust and stones, I think of the entire planet—specifically how the Earth, and everything in and on it, will eventually suffer a similar fate. The only time I dined at Tina's Italian Kitchen—following a potent recommendation from my friend Curt, who claimed the food was ridiculously good!—the food was tasty, but the ambiance was severely lacking; it felt as though you decided to dine in a stranger's living room because of the noticeable lack of background music, the cable news was the only ambiance provided. When passing Tina's Italian Kitchen, before and after their move, to and from the gym, I think Ha, Tina's Italian Kitchen, I'm not a huge fan of their ambiance, it feels like you're eating in a stranger's living room, but the food is tasty! Following the relocation of Tina's Italian Kitchen, the building that originally harbored the restaurant expeditiously fell into utter disrepair, which struck me acutely, perhaps due to the fact I found the building reminiscent of the building where I currently reside, a strip mall with apartments located above the businesses, and I considered the possibility that maybe, one day, I'd drive by my old building and discover it in a similar state of disrepair, then felt moderately depressed. Now there's absolutely no physical trace of the building that originally harbored Tina's Italian Kitchen, and eventually, I'd assume, the recollection will completely dissolve from my memory as well. This building that meant nothing to me, that no longer physically exists, that exists only within the confines of my recollection (in an obscured

and inaccurate manner no doubt) will eventually dissipate from my cognitive faculties as well. Regularly passing the remains of a building that meant nothing to me conjures an odd feeling of nostalgia, I feel nostalgic for the events adjacent to my recollection of the former Tina's Italian Kitchen, and that nostalgia transmutes to melancholy, then transmutes to depression. When I arrive at my apartment I feel oddly depressed, and I amble up the steep set of stairs on the side of my building, flummoxed. At this both Stomachio and I sat on our barstools in silence.

Once I arrived back at my apartment I began the task of getting my affairs in order, so to speak, to which my first order of business, I thought, would without a doubt have to be visiting—paying a visit to—a person from my past I'd admittedly, to the best of my knowledge, morally wronged—who, since that event, had completely understandably refused to communicate with me in any way. However, now that I was on my last legs, so to speak, I felt an intense urge to make amends, so to speak, to reconcile with a person I cared for deeply, who I unfortunately completely failed to treat properly, so to speak—when I had the chance. I wanted to itemize my regrets to her; I wanted her to come to understand that, all things considered, we shared an incredibly special connection, that ultimately, perhaps, wrongs were committed on both sides, that despite all of the above we could have been something special together—and now that I had finally come to terms with the fact I, in fact, did suffer from these temporary bouts of madness, maybe it was possible we could arrive at an entente of sorts; I thought it was possible she'd be amenable to hearing me out.

Once I arrived back at my apartment, however, rather than preparing to travel to her home unannounced and unexpected, I instead found myself procrastinating to an absurd degree; I removed a large bag of Cape Cod reduced fat potato chips out of the cupboard

and began to eat said potato chips; I'd developed a really troubling habit of completely losing track of time and potato chips when pacing around my apartment, eating potato chips.

Pacing through my apartment eating the same bag of Cape Cod reduced fat potato chips, I clearly needed to begin to make the necessary preparations to pay this person from my past an unannounced visit, I thought; I needed to find out where she lived—however, rather than doing any of that, as opposed to getting any of my affairs in order, I continued to eat the reduced fat Cape Cod potato chips, at that point a completely unfathomable amount of potato chips, calorically incalculable in fact, pacing up and down my apartment, and thought about how Curt texted me the words *are you around* out of the blue, I said aloud to myself, at ten pm on a Friday night I'd assumed he was depressed about his latest breakup and wanted to meet up for a drink after work, when, in reality, he'd called out of work and started drinking with his dad at two pm and wanted to know if, at ten pm, I'd meet him at Hot Club; I immediately obliged. Curt had previously engaged in sexual relations with a bartender at Hot Club, and, on her night off, she was mingling with a group of us, despite the fact Curt was intermittently asking her, somewhat playfully (but with a frequency that undercut his frivolity), why she was being so moody, which she promptly disagreed with; in fact, the only thing making her moody, not that she was moody, was Curt intermittently asking her, only somewhat playfully, if she was, in fact, moody. There's no way I'm having sex with Dominica tonight, Curt said as she generously bought us a round of drinks, and I apathetically said Well, you never know... and accepted a beer from Dominica, then politely, reticently informed her I'd actually requested a vodka as Curt asked if he'd told me about the girl he'd met the other night, a blonde from New York at a cigar bar in East Greenwich; he got her number yet held no physical interest in her whatsoever, all he could think about was the image of his ex-girlfriend, and, morosely, Curt speculated that he was

asexual now, that he was no longer capable of amorous interest in either sex, then he displayed pictures of his ex-girlfriend, whom I'd met multiple times, on his phone. Our friend Tony, who'd met Curt at Hot Club before I arrived, couldn't drive and had no money on him, and he also didn't have a valid ID, so we weren't sure if it would be possible go anywhere else, as Tony had a license that was suspended indefinitely, a temporary license, a replacement for the temporary license, all three of which he'd left downtown at G-Pub on three separate occasions. Well, I guess we could go to G-Pub, suggested Curt, and it seemed like the most logical choice—

Pacing throughout my apartment eating reduced fat Cape Cod potato chips, it was only at this point that I took any initiative whatsoever; I placed a plastic bag clip on the bag of potato chips and placed the bag of potato chips in the cupboard. However, in this act of opening the cupboard, a bag of scoop-shaped tortilla chips caught my eye; I gingerly removed the bag of scoop-shaped tortilla chips from the cupboard and opened the bag; I began, albeit in a more restrained fashion, eating the tortilla chips, and I thought about how there's a feeling I can't quite grasp when I engage in summer activities in September—on a small boat with my Uncle fishing for bass stripers the day is undeniably beautiful, indistinguishable on its surface from a breathtaking day in mid-July, or even late-August, yet there's something unshakably solemn I can't seem to grasp in the atmosphere. It's still technically summer, but it no longer feels like summer—mid-July feels majestic, and I bask in its majesty; there's something sacred about a late-August afternoon that conjures the most profound reflections from me annually, yet a comparable September afternoon is blasé and anticlimactic. I feel indecent—somehow, impalpably, tainted by the fact I'm on a boat in the month of September. Sitting on the North Providence town beach on a perfect Sunday afternoon, I'm severely lacking in glee—my glee is dissipated; I'm desperately searching for glee and discover none. I think about

wearing a fleece, how I should be wearing a fleece in mid-September, not shamelessly basking in the sun laying on the North Providence town beach; there aren't even any lifeguards on the beach—I almost hope for an immediate twenty degree drop in temperature. Why? This sensation is impalpable, and I find it completely intangible—is it muscle memory from my youth, where school traditionally (re)started in September, and summer activities subsequently ceased? My schedule is now indistinguishable from January through December. Summer extends from approximately June 21 through September 21; I should enjoy these mid-September Summer days, view them as unanticipated gifts and pleasant surprises—instead I feel a vague sense of shame, a touch of embarrassment indulging in late Summer; if I engage in the same acts in late-August I think If only this moment could last forever—I love this time of year, the twilight of summer! If I perform the same act, under the same weather, less than one month later, in mid-September, the profundity's dissipated—I no longer wish any of it could last forever; I'm totally indifferent to the ephemera I perceive; I almost want it to get cold.

Sitting in my living room, unable to eat another chip, disgusted with the amount of chips I'd consumed, I imagined arriving at this person from my past's home that afternoon unannounced and almost immediately, upon contact with her gaze, I imagined arguing, more or less with myself, as she had this way about her where the manner in which she employed her silence, her reticence, it was just suffocating, and it drove me more or less insane, to an extent; the fact she refused to argue with me in an unsolicited fashion drove me to the brink of insanity (at times).

Listen! Listen. I pleaded almost immediately, before she had even said anything, My life—it's utterly pointless, which you probably know, but now my mental health ... it's officially, I feel safe in saying it's officially deteriorated; I'm on my last legs. Yes, you heard me correctly.

My sanity: it's dissipated. I'm more or less awaiting death as we speak. ... Have you no pity?! None?! Zero pity?! Not even a modicum of pity?! Could I entice to perhaps spare a modicum of pity? To which her response I imagined to be silence, to which I imagined replying—I will itemize my regrets for you, I want nothing more than to itemize my regrets for you, if you'll let me. Will you allow me? Will you let me itemize my regrets for you? I know for a fact your son isn't home until seven, that gives us four hours. I only need three and a half, to which she would, after a substantial pause, no doubt against her better judgment, murmured ok, which was in fact the crux of our relationship from the day we first met; I would, historically, go on an extended, usually somewhat rancorous, diatribe, imploring her for one thing or another, or informing her of one thing or another, to which she remained silent, and then she would more often than not, always after a substantial pause, no doubt against her better judgment, acquiesce my requests.

Finally, choosing to break her oppressive silence, she, in a soft tone, would tell me You have to understand, removing myself from the majority of so-called worldly concerns, ceasing wholesale the visitation of blogs and websites and no longer concerning myself with stuffing my face with deceased, seasoned sentient beings or overpriced holistic plants, it's almost impossible to view what regularly occurs on this planet as a particularly great success. In fact, once removed from this daily inanity—the inanity appears much more clearly as inanity, although that's not exactly the greatest consolation, although it has to be recognized as at least a slight improvement. And while it may be true, she said, that a person has to be mentally ill of some sort to view everything as essentially a waste of time, that doesn't mean the sentiment isn't true—and, furthermore, it doesn't mean the parties defining mental illness are bereft of political and personal motivations and biases. The world as currently composed cannot be said to be good, she continued, but the recent advances in technology have really

allowed that fact to be obscured so easily—yet to speak those words officially, publicly, and you'll come off as a luddite at best, or averse to so-called progress at worst, embittered and irrational. Yet the advances in technology as a whole are, in fact, not good. In fact, they are not advantageous, are actually, for the most part, incredibly asinine, yet saying that to a multitude is heresy—yet at the same time I guess the multitude has never meant all that much to me, or the times when the multitude dictated my ways are so far in my past the recollection of those times fail me, you know what I mean? and I imagined wholly agreeing with everything she said; in fact, I agreed wholeheartedly with her entire sentiment.

It became apparent, had become apparent, was then readily apparent that things had changed—in perhaps an irrevocable fashion. Things—they've irrevocably shifted, shifted in an irrevocable way, a way that, it must be said, cannot be easily revoked, that's incapable of being revoked, I thought. The sum of a plethora of changes that remained wholly impalpable to me moved me to conclude things had changed irrevocably. Sitting in my apartment, I sat down in my favorite chair and did exactly what I never did—I turned on the television set, thinking Well, now that everything has changed, and irrevocably so, I might as well just watch this TV, because given the fact nothing currently is what it once was, well, what's the difference? The news was on. A male anchor was speaking. He advised viewers to remain calm, and I had no idea what he referred to; I'd more or less insulated myself from phenomena like social media and current events, feeling as though, at thirty two years old, I'd simply seen enough. How many years should a person endure witnessing these idiotic displays on social media, reading these vomitive news articles before turning away for good? Thirty two years of disgust is enough, I thought; how many additional years am I required to endure to make an educated decision—that this, it simply isn't for me?! However, perhaps, I

thought, it was precisely this exposure to said media that had driven me to this madness? Perhaps if I continued to remain at a remove from said media my mental faculties would return to their proper state, a state of normalcy? Was it possible I wasn't, in fact, mad in the least?

About the Author



Nick Perry is an American writer.
His website is nickperry.neocities.org.

