

Attic Salt Honors Program

2015

## Attic Salt, 2015

Loyola Marymount University, The Honors Program

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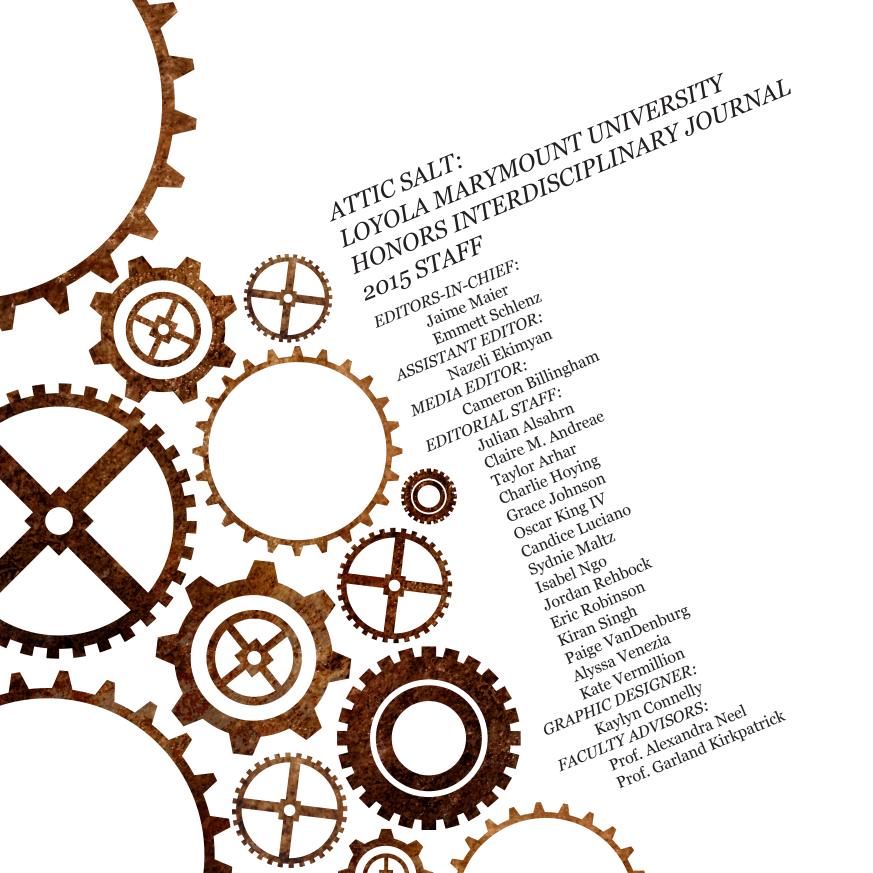
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Attic Salt

18th Century: A translation of the Latin sal Atticum.

Graceful, piercing, Athenian wit.





# Letter from the Editors

## DEAR ATTIC SALT READERS,

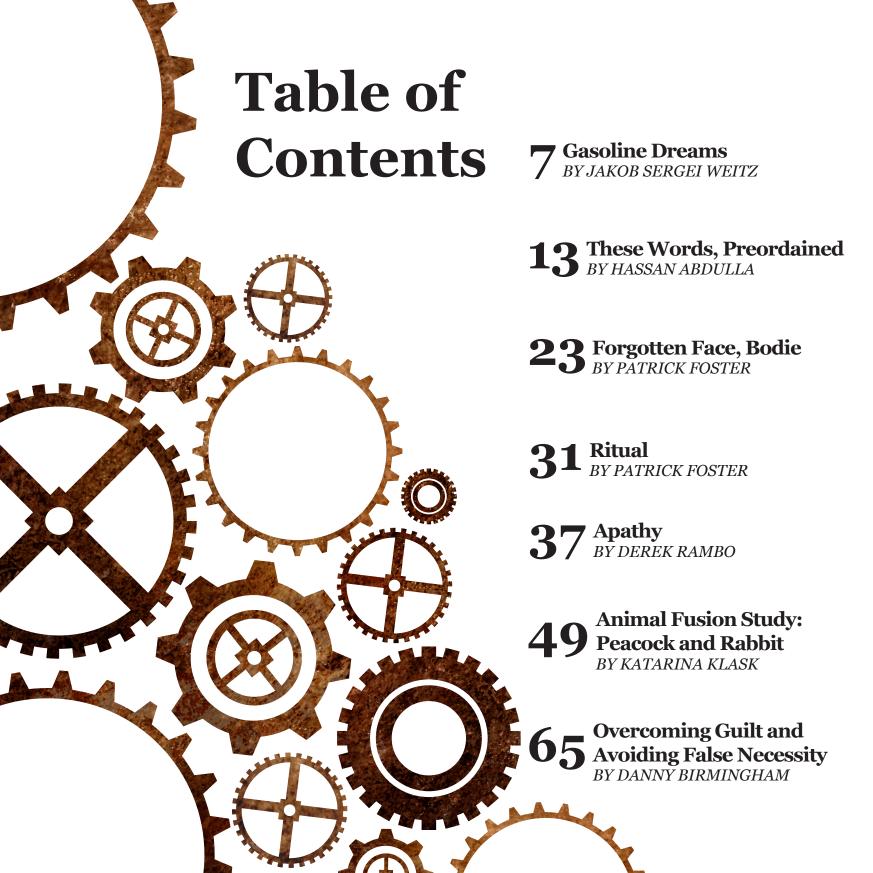
This year's edition of Attic Salt embraces the journal's interdisciplinary charge. It boasts submissions from scientists, musicians, writers of screenplays and prose, poets, theologians, and artists working in an impressive range of mediums—from paper to tungsten and aluminum. Reflecting the breadth of excellent work produced by Loyola Marymount University's students, this year's journal gleans its contributions from all corners of the campus—from Bellarmine to Seaver.

The theme of time—past, present, and future—informs most of these pieces; however, time isn't presented in a linear way, but rather as circular, eternal, or disjointed. In one poem, we travel through the ageless myths of the gods of night and day, who endlessly circle the sky. In another piece, we see old scientific practices become new again. Other works provide reflections on war and reflections on lost relationships, in which memories of the past cut into the present—like the knife that hulls a piece of fruit as one of our poems suggests. We are moved by an epic ballad that relays to us the eternity of the written word: letters stitched onto a banner that waves in the ceaseless wind, paired with a tale that is also stitched into the minds of those who read it. In both poetic and essay form, we learn of past civilizations whose stories give framework to the present and illuminate the future—though perhaps the future is already set in stone, much like, as one of our photos conveys, our experience of the stars that trail across the cosmos before our eyes, even though in the light-years ahead of us they have already died.

In the creation and publication of this journal we would first like to thank our staff members, who have worked on it with love and diligence. We are also grateful for the guidance of our faculty adviser, Dr. Alexandra Neel. We want to thank the Honors Program of Loyola Marymount University, specifically Dr. Vandana Thadani, Dr. John Dionisio, and Meghan Alcantar, for their unending enthusiasm and support. Finally, we extend our great thanks to Professor Garland Kirkpatrick for handpicking the talented Kaylyn Connelly, who designed and crafted the beauty that defines this year's journal.

And to our readers: please cherish your time in these pages.

FOREVER YOURS, THE ATTIC SALT EDITORS



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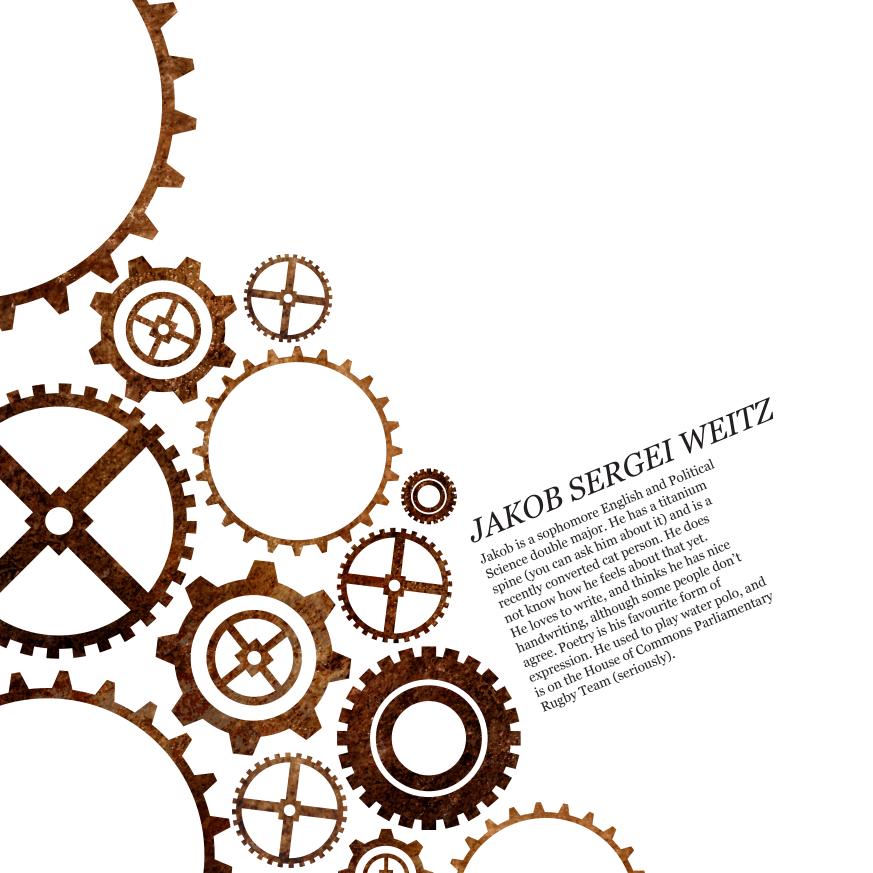
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## **Gasoline Dreams**

In my dreams a fire starts to burn.
Cigarette smoke mortars, beer can bombshells,
guns I think the Japs made.
Who knows, who cares, from God, from Hell, from Thunder and from Lightning above.

Oddly I felt nothing.
I saw Joey die there, sure.
He was my brother, sure.
I saw a lot of fuckin' Charlies die there too and their fuckin' brothers.

Mark, Robert, Ngoc, Minh,
Bahn Mi, cheap beer,
cheap women, cheap smokes,
cheap life, on sale.
Get it here, hot, fresh,
young blood still pumping to the sounds of the Red, the White, the Blue,
the fuck you -

I can't talk about it, sure.

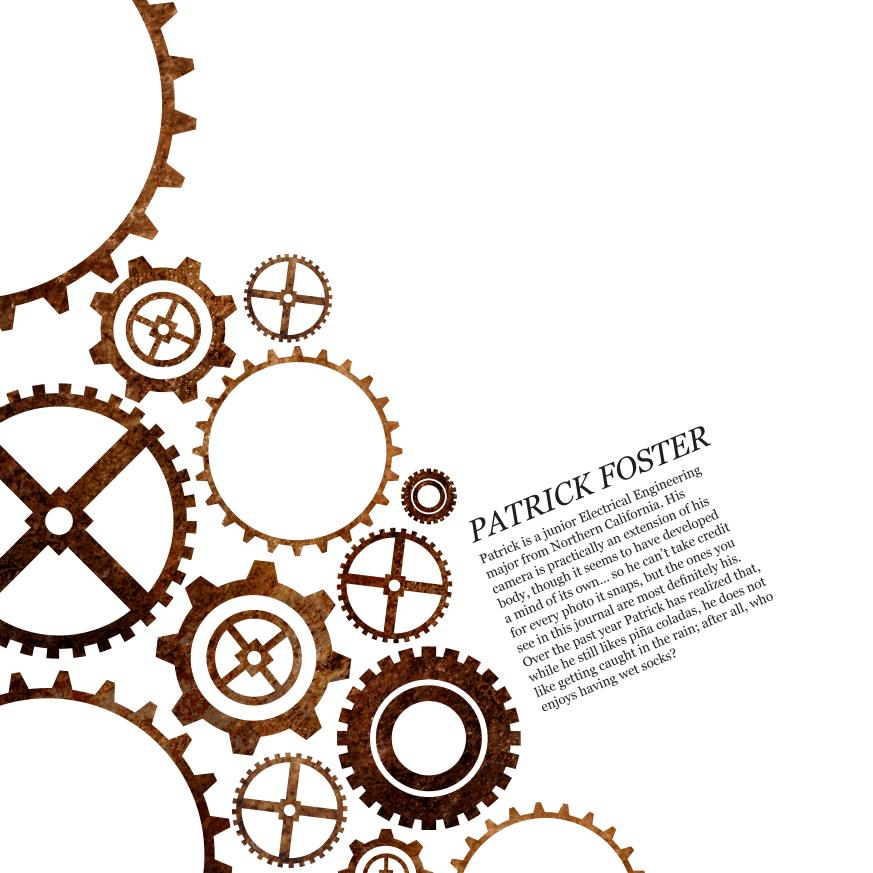
Could you?

You don't know what it's like to see a little itty bitty piece of metal enter your goddamn forearm and not come out, time standing still and pointing its bony, skeletal finger at you and laughing, laughing at your friends, laughing at your enemies, laughing like the only one who got the joke.

A hundred thousand tons of nuclear freedom; Give me liberty or give me death. I guess we both know which one both sides chose.

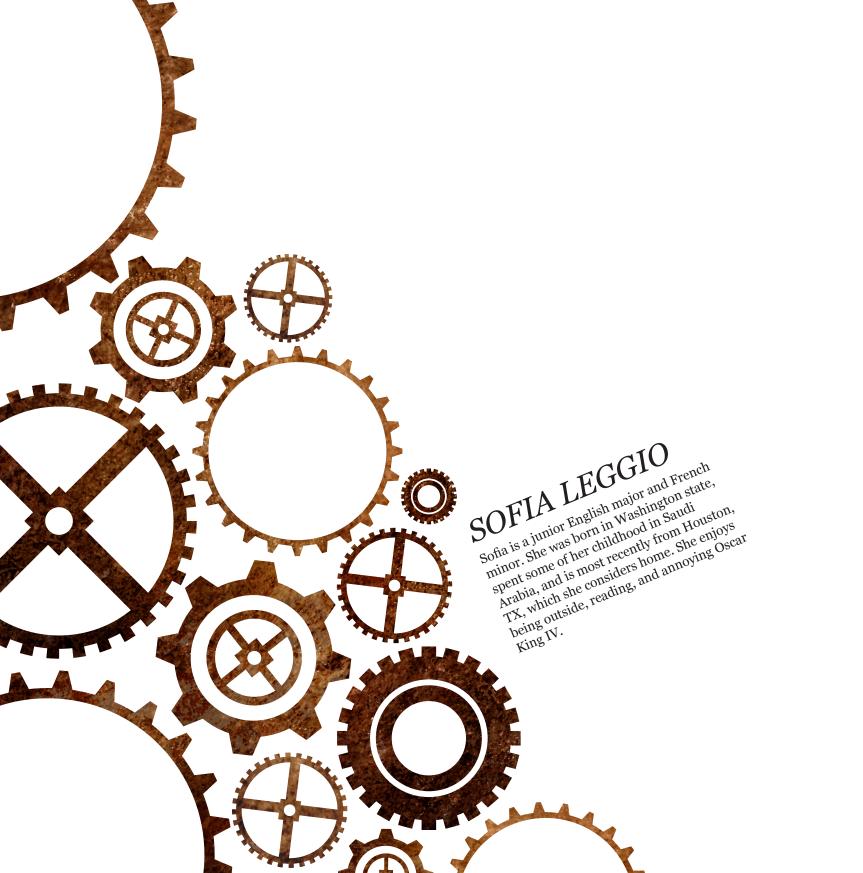
We aren't even the same people anymore. When you smell gasoline, I bet you think of cars.

*Khe Sahn*, 1968.



# Trail Blazing, Joshua Tree





# **Imagine Yellow**

Imagine yellow Dusty sunlight filtering through my kitchen window Onto the butter colored telephone And into my cold bitter tea

Imagine yellow dreams
Of soft skin and fingers, touching but not one
Holding me in—hard, pushing the cold out
Like soft paper falling into the flames, crackling in delight

Imagine yellow stars Rough paper cutouts Gluey glitter scattered like teeth My red, mother's hands bigger than her tiny doves

Imagine yellow teeth Clacking and smooth, nearly translucent now Like a set of old dominoes, worn down by fingers eager to win Biting hard—into jello.

# When I in Silence

When I in silence stop and think on time I see not a line, but a fruit, peeled, hulled A rounding ball of sweetness plucked and lulled. Rind, ever circling seasons—bud to rime. And me, at the core, fearing the spiral down Because what lies beneath could be rotten, Because when it runs out, away I'm forgotten And all is lost, all thought, fear, all renown

But I think on those who too soon reached the heart, Sped up the paring knife with their own hand, And what they sensed, feeling they were set apart When life did not go quite as they had planned, Leaving the world to its quiet skinning, And we: left behind with our heads spinning.



# These Words, Preordained

The following is an excerpted version. To read the story in full, please visit www.atticsaltlmu.com

04-29-11

1:31pm

yourparamour: hey yourparamour: hey yourparamour: hey

1:34pm

yourparamour: hey yourparamour: hey yourparamour: hey

1:41pm

yourparamour: hurry up yourparamour: you're so slow

yourparamour: I'm suffocating over here

2:12pm

yourparamour: I dozed off

yourparamour: I'm gonna take a nap

2:51pm

yourparamour: I'm awake yourparamour: let's do this yourparamour: need you urgently

3:07pm

forgottenspeech: for a second there forgottenspeech: I thought I was popular forgottenspeech: a dozen new messages!

forgottenspeech: you always knew how to get my hopes up

3:09pm

yourparamour: all the better to dash them cruelly

forgottenspeech: feeling sick again? forgottenspeech: or just pretending? yourparamour: somewhere in between

yourparamour: every sniffle brings me closer to a watery grave

forgottenspeech: why would it be a watery grave

forgottenspeech: are you on a boat

yourparamour: it counts as a watery grave if your lungs are

full of liquid

forgottenspeech: gross

forgottenspeech: blow your nose

*forgottenspeech*: pretend you're an elephant yourparamour: what noise does an elephant make?

forgottenspeech: I dunno forgottenspeech: trumpet? yourparamour: \*TRUMPET\* forgottenspeech: well done

3:17pm

yourparamour: so... forgottenspeech: so yourparamour: so forgottenspeech: SO yourparamour: soooo

yourparamour: did you do it?

forgottenspeech: nah

yourparamour: are you waiting for your other testicle to

descend, or...?

*forgottenspeech*: I really hope not

*forgottenspeech*: three testicles is enough for any man

forgottenspeech: four would just be weird

yourparamour: it's okay

yourparamour: at this rate, it'll be a moot point

forgottenspeech: this better not be a "you're gonna die a

virgin" joke

yourparamour: is it a joke if it's true???

forgottenspeech: keep going and you can have someone

else's notes

yourparamour: you are terrible at blackmail yourparamour: besides, your notes suck

yourparamour: last time all you wrote down were poems

about dogs

*forgottenspeech*: so what you're saying is my notes were awesome yourparamour: have you considered using your suave poetry

to ask her?

3:24pm

yourparamour: sensitive topic?

3:31 pm

yourparamour: oh don't be such a baby about it

3:35pm

forgottenspeech: relax, bud. I was writing a poem. check it

forgottenspeech: Roses are red

Violets are blue When I use my hand I think about you

forgottenspeech: great poem or greatest poem?

yourparamour: greatest yourparamour: I'd say yes

yourparamour: except it says nothing about prom

forgottenspeech: easily remedied forgottenspeech: Roses are red

Violets are blue When I use my hand I think about you

PROM?????

yourparamour: a masterpiece

yourparamour: move over, cummings

forgottenspeech: you want him to move out of his grave?

yourparamour: yes

yourparamour: zombie poets are my fetish

yourparamour: I'd let zombie cummings eat me out

yourparamour: eat my brains out, I mean

forgottenspeech: I'm gonna leave while I still have my appetite

forgottenspeech: I'll email you what you missed later

yourparamour: I'm writhing with anticipation

## 05-05-11

10:31pm

yourparamour: fuck yourparamour: this yourparamour: test

*forgottenspeech*: I don't get how this is difficult for you yourparamour: I'm sorry that I wasn't born a genius

forgottenspeech: it's okay forgottenspeech: I forgive you

forgottenspeech: and I love you anyway

yourparamour: better not let Julia hear you say that

forgottenspeech: oh

*forgottenspeech*: should I stop showing her this conversation? yourparamour: as if you could get within three feet of her

without fainting

yourparamour: you still haven't asked her yet, have you?

forgottenspeech: tomorrow forgottenspeech: I promise

yourparamour: why are you promising to me?

forgottenspeech: who else would I promise to?

yourparamour: beats me.

forgottenspeech: I'm surprised she still hasn't been asked

yourparamour: I'm not *forgottenspeech*: why not?

yourparamour: dunno. Maybe she just hasn't said yes yet.

waiting for the right person.

forgottenspeech: the right person, AKA me. I always knew it

yourparamour: that's the right tude

forgottenspeech: tude? yourparamour: attitude

forgottenspeech: your slang is terrible

yourparamour: my head is a whirlwind of calculus. I'm all

about those curves

forgottenspeech: oh, that gives me an idea

yourparamour: what is it? forgottenspeech: it's a surprise yourparamour: I hate you

forgottenspeech: I know. go back to studying. yourparamour: K. I'll talk to you tomorrow

yourparamour: be prepared for me to bitch about the test

forgottenspeech: be prepared for bitch. got it.

yourparamour: I'll retort tomorrow. Be prepared for that too.

### 05-06-11

#### 2:07pm

forgottenspeech: love it when I have a sub forgottenspeech: so much easier to ditch

#### 2:14pm

forgottenspeech: so...

forgottenspeech: this is awkward

forgottenspeech: I don't know if you heard what happened

forgottenspeech: well, you probably did

#### 2:21pm

forgottenspeech: I don't know what to say

forgottenspeech: I didn't realize you and Julia were fighting

forgottenspeech: why didn't you say anything?

forgottenspeech: I think she thinks I'm in love with you

forgottenspeech: that'd be weird

forgottenspeech: being in love with you forgottenspeech: our kids would look weird forgottenspeech: mostly because of me forgottenspeech: just mostly, though

## 2:23pm

forgottenspeech: I'm gonna jump on Halo

forgottenspeech: you should join me when you get home

3:14pm

forgottenspeech: need you urgently

forgottenspeech: every team I end up with sucks

forgottenspeech: I need you to distract them with your

feminine charms

forgottenspeech: so please pick up some feminine charms on

your way home

forgottenspeech: maybe if you find some forgottenspeech: we could go to prom together? forgottenspeech: it's a little cliché but in retrospect forgottenspeech: there's no one else I'd rather go with

forgottenspeech: even if it means I won't get lucky at the end

of the night

4:14pm

forgottenspeech: Layla?

5:17pm

forgottenspeech: oh God

forgottenspeech: your mother just called forgottenspeech: I'm in the car right now

forgottenspeech: I don't know if you're reading this

forgottenspeech: but I'm coming forgottenspeech: please be alright

forgottenspeech: please

05-13-11

1:13pm

forgottenspeech: today's the day forgottenspeech: I just woke up

forgottenspeech: and came online to tell some people where

the plot was

forgottenspeech: because they cancelled school today

forgottenspeech: and you're still here

forgottenspeech: sort of forgottenspeech: not really forgottenspeech: goodbye, I guess

forgottenspeech: your family asked me to give a speech forgottenspeech: I hope you don't mind that I said no

06-17-11

9:23pm

*forgottenspeech*: youre not gonna believe this *forgottenspeech*: guess who got elected prom queen

forgottenspeech: go on forgottenspeech: guess

forgottenspeech: i cant hear you so well

forgottenspeech: so ill just assume youre done guessing

forgottenspeech: its you forgottenspeech: grats

forgottenspeech: it was a landslide apparently

*forgottenspeech*: the facts now reflect what you already know *forgottenspeech*: youre royalty and everyone else is a peasant

forgottenspeech: except Thorson forgottenspeech: hes your king

9:51pm

forgottenspeech: my king too i guess forgottenspeech: long live the king forgottenspeech: long live the queen forgottenspeech: wait thats not how it goes

forgottenspeech: the king is dead long live the king

forgottenspeech: the queen is dead

forgottenspeech: fuck

06-19-11

1:14am

forgottenspeech: i'm a little drunk forgottenspeech: i love you

forgottenspeech: i dont remember if i ever told you that

forgottenspeech: not seriously anyway

forgottenspeech: i never wanted you to think i was weird

forgottenspeech: ironic i know forgottenspeech: or something

*forgottenspeech*: i love you like the moon loves the sun *forgottenspeech*: or like your fish loves fish food

forgottenspeech: i guess he's my fish now

forgottenspeech: because he lives with me and everything

forgottenspeech: he lives in the closet

forgottenspeech: still doesn't like other men fish

forgottenspeech: so I guess it's appropriate that he lives in

the closet

forgottenspeech: we would have laughed about that

forgottenspeech: once forgottenspeech: upon forgottenspeech: a time

2:01am

forgottenspeech: come back forgottenspeech: please come back forgottenspeech: need you urgently

#### 7-09-11

#### 11:14pm

forgottenspeech: do you miss me?

#### 11:28pm

forgottenspeech: does it get lonely forgottenspeech: wherever you are

### 8-07-11

#### 5:19pm

forgottenspeech: i have a surprise

forgottenspeech: or two

*forgottenspeech*: i broke into your room the other day *forgottenspeech*: mostly because your family and i we dont

talk so much anymore

forgottenspeech: i think i make them sad

*forgottenspeech*: but also because i think youd like that *forgottenspeech*: breaking in instead of just walking in

forgottenspeech: it was easier than i thought

forgottenspeech: breaking in anyway forgottenspeech: youd be happy

forgottenspeech: your family hasnt gone through your stuff forgottenspeech: looks like you found a way for them to stay

out of your room

forgottenspeech: i dont know what i was looking for

forgottenspeech: but i took back my hoodie forgottenspeech: which i cant even wear anymore forgottenspeech: everyone thinks its your hoodie

forgottenspeech: this sounds fetishy now

forgottenspeech: i promise i dont sniff it while masturbating

forgottenspeech: i just keep it on my bed

### 9-11-11

#### 4:51pm

forgottenspeech: today wasnt so good forgottenspeech: 10th anniversary of 9/11 forgottenspeech: they talked all day

forgottenspeech: about how we shouldnt forget forgottenspeech: and to remember those we lost forgottenspeech: like i needed the reminder

#### 5:02pm

forgottenspeech: i havent forgotten about you

#### 5:06pm

forgottenspeech: how could i?

#### 10-02-11

#### 12:19pm

forgottenspeech: saw your sister in church today

forgottenspeech: i dont think she saw me

forgottenspeech: she looked like the lights gone out of her eyes

forgottenspeech: i guess i can understand

forgottenspeech: god ignored her outstretched fingers

forgottenspeech: and you slipped through

#### 10-09-11

#### 9:29pm

forgottenspeech: how bout we play pros and cons

forgottenspeech: suicide forgottenspeech: pros forgottenspeech: easy forgottenspeech: inevitable

forgottenspeech: death is inevitable i mean forgottenspeech: and either i get to see you

forgottenspeech: on the other side

#### 9:52pm

forgottenspeech: or there is no other side

forgottenspeech: which is peaceful and whatnot

*forgottenspeech*: cons

forgottenspeech: people will not be happy with me forgottenspeech: "life shouldn't just be thrown away"

forgottenspeech: its a sin i think forgottenspeech: so i might go to hell

forgottenspeech: and hell will probably be you yelling at me

forgottenspeech: for all eternity

forgottenspeech: oh wait im listing cons

#### 11-22-11

#### 9:21pm

forgottenspeech: my mom has been getting mad at me lately

forgottenspeech: i left this window open forgottenspeech: and she says it isn't healthy

forgottenspeech: for me to keep talking to you

forgottenspeech: shes probably right forgottenspeech: but its kind of nice

forgottenspeech: you know? forgottenspeech: its kind of nice

#### 12-07-11

#### 7:58am

forgottenspeech: saw your parents while i was buying groceries

forgottenspeech: your mom hugged me

forgottenspeech: she cried a little bit when she did forgottenspeech: but i couldnt look away from your dad forgottenspeech: i wonder if he lies awake the same way i do

forgottenspeech: i wonder if he wonders

forgottenspeech: when this is going to stop hurting

\_\_\_\_\_

#### 1-01-12

#### 12:00am

forgottenspeech: happy new year forgottenspeech: i had a weird thought

forgottenspeech: my dad asked if there was anyone i wanted

to kiss at midnight

*forgottenspeech*: my mind kinda jumped to you *forgottenspeech*: maybe im falling in love with you

forgottenspeech: ha forgottenspeech: haha

forgottenspeech: ill laugh for both of us

### 3-15-12

### 8:27pm

forgottenspeech: sorry its been a while forgottenspeech: you got logged out

forgottenspeech: it took me a while to guess your security

questions

forgottenspeech: when did you set those when you were six

or something

forgottenspeech: because since when is your favorite book

clifford the big red dog

forgottenspeech: fucking clifford

## 05-06-12

#### 3:14pm

forgottenspeech: so...

forgottenspeech: its been a year forgottenspeech: happy anniversary

forgottenspeech: you said youd see me tomorrow a year ago forgottenspeech: i wish the last thing you said hadnt been a lie

#### 5-23-12

#### 12:00am

forgottenspeech: i hope youre happy wherever you are. i hope you have all the time and all the books to read. i hope youre watching over me i hope it doesnt make you too sad i hope you like what you see.



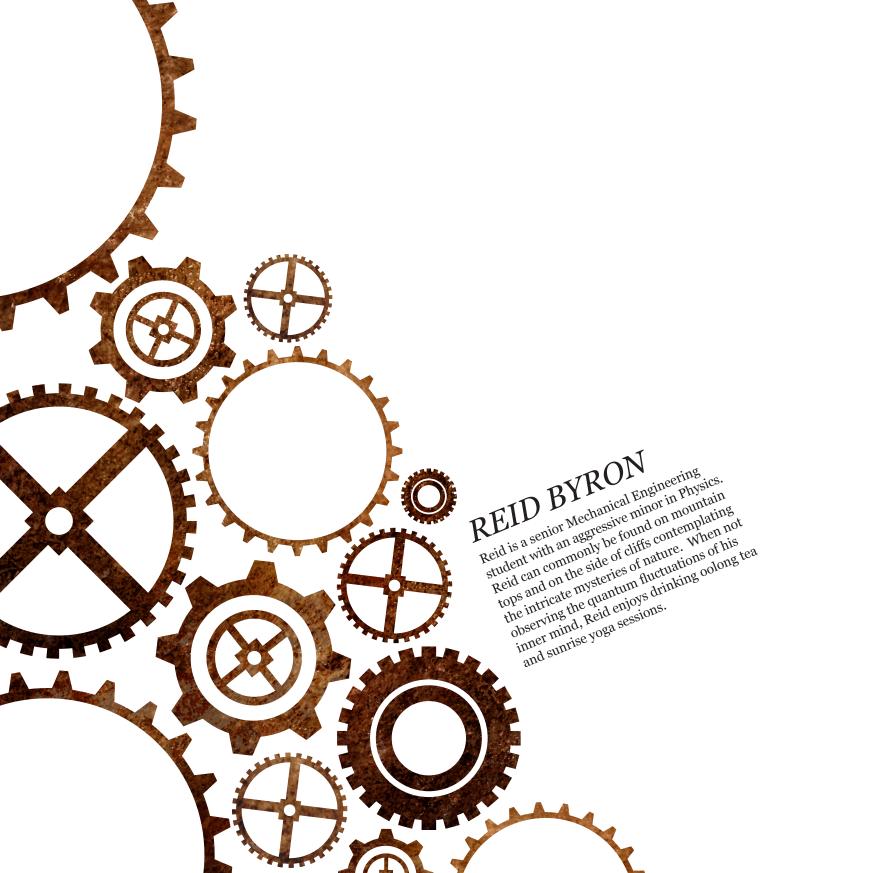
# Tupac Amaru II

My blood is the red-hot strain of two conquerors
Of the steel-helmeted pale horsemen
With cold weapons that spurted fire and thunder
Beneath a billowing flag on a stake
And of the sons of the sun
Who closed their fists over their mother's throat
In the name of divine rule
(Certainly I did not descend from a line of peaceful explorers.)

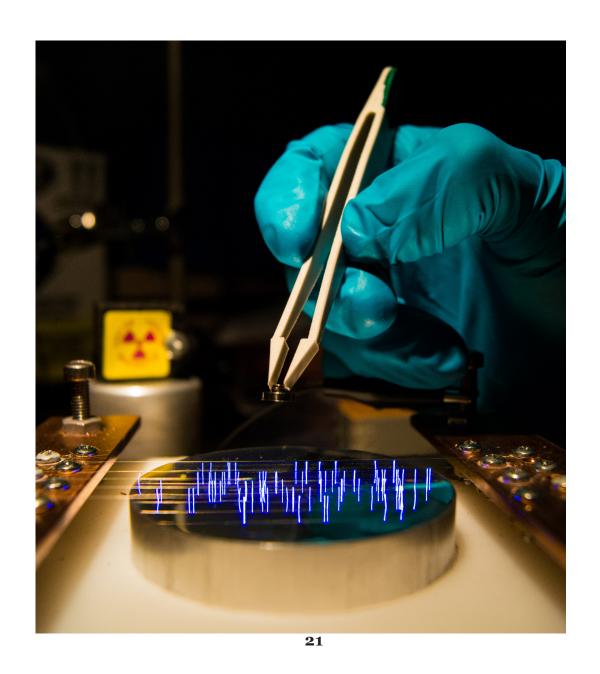
The war was raging through my veins Before my mouth learned to speak. I was stretched in all directions Before my limbs learned to move.

And when they killed me
Pulled me by my foot
By my foot
By my foot
By my hand
By my hand
By my head
I burst like a blossoming, red flower
My tempests set free at last
My body, more formidable than Pandora's box
Infecting the world.
Even in death
My blood could not stand to mingle with itself
Separating like Spanish and Quechua
Like Dios and Pacha.
My body could not contain two gods.

(Tupac Amaru II was a revolutionary who fought for indigenous rights and Peruvian independence in the 1700s. For this, he was drawn and quartered by the Spanish crown in 1781.)



# The Alpha-Ray Illuminator



A nanometer beyond what the human eye perceives lies a universe of complexity outside our common experience. A huge flux of subatomic particles passes through the human body every instant without interaction and without our slightest notice. It is only by the cleverness and ingenuity of humankind that these invisible particles have been observed, named and understood.

Long before grand experiments such as the Large Hadron Collider at Cern or the Super-Kamiokande Experiment in Japan, physicists at the turn of the century used comparatively basic tools that could fit on a desktop to make fundamental discoveries about the nature of the world around them.

The device in the accompanying picture is able to illuminate the unstoppable and constant disassociation of the universe. An intrinsic property of its structure, a radioactive Americium-241 source breaks apart by ejecting a heavy, energetic chunk of its nucleus in a process known as alpha decay. These alpha particles cannot be seen, heard or felt; however, under the appropriate set of conditions, they can be made to create quite a light show.

I stumbled across an article published in 1945 detailing the operating principals and implementation of a small instrument capable of detecting alpha particles.¹ The instrument is unique in the fact that it creates an audible and visible spark each time an alpha particle is incident upon the active area of the detector. Being one that is inclined to build archaic physics apparatus, I set about amassing the materials and tools necessary to reproduce such a device.

The operating principal is simple. Five hair thin tungsten wires are suspended above a two inch diameter aluminum plate known as a cathode. The tungsten wires are grounded and a potential of -5000 volts is applied to the cathode. An alpha particle passing between the wires and plate will ionize or knock off electrons from air molecules in its path. These free electrons are accelerated by the strong electric potential towards the tungsten wires, creating an audible and visible spark in a process known as a Townsend Avalanche.

The image you see before you is the alpha detector in action. Held by a pair of tweezers is the Americium-241 source. Every spark captured in this image was initiated by an ejected alpha particle passing between the thin tungsten

wires and the cathode of the detector. A long exposure photograph was taken to image many such events as each little lightning bolt lasts only 2.40ms. As soon as the Americium source is moved away from the detector, this discharge stops, yet the atomic nucleus decays persistently with or without our observation.

In summary, an atomic nucleus decays and a piece of the nucleus hurdles towards the detector where it initiates an electric discharge visible to the unaided eye. Thus, we are provided with the opportunity to witness the normally invisible process of radioactive decay. What great insight can be gained from such a tiny and supposedly "outdated" instrument.

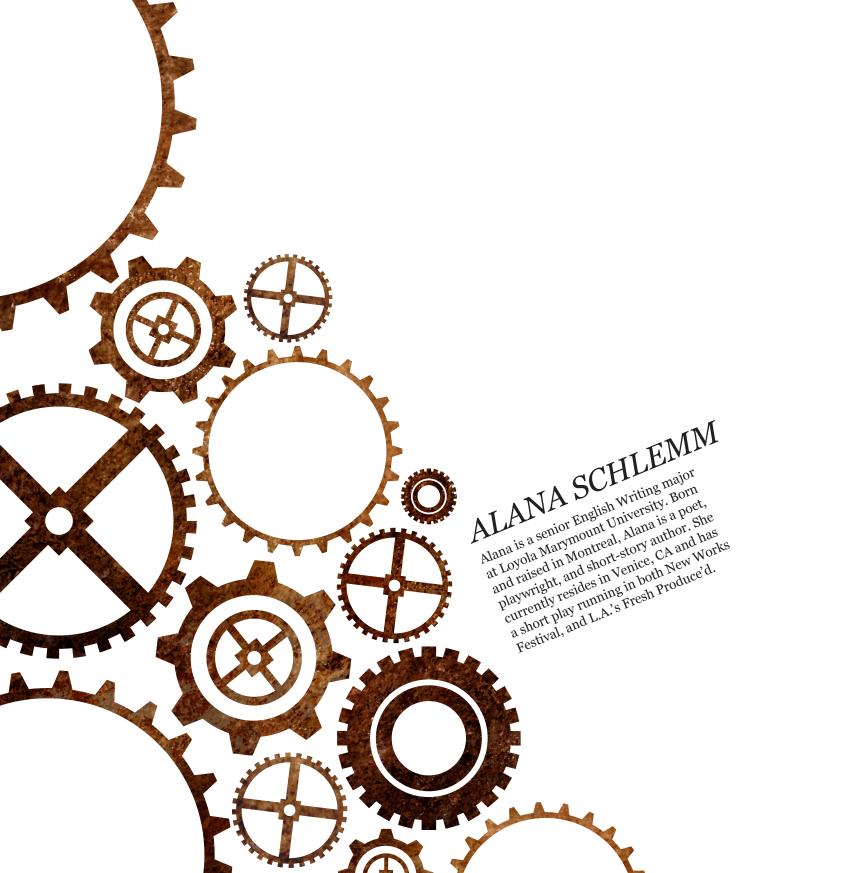
1 W.Y. Chang and S. Rosenblum. "A Simple Counting System for Alpha-Ray Spectra and the Energy Distribution of Po Alpha-Particles." <u>Physical Review</u> 1945 Palmer Physical Laboratory, Princeton University

Thanks to David Strebel for lending his photographic talents.

# Forgotten Face, Bodie

by Patrick Foster





## I am Saule

Long ago I fell for you-Moon, man; Menesis. Skulking by the silver gates of my castle, spinning charm with your silken tongue.

All day you slack and sneak, while I set the sky on fire in *my* golden Chariot. You lie in wait at days close like a cat of the dim jungle, watching as I bathe my steeds in the salt-sheathed sea, seducing me into the shadows of your sunken dungeon.

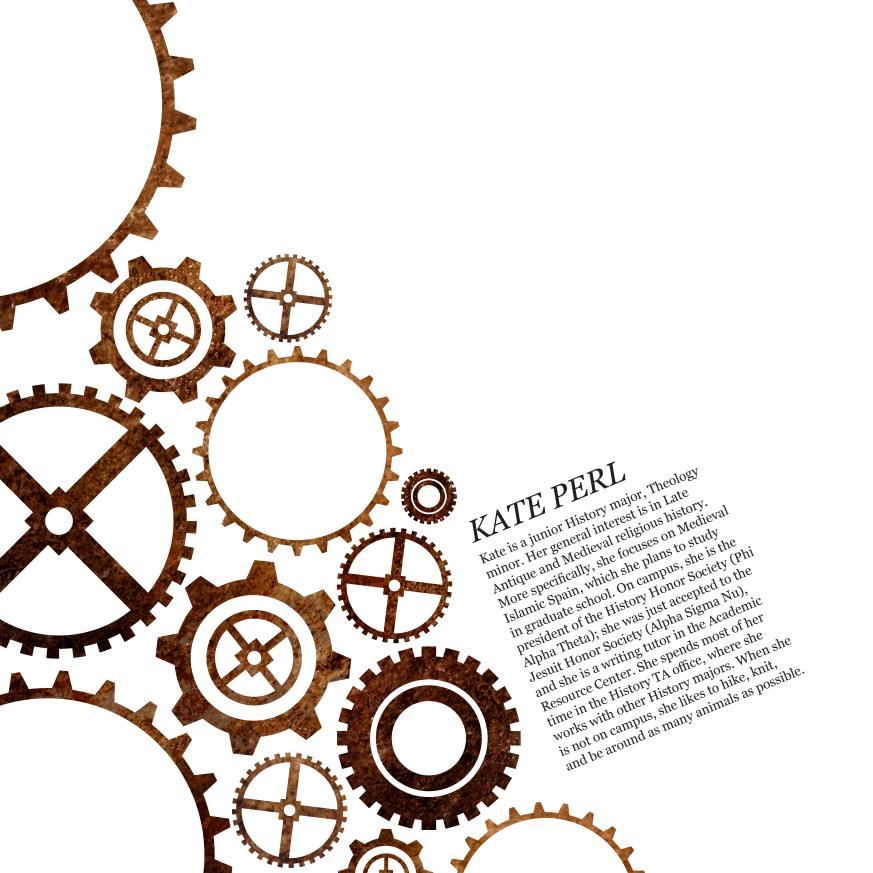
Days die sooner with each passing shift, the steam from my seething skin weak in your cold embrace. The copper wheels of my chariot, led astray to obscurity.

Beguiled by the pilot of darkness, Queen of heaven and earth enamored.

eclipse. the World is black, and I see *you* for the first time.

Summer solstice nears, I stand on a silver hill in silver shoes, stirring you into a distant dust. With one sigh I set you ablaze, watch you wither, reduced to ashes from the kiss of my smoldering feet.

Hark back to your home, Menesis You will not share the sky with me.



# "Yoga Pants Prank":

## A Study of Masculinity and its Construction of Homophobia and Rape Culture

This paper will examine a video made by a YouTube celebrity named Yousef Saleh Erakat, called "Yoga Pants Prank," in which Erakat wears yoga pants, bends over the trunk of a car and hides his face and upper body. He shocks men, who do not initially know that they are on camera, by catching them in the act of ogling him and commenting on his body. Several of the men respond with defensive aggression in order to avoid accusations of homosexuality; some try to justify their ogling by insisting that they thought he was a girl (they do not use the word "woman"); and a few respond with humor.

This video presents hegemonic expectations of masculinity and femininity, homophobia as a key feature of masculinity, and the presumed normality and acceptability of staring at a woman's body. It presents women (specifically women who wear leggings) as sexual objects that draw the male gaze by instinct, cross-dressing men as unfairly attracting heterosexual men and then causing those heterosexual men to appear homosexual, and both women and gay men as non-masculine others to whom a comparison is highly insulting. Further, Erakat's male privilege is evident in that he is capable of loudly calling out the men who stare without having to fear sexual assault in response to his assertiveness. In this paper, I argue that the current standards for masculinity are threatening and violent toward sexual minorities and women; those standards create and perpetuate homophobia and rape culture.

Current standards for masculinity are hegemonic in that men are socially entitled and expected to take a wide range of actions, including ogling and making comments about women's bodies, which assume that women are passive sexual objects, in order to prove their heterosexuality to other men. Standards for femininity are also hegemonic because women are expected to accept their dehumanized position as a social norm and to appreciate the male attention derived from that position. By tampering with the hegemonic relationship between standards for masculinity and femininity, Erakat's video causes shock, hostility, and the revelation of internalized homophobia.

In his article "Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame, and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity," Michael S. Kimmel explains that "Manhood is demonstrated for other men's approval." A significant aspect of gaining that approval is demonstrating to male peers one's heterosexuality because, according to hegemonic masculinity standards, an accusation of being gay is an emasculating attack. Homophobia among heterosexual men is not merely the irrational fear of gay men; rather, it is men's fear of other men and of the possibility that those other men will reveal one's failure to measure up to standards of masculinity.2 When a man accuses another man of being gay, he is projecting onto him the vulnerability which follows a man's lack of masculinity. The fact that, for a heterosexual man, a comparison to a gay man is highly insulting and fearinducing indicates that it is unacceptable and unsafe to be an openly gay man in a society of hegemonic masculinity. Gay men face violence from heterosexual men because heterosexual men fear that gay men will, by interacting with them, cause them to be accused of being gay. The fear of humiliation and vulnerability drives men to respond violently to other men who threaten their masculinity by publicly making them appear to be homosexual.

Erakat's video exemplifies the homophobia and accompanying violence that constitute hegemonic masculinity. When the men who ogle Erakat discover that he is a man, they immediately become aggressive because they are afraid of being seen by other men as gay, and therefore emasculated and vulnerable. Their aggression is an attempt to demonstrate publicly their ability and willingness to use physical force to prove their masculinity and heterosexuality. For example, when Erakat asks one man, "Why were you staring at my butt?" the man responds by asking, "Are you trying to call me *gay* or something?" The aggressive tone the man uses, along with the repulsed emphasis he places on the word "gay," indicates that Erakat's implication was the most insulting and fear-inducing implication he could have made. The man felt the need to redeem the masculinity he thought he had lost by proving to Erakat and the public his strict heterosexuality through physical aggression.

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u., pp. 214, 21/.

<sup>1</sup> Kimmel, Michael. "Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, shame, and silence in the construction of gender identity." In H. Brod, & M. Kaufman (Eds.), *Research on Men and Masculinities Series: Theorizing masculinities*. (pp. 213-219). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. 1994. P. 214. 2 Ibid., pp. 214, 217.

Another man jumps in a startled manner and then runs away upon discovering Erakat's gender, which points to a deeply internalized and instinctive fear of the humiliation associated with appearing to be gay. One man screams at Erakat and calls him "crazy" for wearing leggings. His hostility and accusation of insanity not only reinforce masculinity standards, but they also make vulnerable and condemn men who wear clothing socially designated for women because cross-dressing is associated with homosexuality, which indicates an absence of masculinity. The man considers Erakat's decision to wear leggings unfair because Erakat initially attracts him and other heterosexual men, and consequently causes them the humiliation of appearing homosexual. Finally, the most telling example of deep concern for proving masculinity to one's peers is the instance in which two teenage boys walk by Erakat. Erakat accuses only one of the boys of ogling him, and that boy immediately rejects the accusation and starts circling Erakat, demonstrating that he is prepared and willing to engage in a fist fight. It appears that he does so primarily to prove to his peer that he is not gay and that he will be as violent as necessary to make that clear. The aggressive reactions taken by most of the men in the video are relatively uniform in tone and in what they are trying to prove. The hostility is derived from the hegemonic masculine way of responding to their fear of the humiliation which they associate with accusations of homosexuality.

Kimmel argues convincingly that the homophobia in masculinity is intimately connected with violence against women<sup>3</sup> because "Women become a kind of currency that men use to improve their ranking on the masculine social scale."4 By understanding women as currency, rather than as human beings, hegemonic masculinity participates in the process of objectification and commodification which, according to Jean Kilbourne in her article "Two Ways a Woman Can Get Hurt," are the first steps in justifying violence against people.5 Women become objects with which men prove their heterosexuality and consequently, their masculinity; men do so by aggressively and publicly calling attention to women's bodies which they see as sex objects in order to make clear their attraction to women's bodies and not to men's. By ogling women and making comments about their bodies, men assert their dominance,

thereby making women feel vulnerable to physical assault. Kimmel points out the importance masculinity standards place on "scoring" women; by using a term associated with competitive sports, men turn women with whom they have sex into abstract points on the scoreboard of masculinity, thereby dehumanizing and commodifying those women. Men's assertion of dominance creates and perpetuates rape culture, meaning that it is considered socially acceptable and normal for men to treat women as inhuman, and therefore exploitable, sex objects.

Erakat's video makes obvious men's sexual objectification of women's bodies because it consists of men ogling and commenting on the body of someone they assume to be female. Although this paper has already described the men's aggressive responses to their discovery of Erakat's gender, it is necessary to note that the men's stares and comments are acts of aggression in themselves. Kilbourne makes the important observation that "It is very difficult, perhaps impossible, to be violent to someone we think of as an equal, someone we have empathy with, but it is very easy to abuse a thing."7 The stares or comments of every man that passes the car over which Erakat is bent serve to reinforce violent hegemonic masculinity because they categorize the female body as an object which exists for the male gaze and exploitation. One man walking by Erakat says, "That mug is fat," before he realizes Erakat is a man. He felt comfortable making such a comment because rape culture condones and normalizes such objectifying and aggressive comments when they are aimed at women. The comment is aggressive because, according to hegemonic femininity standards, women must accept such comments or risk assault if they rebuke a man for making them. The threat of violence exists because men feel the need to maintain their superiority, so a woman who refuses to submit to that superiority is a threat to their masculinity.

The stares of the men in the video all serve to place women in the passive position of one who is being surveyed, and men in the active position of the surveyor. John Berger identifies the dichotomy of surveyor and surveyed in his article, *Ways of Seeing*, and he notes that a woman must continually watch herself because the way she presents herself defines what can and cannot be done to her.<sup>8</sup> This dichotomy and its consequences are evident

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 215

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 214

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Kilbourne, Jean. "Two Ways a Woman Can Get Hurt." In Can't Buy My Love: How advertising changes the way we think and feel. (pp. 270-290). New York, NY: Simon & Schuster. 2000. P. 278

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Kimmel, "Masculinity as Homophobia," p. 217.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Kilbourne, "Two Ways a Woman Can Get Hurt," p. 278

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Berger, John. Ways of Seeing, London: British Broadcasting Company and Penguin Books, 1977, P. 46.

in the video because the ogling men assume their actions are acceptable partly because of how someone they take to be a woman (Erakat) presents himself. Erakat's choice of pants and position over the car are his methods of defining what can be done to a woman wearing and doing the same thing. In a culture which condones and normalizes sexual objectification and exploitation, a woman wearing pants and assuming a position which accentuates a sexualized part of the body is seen by men (and frequently by other women) to be "asking for" male attention. Male voyeurism, however, is not entirely based on how a woman chooses to present herself; rather, it is normalized and considered to be socially acceptable based solely on a woman's gender and her assumed heterosexuality. Berger's argument that women define what can and cannot be done to them is flawed in that it implies a certain amount of agency on the part of women. It suggests that if a woman tries to present herself in a way which would *not* draw attention to her sexuality, then men would not stare at or make comments about her body. In reality, this is not the case, as men use all women as objects to prove their masculinity regardless of how they present themselves. The only effect female presentation has is that men interpret it to decide that some women are "easier" to obtain as sexual conquests than others.

The notion of male entitlement and the assumed acceptability of ogling women are evident in Erakat's video because when Erakat calls out the men ogling him, the responses of several are, "I thought you were a girl." This recurring statement is problematic because it indicates that the speakers think their ogling and comments would be normal and acceptable if Erakat were a woman, but that it is abnormal and unacceptable for them to treat other men in such a way. By making such statements, they are justifying their actions and appealing to Erakat's sense of masculine entitlement. They hope and assume he understands that their actions were innocent mistakes made as a result of the misleading way Erakat presents himself. The system of male entitlement to ogle and comment is a violent way of thinking.

Their ogling and comments are threatening and hostile towards women, but given that they target women, they serve to justify male violence because they enhance men's masculinity in the eyes of their male peers. When men accidentally take the same threatening and hostile actions against their peers, those actions are deemed highly inappropriate. Men do not have the same sense of entitlement to objectify other men sexually because they are determined not to be humiliated by being considered gay. Here the connection between homophobia and rape culture is evident because men feel entitled to objectify

and exploit women's bodies in the effort to prove their heterosexuality. The violent connection is necessary in living up to hegemonic standards of masculinity.

What makes the video comedic for its audience of YouTube users is the revelation of Erakat's gender to each man who passes by, and the callings-out which ensue. It is important to note his ability to call out those men in the first place because it is an indication of his male privilege. If a woman were to conduct an experiment in which she wore leggings and bent over a car to find out how many men ogled and commented on her body, she could not call out those men in the way Erakat does without risking assault for her assertiveness. Although men reacted aggressively toward Erakat, his masculinity and their homophobia prevented them from assaulting him sexually. A woman who refuses to serve as currency for what men do for the sake of their reputation among other men is threatening to remove the means by which they achieve their statuses of masculinity. By not allowing herself to exist as a passive means to an end, she affirms and announces her humanity and agency. In doing so, she undermines men's ability to live up to hegemonic standards for masculinity. In the case of a woman doing what Erakat does, there is a greater likelihood that men would respond by sexually assaulting her in the effort to reassert the dominance they are accustomed to.

One way of assessing the impact of an online cultural representation such as this video is to read the comments posted by viewers. They frequently provide a wide range of interpretations, aspects which caused particular offense or confusion, and topics derived from the piece which require further discussion. In Erakat's video, for example, one YouTube user whose name is "CriticalThinking" started a thread of comments as a result of the following statement: "Women wear leggings BECAUSE they want their butt looked at. Seriously, that's the only reason to wear them. When girl's [sic] complain about it, they're not being honest about why they put them on." What follows is a series of comments from women claiming they wear leggings because they are cheap and comfortable, as well as another comment from CriticalThinking. It is relatively safe to assume that CriticalThinking is a male user because the comments present women as passive others against whom he projects hegemonic standards. By assuming that women who wear leggings are "asking for" male attention and aggression, he perpetuates the notions of female objectivity and exploitability which by consequence remove any blame or responsibility for respect and self-control on the part of the men who actively participate in hegemonic masculinity.

Erakat's video, as well as some of the comments, serves to present a danger which exists for all women and gay men in public because they are the people against whom men project their masculinity. Since violence is the primary means by which men demonstrate that masculinity to other men, women and gay men are the targets of sexual threats and assault. The homophobia-driven rape culture which characterizes masculinity is a violently oppressive hierarchy of gender and perceived sexual orientation.

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<sup>9</sup> Kimmel, "Masculinity as Homophobia," p. 216

# Ritual

by Patrick Foster















## The Banner

A wand'rer once beside me rode With banner borne on high, Yet naught but dust upon that road Would rally to her cry. Her banner pale – a banner dead, Its masters gone away – Did lonely fly there overhead Against a sky of grey.

I asked the wand'rer why she bore So long past that last sigh Such colors now long-lost to lore, Their lords' lifeblood run dry. Said she, "I ride for Elderwood, Where stories meet their end. This banner long and proudly stood, But now it flies condemned.

"The colors once that hung above
A hearth and home and kin
Now herald naught that men speak of,
Mem'ry lost, thread worn thin."
With solemn grip and sorrowed brow
She led them on parade:
The empty road, the fallen bough,
And ghosts behind her strayed.

A sadness and a mournful fear
Arose within my chest,
For none would sing of – none would cheer –
That banner riding west.
My mouth I opened, then, to speak:
"This story none will hear—
Tell it to me, that it might live,
For Elderwood is near."

The wanderer, she looked ahead Down narrow, forlorn trail, Her charge's tattered once-gold thread Askance upon the gale. Said she, "The song is one of years And fam'ly forged within A toil of blood, and sweat, and tears – The seeds of hearth and kin." Said I, "but these things surely last; A blood-bond never wants!" But like great Ozymandias, Nothing beside remains. The banner once that cherished flew O'er kings and men as one— Who now pays that pale flag its due, Torn-twain 'neath setting sun? The wand'rer spoke, "I'll tell you, friend, Of shelter in a storm. A splendid hall where bards attend And bread is ever warm. A place for stories fondly sung Where kin sit 'round a fire; In such a place this banner hung— The hall of Havenshire."

We rode, and there around us rose That hall's ghost board for board: A haven-home where each man knows To leave behind the sword. The meek, the lost, and downtrodden Drank with the proud and strong—Not a single cup forgotten, Nor empty for too long.

At oaken, lordly table stood
The father of it all:
A smile enshrouded by a hood,
Arms open as his hall.
"Havenslord," the name unspoken –
As time-lost as his face –
Stirred from mem'ries of songs broken,
So long ago erased.

His voice, it boomed, "You're welcome here, If worthy you have aught
To visit on a hungry ear—
What stories have you brought?"
For there above that hall-lord hung
A saga told in thread:
A banner, stitched with tales once-sung,
Once-cherished, now long-dead.

A people's wealth, weighed not in gold, But words, and thoughts, and names, Lay there in hoard – an epic told O'er hearthfire's home-wrought flames.

Such wealth was never meant to last.

Upon my eyes, the spell did break And hall-song fade away, As though from dreams I'd come awake To skies of somber grey. I felt the tears upon my cheek As real as was that hall, And then resolved that I would seek That lord who welcomes all.

But spake the pilgrim, "Ashen cold Now lies the haven's hearth, And tarnished – tattered – hangs the gold That bore its life and worth." A valiant last defender, then, Seemed that banner brave— A lonely mem'ry left by men To mark their stories' grave.

I followed, silent, close behind That standard-bearer grim Whose jaw was set, to fate resigned, Her words a ghostly hymn: "Look now ahead, though far afield Lie both song and singer, While Havenshire's fate is sealed, Echoes yet may linger."

I looked up from the road, and then Beheld a wondrous thing: The endless, mournful grey broken By colors rippling. We'd come upon great Elderwood, A forest not of trees— Where banners all in columns stood Aflutter in the breeze.

And there, among the rank and file, A final space unmanned—
A resting place, a wand'rer's mile
From hearth and hall-song grand.
My road-companion looked to me,
Then held at length the stave—
And so the wanderer to me
The tired banner gave.

Said she, "This story's end is now, And with you it may die." She gave a solemn mourner's bow, And westward cast her eye To elder banners, each resigned To ne'er see one more dawn, And when I thought to glance behind The wanderer was gone.

### But:

"To what foul end," my voice I heard,
"Must haven's hall-song come?"
While I knew not each threaded word,
The banner still held some.
To harsh winds bare the fabric soft,
Of that there'd come no good—
And so, with banner borne aloft,
I turned from Elderwood.

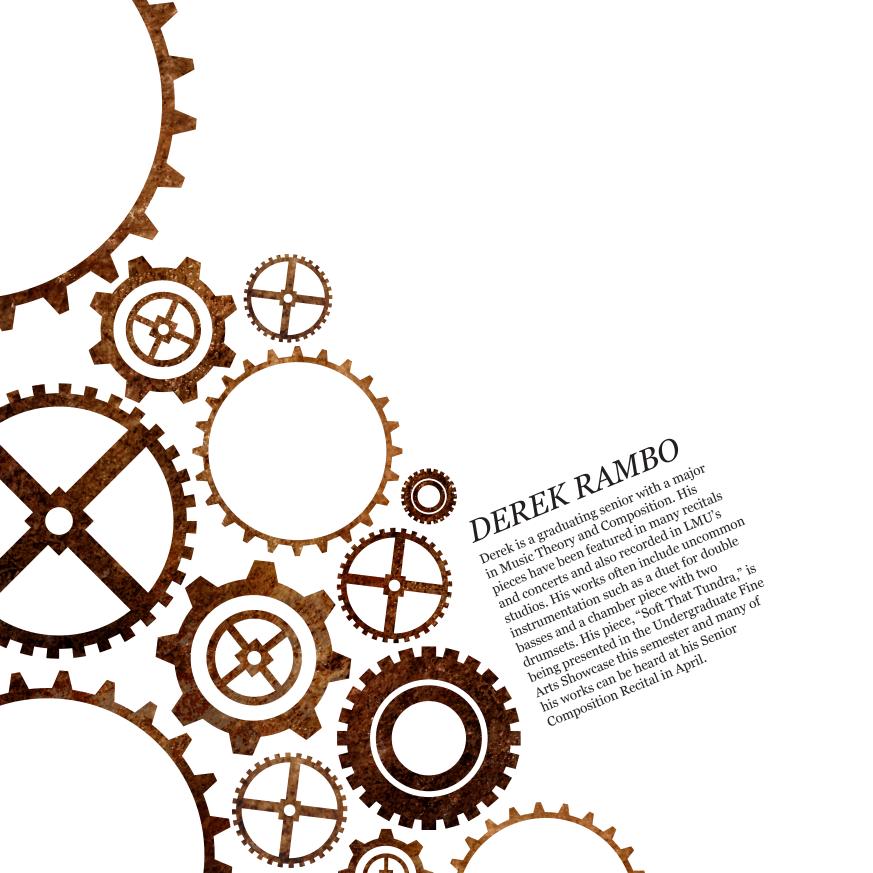
Though Havenshire may be dead (For better or for worse),
Upon that saga told in thread
I've stitched an extra verse:
"As long as wind may carry breath,
So long the banners fly—
While words may pass 'twixt life and death
The stories never die."

# Red Light by Hassan Abdulla

Your eyes have a way of silencing me and inviting me all at once.

If they replaced traffic lights, no one would know whether to stop or go

Either way, your eyes know how to cause a wreck.



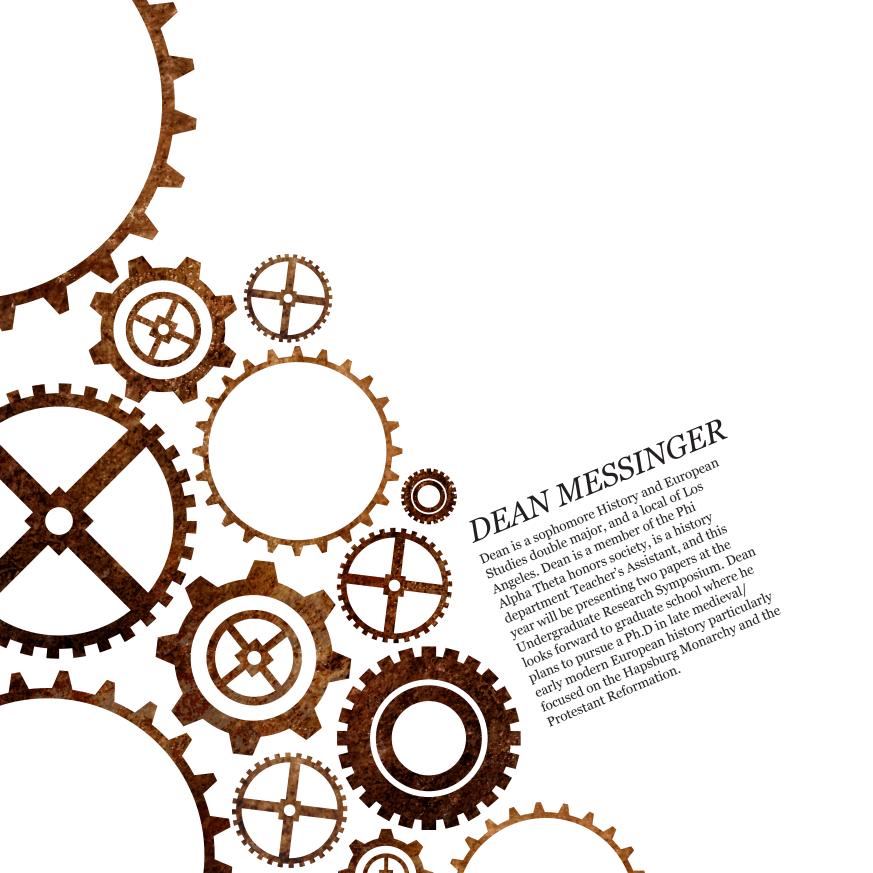
## **Apathy**

The following is an excerpted version. To view the piece in full, please visit www.atticsaltlmu.com

The main objective in the composition of Apathy was to experiment with instrumentation and the spatial nature of playing percussion instruments. The use of two drumsets in addition to marimba and auxiliary percussion in a chamber setting is very rare even in the most modern of pieces. The primary points of interest in this piece come from not only its energetic rhythmic ideas balanced with melodic phrases, but its theatrical aspects as well. The piece requires the four players to change physical location, moving from instrument to instrument after short amounts of time, providing it with an unusual visual aspect. The idea of having a specific part played by one performer on a given instrument and then later having that same part played again by a different performer on the same instrument demonstrates a linear sense in the music, but nonlinear in activity. Apathy was written specifically for the LMU Percussion Ensemble.

Apathy Drum Sets played with Hot Rods, Marimba played with hard mallets Derek Rambo Drum Set ...... 11 > § ...... 3. was a settle effect of the first of the firs mp Shake Stick Click or the formation where from the first the first of the fi <del>╻╸╸┊┊┊┊┊┊┊┊┊┊┊┊┊┊┊┊┊┊┊┊┊</del><del>┋┊</del>





### **Between East and West**

Geopolitical and Cultural Impact of the Norman Conquest of Sicily

In 1087, a group of adventurers sailed into the now ruinous city of Myra, on the southern coast of the Anatolian Peninsula. Once in the city, the adventurers forced their way into the local Orthodox church, and seized the sacred relics of St. Nicholas the Wonderworker, and stole away back to the sea.¹ This symbolic act of theological larceny would paint a picture of things to come. As the decaying Byzantine Empire suffered disastrous defeats at the hands of the Seljuk Turks, a new Christian power was rising in the Mediterranean destined to supplant them: the Normans. The remains of St. Nicholas were ferried back across the Mediterranean to the city of Bari, a historic city in the region of southern Italy called Apulia, a stronghold of Norman power, and a springboard for their future endeavors across the Mediterranean.

The historical narrative and experience of the medieval Norman people could be appropriately surmised in a single word: adventure. Accurately described by the 12th century historian Orderic Vitalis, the Normans were men, "whose bold roughness had proved as deadly to their softer neighbors as the bitter wind to young flowers."2 Emerging from the vibrant Viking culture of Scandinavia, the people known as the Normans raided the French coast and even laid siege to Paris in 885, eventually settling along the northern French coast with the baptism of Viking leader Rollo [baptized Robert] and the swearing of feudal oath to the Frankish king.3 Norseman changed to Northman, which changed to Norman, and the newly Christianized Vikings created a duchy of their own. Using the Duchy of Normandy as their launchpad, the Normans continued their adventures around Europe, most famously conquering England in 1066. Some of their most interesting adventures, however, emerged from their foray into the world of the Mediterranean.

In the center of the Mediterranean, the island of Sicily lay at the crossroads of three continents, and with its unique location, has changed hands multiple times throughout history. Straddling the divide between Latin Christianity, Orthodox Christianity, and Islam, the multiple peoples and empires that have claimed Sicily as their own have left indelible marks on the landscape, culture, and history of the island. Of the many peoples that called Sicily home, including the Byzantines and

Arabs, none has had a greater impact on the history of the island than the Normans. With their conquest of Sicily in the 11th century, the Normans brought Sicily permanently into the realm of Latin Christendom and Western Europe, uniting the island with its mainland counterpart into a wealthy state (both financially and culturally) to be inherited by the Catholic kingdoms of the West, changing forever the island's status and geo-political identity, and most importantly, its destiny in the wider Mediterranean.

The story of how the Normans first came to Sicily and the Mezzogiorno is undoubtedly a story of adventure, complicated by centuries of chroniclers with ulterior motives and monarchs they desired to please. One such chronicler was Amatus of Montecassino, an 11th-century Benedictine monk, who wrote a comprehensive and for the time very detailed history of the Normans, although doubts exist to the historical accuracy of his work. In it, he describes the arrival of the Normans in Italy in the following terms:

Before a thousand [years] after Christ... forty valiant pilgrims appeared in the world. They came from the Holy Sepulcher of Jerusalem where they had gone to adore Christ and arrived in Salerno. It was besieged by the Saracens... When the pilgrims of Normandy arrived there, they could not tolerate such harm on the part of the Saracen lords. Nor could they tolerate Christians being made subject to the Saracens... they fell upon the Saracens, killing many of them... Thus the valiant Normans were victorious and the citizens of Salerno were delivered from bondage to the pagans... They [citizens of Salerno] entreated the Normans to remain to defend Christians.<sup>4</sup>

While the historic siege of Salerno described above may be apocryphal, as well as the numbers of Norman pilgrims, this exaltation of the Normans does illuminate and corroborate that the Normans came as warriors to a land steeped in warfare. Historian G.A. Loud proposes that amongst the innumerable myths and pseudo-histories surrounding the Normans, at best historians can, "suggest

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Marjorie Chibnall, *The Normans* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2000) 95.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Chibnall, The Normans, 4.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Ibid. 10-12.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Amatus of Montecassino, *The History of the Normans*, trans. Prescott N. Dunbar (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2004) 49-50.

a plausible (if ultimately unprovable) explanation for their [the Normans] arrival." Modern scholars, however, have more or less agreed upon the following story: Normans returning from pilgrimages in the Holy Land settled in the Mezzogiorno, finding abundant mercenary work among the warring Lombard states against the Saracens and at times for or against the Byzantine remnant in Italy. As renowned mercenaries and warriors, the Normans thrived in war-torn southern Italy, and a steady stream of Norman nobles and war bands settled there, enticed by the prospects of land and wealth.

The political landscape of southern Italy at the time was one of chaos and microcosm. The conflicts that cleaved the Mezzogiorno apart and spread discord mirrored that of the wider Mediterranean. The southern Italy that the Normans first came to was one divided between an atrophied Byzantine Empire exercising at least nominal authority over the modern day regions of Apulia and Calabria, and a number of scattered Lombard principalities seeking to solidify their holdings, all the while both being harassed and periodically invaded by Saracens from the Emirate of Sicily. Altogether, this is a perfect cross-section of the conflict that defined the Mediterranean in the central Middle Ages, the decay of the Greek Byzantine East, and the rise of the two great competitors, Latin Christendom and Islam.

This war torn and politically fragmented landscape provided the perfect proving ground for Normans seeking adventure, wealth, and land. Lombard aggression in the 11th century against the Byzantine Empire and each other was fueled by Norman mercenaries, and their growing strength and military supremacy was inevitable, as the Lombard princes, "happily continued with their own feuds, and paid for these splendid mercenaries," further increasing and solidifying the Norman presence in southern Italy.9 Norman mercenaries became wealthy as a result of the war against the Byzantines and began to settle down and establish small lordly and comital states like the Lordship of Aversa, north of Naples, granted to the adventurer Rainulf Drengot in 1028, from which the Normans would began their conquest of the whole of the Mezzogiorno.<sup>10</sup>

One of the two most prominent early Norman adventurers to carve out a state for himself in Italy was Robert 'Guiscard' (the Cunning) of the Hauteville family. As the

sixth of twelve sons of a modest Norman lord in Northern France, Robert and his brothers knew they must seek land and prestige elsewhere. Five of these twelve sons would go to Italy and Sicily and become lords and counts in their own right, laying the foundations for a Norman Kingdom in the central Mediterranean. Of these brothers, Robert stands out amongst them for his military prowess and blunt and aggressive political acumen.

Guiscard quickly rose to be the leader of the Normans in the Mezzogiorno and settled himself in the region of Apulia, recently captured and settled after kicking out the last of the Byzantine administrators. Using Apulia as a base, he invaded and subdued much of Calabria as well, effectively ending the Byzantine dying grasp on the Italian peninsula. It was around this time that another player stepped into the scene, only to complicate matters further. As Supreme Pontiff of the Roman Catholic Church, as well as temporal ruler of much of the Italian peninsula, the Pope in Rome had much invested, and much at stake, with the Normans.

The Papacy and the Normans in Italy and Sicily have, at various times, been fiercest foes and warmest friends. In 1053, Pope Leo IX chose to make an enemy of the Normans, and led an army to remove the Normans from Italy. At the Battle of Civitate, Robert Guiscard masterfully defeated the Pope's army, and forced him to grant the Normans right of conquest over the lands in Apulia and Calabria, thus for the first time extending legitimacy to the Norman adventures and a title, Duke of Apulia, to Robert Guiscard, albeit as a Papal fief. <sup>12</sup>

The Norman relations with the Papacy changed constantly, and in many ways was mutually beneficial and sometimes destructive, for both parties. The Normans filled a niche valuable to a Papacy in crisis, embattled on three sides by enemies: the German Emperor, the Byzantines, and the Muslims. For example, the Pope excommunicated Robert Guiscard for conquering the Lombard principality of Salerno which was under Papal suzerainty, but when the German King Henry IV attacked the Pope at Rome, "Robert Guiscard marched on Rome, sacked the city, and rescued [Pope] Gregory VII," in 1082. 13 Against the Greek Orthodox Byzantines, Norman adventurers carried the banner of Latin Christendom proudly, and established multiple Catholic bishoprics and monasteries in their lands, thus extending

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> G.A. Loud, *The Age of Robert Guiscard: Southern Italy and the Norman Conquest,* (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2000) 60.

 $<sup>^{6}</sup>$  Donald Matthew,  $\it The\ Norman\ Kingdom\ of\ Sicily$  , (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 11.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Matthew, *The Norman Kingdom of Sicily*, 11.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Hiroshi Takayama, "Law and Monarchy in the South," in *Italy in the Central Middle Ages*, 1000-1300, ed. David Abulfia, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) 59.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Donald Matthew, *The Norman Kingdom of Sicily*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 13.

<sup>10</sup> Chibnall, The Normans, 76-77.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. 77.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 77.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Abulafia, *Italy in the Central Middle Ages*, 60.

Papal authority and influence deeper into a Southern Italy previously dominated by the Greek Orthodox faith and the Patriarch of Constantinople.<sup>14</sup> The Normans on the other hand. received legitimization from the Papacy, Marjorie Chibnall writes, "By offering military protection in times of schism and invasion by imperial armies, the Norman princes were able to extort concessions of privileges," from the Papacy. 15 One such privilege was granted only six years after the Pope tried to erase the Norman presence in Italy, when another Pope would dramatically change the history of the Normans and the future of the Mediterranean. In 1059, Pope Nicholas II. eager to bolster Christendom and his own position over the Normans, invested Robert Guiscard with the title of "future Duke of Sicily," thus granting approval and a blessing, as well as a legitimate religious justification for the Norman conquest of Islamic Sicily for the forces of Christendom.<sup>16</sup>

While mainland Italy was mostly subdued by Robert Guiscard, the task of the conquest of Sicily fell to his younger brother Roger. Roger, like his brother, had left his home in Normandy to find land and glory in the Mediterranean. Sicily at the time was ruled by Arab and Islamic Emirs and warlords, but had a majority Greek Christian population. Although probably apocryphal, Amatus of Montecassino has Duke Robert proclaiming, "I should like to deliver the Christians and Catholics who are bound in servitude to the Saracens. I greatly desire to free them from their servitude and to wreak vengeance for this injury." When Duke Robert called for the conquest, his brother Roger took up the call.

The Norman invasion of Sicily began in 1064, and less then ten years later, in 1072, the last Islamic bastion of Palermo fell and Duke Robert invested Roger with the title of 'Count of Sicily'. This created two-semi autonomous, de facto sovereign, de jure Papal fiefs Norman polities in the Mediterranean. One state, under Robert Guiscard on the mainland, and the second, under his brother Roger, on the island of Sicily. These two states would not last long, as Roger's son, Roger II, acting under the title 'Duke of Sicily' intervened into a dynastic dispute among Robert Guiscard's successors in 1127 and united both the Mezzogiorno and the island of Sicily under one Christian Norman ruler, a historic partnership that remains to this day.<sup>18</sup>

Again, Papal politics stepped into the fray, and antipope Antecletus II, seeking Norman support for his claim to the Papacy, declared and invested Roger II, King of Sicily, in 1130. 19 Roger II of Sicily would prove to be one of, if not the most dynamic, adventurous, and decisive historical figures of the 12th century. Historian Francois Neveux describes Roger II with great praise, writing, "Belonging to the second generation of Normans in Italy, he had inherited all the good qualities of the Hautevilles. He was a fine soldier and an excellent politician." He would transform a diverse patchwork of Norman landholdings and Greek and Islamic communities into a unified, powerful, wealthy and expansive state.

In order to forge a robust and united kingdom, Roger II went about seeking to solidify his control over both Sicily and the Mezzogiorno. One way he did this was to establish and impose a uniform feudal system across his kingdom. This was no easy feat for Roger II, as many of his Greek subjects "had no true aristocracy and still preserved some vestiges of Byzantine administration based on walled towns." Through extensive noble intermarriage with local Lombard or Greek leaders and land-swapping, however, Roger II was able to create a lasting Norman style feudalism in his Kingdom.

Another way he sought to solidify his kingdom was through the Church. Chibnall writes, "Since the ecclesiastical organization of Southern Italy was very nearly as complicated as the political, this was a difficult task."22 New Latin Bishoprics were established and Norman clerics became common in Catholic ecclesiastical administration in Sicily. While the Normans themselves were Latin Christians, they made no attempt to pursue a policy of "Normanization of the Church," and first and foremost, completely unique for the time, "The Hauteville themselves aimed at toleration."23 While favoriting the Latin rite, Roger II made, "no attempt to change Greek rites," and even endowed new Greek monasteries, and under his reign Sicily saw a "flourishing condition of Greek monasticism in Roger II's dominions."24 It was this kind of cross-cultural interaction and acceptance that allowed for the new Kingdom of Sicily to thrive.

Norman Sicily was perhaps the most tolerant and diverse polities in Europe. For example, in 1140, Roger II issued the 'Assizes of Ariano' which allowed the diverse communities under his rule, including Greek, Islamic, Lombard, and even small Jewish communities, to uphold their local customs and laws, as long as they did not directly contradict supreme royal law.<sup>25</sup> Interaction between Greek

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Matthew, *The Norman Kingdom of Sicily*, 17.

<sup>15</sup> Chibnall, The Normans, 88.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> G.A. Loud, The Age of Robert Guiscard, 146

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Amatus of Montecassino, The History of the Normans, 137-137

<sup>18</sup> Chibnall, The Normans, 86

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. 86.

 $<sup>^{20}</sup>$  Francois Neveux, A Brief History of the Normans: The Conquests the Changed the Face of Europe, trans. Howard Curtis (London: Constable & Robinson Ltd, 2006) 165.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Chibnall, *The Normans*, 78.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Ibid. 88.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Ibid. 88

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Matthew, *The Norman Kingdom of Sicily*, 86-94.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Abulafia, Italy in the Central Middle Ages, 64.

and Latin was so common, that "nowhere could they [the Greeks] be considered a 'subject' people."<sup>26</sup> In fact, Greek culture was such a powerful influence at the royal court in Palermo that Roger II himself signed his own name in Greek on official documents.<sup>27</sup> Greek leaders would often be chosen to hold the highest positions of power at the royal court, and one man by the name of George, would rise to the position of Roger II's chief minister.<sup>28</sup>

Even more unique and rare for the time was Roger II's treatment of the Muslims of Sicily. "At a time when the Crusades had greatly increased mistrust and hostility between the followers of the two religions," Francois Neveux writes, Roger II's unparalleled acceptance of Islam was, "a remarkable exception to the general rule [of intolerance]." Roger II even allowed for the free practice of Islam within his otherwise Christian kingdom, something unheard of in the rest of Europe.

Beyond toleration, Roger II actively sought to include many Muslims into his court and royal administration. Much of the bureaucratic structure of his kingdom was based on the pre-existing Islamic precedent, so much so that many of the titles and names of government sections and officers still went by their Arabic name throughout his reign. For example, one of the most powerful offices in Roger's Sicily was that of the Amiratus, or the Latinized version of the Arabic word Emir, meaning commander or prince.<sup>30</sup> Many of these leaders were Muslim and were often charged with leading Roger II's armies, thus creating an almost unheard of, and surely heterodox situation where a Christian king would order Muslim soldiers, led by Muslims, into battle against Christians.<sup>31</sup>

Beyond politics, Arabic culture was also a common presence at the royal court. Most of the land surveys and census were written in Arabic, and carried out by the 'Dîwân at-taherqîq al-ma'mûr' an Arabic office within the government of Sicily that managed land administration and revenue and drew heavily from the pre-existing records and officers of the Emirate of Sicily.<sup>32</sup> Also, under Roger II, coins minted in Sicily still often had Arabic inscriptions and were often dated with the Islamic calendar, creating an awkward coin that carried both the Christian cross, as well as Arabic.<sup>33</sup>

As a united and powerful polity, the Kingdom of Sicily and the Normans were ready to chart a course of

aggressive expansion and carve out an empire of their own in the Mediterranean. Starting even before the establishment of the kingdom, Robert Guiscard invaded the Balkans, seeking to challenge the authority of the Byzantine Empire.<sup>34</sup> Roger II was thoroughly interested in Mediterranean expansion, and in 1127 he conquered the island of Malta.<sup>35</sup> Chibnall quotes David Abulafia, writing, "Virtually no corner of the Mediterranean from Byzantium, Jerusalem and Antioch, to Spain and the Maghreb escaped his [Roger II's] attention as a source of wealth and honour."<sup>36</sup> To this end, he sent soldiers to aid in the early Reconquista of Spain and sent a fleet to root out pirates at Jerba on the North African coast.<sup>37</sup>

Norman Mediterranean expansion coincided perfectly with the advent of the Crusades in 1095. The leader of the Norman crusaders from their Italian possessions was Bohemond, the son of Robert Guiscard. While the motives of all Crusaders in general is questioned, it seems Bohemond's motives were clearer, seeking to establish a state of his own in the Holy Land.<sup>38</sup> One of the more powerful and victorious of the Crusaders. Bohemond was able to achieve his goals, and established the Principality of Antioch in the Holy Land, which would be one of the longest lived of the otherwise short-lived Crusader states, finally falling to the Turks in 1268.<sup>39</sup> The comparable strength and success of the Norman Crusader state can be attributed to many factors. but mostly coming from their unique experience in Sicily. Because of their background in Sicily, the Hauteville princes that ruled from Antioch were fluent in Arabic, and used to ruling a diverse state, allowing for the efficient ruling and administration of their principality.

Of all the effects and outcomes of the Norman conquest of Sicily, none was as influential and long-lasting as the perpetual bond the Normans forged between Western Europe and the island of Sicily. For years to come, the Kingdom of Sicily would be the living and beating heart of the Christian Mediterranean. Every Western European ruler who sought and came close to creating a universal and Christian empire would come into possession of the Kingdom of Sicily. The very next dynasty to rule the island, the Hohenstaufen, would seek to challenge the authority of the Pope and create a universal empire. France's imperial aims led them to try and invade the Kingdom of Sicily, while Charles V, arguably the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Matthew, *The Norman Kingdom of Sicily*, 93.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. 93.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> Abulafia, Italy in the Central Middle Ages, 65.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> Neveux, A Brief History of the Normans, 168.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> Abulafia, Italy in the Central Middle Ages, 65.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> Neveux, A Brief History of the Normans, 168.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> Abulafia, *Italy in the Central Middle Ages*, 65.

<sup>33</sup> Chibnall, The Normans, 92.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. 80.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. 85.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> Ibid. 102.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> Ibid. 102.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> Ibid. 96.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> Ibid. 97.

closest to actually achieving imperial hegemony over Europe, was also King of Sicily. Even Napoleon would invade and conquer the Kingdom of Sicily. What is so astonishing about the Norman rule of Sicily and the Mezzogiorno, is that:

At the time of the Norman's arrival in the South, there was no resolution in sight of the tensions set up by the interaction of these three basic group [Latin, Greek, and Muslim]. The Normans changed this, and rather quickly... The Normans, without previous consolidation of their own lordships into a single political authority, were able to effect decisive change in the history of Europe.... mere adventures brought the limits of western Europe to the straits of Otranto.<sup>40</sup>

More importantly, however, was that the Normans were able to bring Sicily permanently into the sphere of Western Europe without sacrificing its unique position in the Mediterranean as the crossroads of Latin Christendom, Greek Orthodoxy, and Islam.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> Matthew, The Norman Kingdom of Sicily, 13.



## **Key Lime Pie**

It takes forty key limes for a key lime pie. You can pour a short cup of bisulphite of lime juice – but for hardcore key lime pie, you open pores. Roll up the sleeves! Un-sleeve that big Knife through the skins of Ping-Pong rounds of citrus. Forty rounds to cleave forty pairs of halves, the juice of each half less than the weight of a baby's tear. Scrape the skin along a grater, just to the white: it will take forty key limes to zest up the tangy cream, the condensed volume of milk.

And they all must be there, all forty. Counted out from bag or tree. Clean to their dimpled pores. It takes forty key limes the way it takes forty winks to really sleep. Forty thieves to really steal. Forty years to really walk home After captivity, it took forty generations for limes to seduce their way away from the Indian Ocean; shake off the shackles of Mediterranean air and the familiarly exotic blooms of azalea, the color-bursts of pomegranates for the dark of ship holes and stench heavy as tarps. Stone-hard limes. Surviving where loads of human commodities often did not. Colonizing the archipelago of New India and, of course, the Keys. The steps are not Involved. The essence Is a lot of key limes.

It's 1:40. Could be Done half past four, chilled and Out on the dessert table, Served with strong coffee And forty odd conversations. Key lime pie. It takes forty key limes.

###



# **Animal Portrait Study: Peacock and Rabbit**





### No Place Like Gnome

The following is an excerpted version. To read the script in full, please visit www.atticsaltlmu.com

"No Place Like Gnome" centers around a young gnome named Garder who lives in the gnome community of Green Grass Place. He is the only gnome with no beard. After confronting his parents about his lack of beard, he learns that they are not in fact his parents; rather, he was a Store-bought gnome. He flees his home in search of where he comes from – a small toy shop in Metro Capitol, a sprawling city just past the suburbs. Along his epic adventure he makes some lawn ornament friends like Stretch, the clumsy, long-legged lawn flamingo, Barry, the Chicago Bears bear, and Minni, a young female gnome who tags along for the adventure. As they make their way to the store that birthed Garder's idol, the rugged, eye-patch wearing Murkor Mace, they're tracked by a mysterious figure known only as The Collector. Will Garder find his true home? Or will he find out there truly is.... No Place Like Gnome.

Tiny cottage on a green hill. Old fencing. Assorted, quaint lawn decor. Sun rises in the background as birds begin chirping.

Yard begins to come to life as a gaggle of groggy gnomes awake from their slumber. The foot high creatures begin trickling out of burrows in the ground.

GNOME POLICE OFFICER

Morning!

GNOME PAPER BOY

Morning!

Gnome vendors sell mushrooms, construction workers orchestrate building of small cardboard structures, crossing guards direct the flow traffic as gnomes ride by on small woodland creatures.

An entrance to a burrow near the intersection is marked by a "Gnome, Sweet Gnome" sign.

INT. SMALL BURROW (BEDROOM) - DAY

Dark bedroom. Next to an occupied bed, a gnome figurine alarm clock sounds as it begins yodeling. A hand slaps the glowing red nose and silences it.

GARDER GNOME (13), a rosy cheeked, young gnome rolls out of bed. As he leaves the bedroom, he kisses his hand and touches it to a poster of a battleworn, eyepatch-wearing, gray-bearded gnome marked

"MURKOR MACE".

INT. SMALL BURROW (BATHROOM) - CONT.

Garder inspects his baby smooth face in the mirror. Pulls in an extreme magnifying glass, not a hair in sight. He sighs deeply, then adheres a black, fake moustache to his upper lip and leaves.

INT. SMALL BURROW (KITCHEN) - CONT.

Garder sits down at the breakfast table across from his father, FUDWICK (56) who eyes a newspaper. He peeks over the paper and slaps it on the table after seeing Garder, his bushy beard shaking.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FUDWICK

For Grass' sake son! How many times do I have to say it?!

He rips the fake stash off Garder's lip and shakes it at him.

FUDWICK (CONT'D)

No son of mine will have any facial hair until he can grow the real deal.

GARDER

But Dad-

FUDWICK

No buts. You are going to earn the right to wear one of these beards. No shortcuts!

Fudwick slams the fake moustache into the waste basket. From the counter where she packs Garder's lunch, FRIEDA (52), Garder's mother chimes in.

FRIEDA

Oh dear, don't you think that's a bit harsh?

FUDWICK

Harsh was me getting lashed with a shoelace at his age! I shoulda-

Fudwick trails off with a grumble as he walks to his room and slams the door.

Garder hangs his head in shame. Frieda pushes his Murkor Mace lunchbox across the table. On top of it is a brand new fake moustache. She winks. Garder lights up, kisses her on the cheek and runs out.

EXT. GREEN GRASS PLACE - DAY

Garder skips down the road, scrambling by passing squirrel drivers, hopping small fences on his way to the big treehouse in the backyard. He scrambles up the ladder as a school bell rings.

INT. SCHOOL TREE HOUSE - DAY

A gaggle of young gnomes bustle about the halls.

Garder pulls books from his locker, but is suddenly hit in the face with a rotten mushroom.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He falls to the ground, picking bits of rotten shroom from his hair. A shadow looms over him.

Standing above with an entourage of letterman-wearing goons is ZOOKNOCK (18), the school bully who stands at a towering foot and a half, and sports a full, golden beard.

ZOOKNOCK

Long time no see, Babyface.

The gathering crowd roars with laughter.

ZOOKNOCK (CONT'D)

(mockingly)

That beard is really coming in strong. What's it at, three weeks?

Another roar of laughter. Zooknock high fives one of his cronies. Garder stands up and squares up with him.

GARDER

At least my moustache is the only fake thing about me.

The crowd guiets with an "ooooohhh".

ZOOKNOCK

You better watch it, punk.

Zooknock pushes Garder to the ground again.

ZOOKNOCK (CONT'D)

I got four generations of purebred lawn gnome that'll put you under the ground...

He pokes Garder's chest.

ZOOKNOCK (CONT'D)

Permanently.

MINNI (12), a small redhaired, freckle-faced gnome girl jumps to Garder's side.

MINNI

Leave him alone, barkbreath!

Zooknock chuckles, playing to the crowd.

ZOOKNOCK

Well if it isn't little Miss Minni to the rescue.
(MORE)

(MOKE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

ZOOKNOCK (CONT'D)
Guess you need your girlfriend to
save you, huh Babyface.

Zooknock peels the fake moustache off Garder's lip and plants it on his brow. Zooknock, his posse, and the crowd all snigger and disperse, leaving Garder and Minni alone in the hallway.

MINNI

Four generations of purebred gnomes, you think they'd teacher you some manners. Here.

Minni tries to help Garder up, but Garder shrugs her off.

GARDER

Thanks for making me the school laughing stock.

MTNNT

Like you needed my help.

CARDER

You're right. I don't.

Garder storms off down the hall and out the school exit. Minni looks after him. The door slams.

She turns to the bronze statue of Murkor Mace as if for advice, then sighs and trudges off to class.

EXT. GREEN GRASS PLACE (CLEARING) - DAY

Sun is low. Garder tightens the straps of his climbing gloves, standing at a green clearing in the trees. He steps up to a tree with many branches and looks up to its zenith. He crouches and the ready and exhales.

Jumping up, he quickly scales the tree, flinging himself from branch to branch as he moves higher.

INT. SCHOOL TREE HOUSE (CLASSROOM) - DAY

A pudgy, joweled, female TEACHER lectures monotonously on the Great Opossum Massacre at Fort Nike.

Minni sits with her face on her hand, fighting sleep.

Out of the corner of her eye, she spots Garder in the trees through the classroom window.

EXT. GREEN GRASS PLACE (CLEARING) - DAY

Garder begins jumping from tree to tree, sometimes swinging from overhanging branches.

INT. SCHOOL TREE HOUSE (CLASSROOM) - DAY

Minni watches Garder intently, now very much awake.

TEACHER

... where Major Gristletoe thwarted the Opossum Overlord with his quick thinking and...

EXT. GREEN GRASS PLACE (CLEARING) - DAY

Picking up speed, Garder sprints down a long branch, preparing for a leap of faith. A strong wind tugs at the end of his moustache, then rips it off sending it floating into the air beside the branch.

Garder looks to the moustache, then to the ground. It's a long way down. He looks between the ground and the moustache a few times more, then dives for the moustache, grabbing it before plummeting into free-fall.

INT. SCHOOL TREE HOUSE (CLASSROOM) - DAY

Minni sits on the edge of her seat, biting her nails, fully facing the window now.

TEACHER

... with his downfall brought a new age of Gnomanic industrialization...

EXT. GREEN GRASS PLACE (CLEARING) - DAY

Garder plummets through the air for a few moments then smashes into a branch. He bounces off several more, slowing him down a bit before he lands with a thud in a bush.

INT. SCHOOL TREE HOUSE (CLASSROOM) - DAY

Minni gasps, then falls from her chair onto the ground. The classroom quiets and directs their attention to Minni.

She pops up to look out the window.

TEACHER Everything alright Minni?

EXT. GREEN GRASS PLACE (CLEARING)

The bush is still for a moment before Garder's hand shoots up gripping the stash.

INT. SCHOOL TREE HOUSE (CLASSROOM)

Minni exhales a sigh of relief, smiling. The teacher's hand taps her on the shoulder.

TEACHER

Minni?

Minni turns around, just now noticing everyone's stares. The class giggles.

TEACHER (CONT'D)

Please go back to your seat now.

Minni blushes and nods to the teacher, then returns to her seat.  $% \left( 1\right) =\left( 1\right) \left( 1\right) +\left( 1\right) \left( 1\right) \left( 1\right) +\left( 1\right) \left( 1\right)$ 

INT. SMALL BURROW - NIGHT

Garder pushes through the front door and walks to his room, passing his mother. She turns from her chopping board where she cuts mushrooms.

FRIEDA

How was you day, honey?

GARDER

Fine.

He answers without looking back then closes himself in his room.

INT. SMALL BURROW (BEDROOM) - CONTINUOUS

He lays on his bed looking through the skylight window above. Frieda enters and makes her way over to Garder. She pulls a branch and some rotted mushroom from his hair.

FRIEDA

Fine, huh?

She looks at Garder. Garder avoids eye contact.

FRIEDA (CONT'D)

Alright, fess up. What happened?

(beat)

Come on, I'm not going anywhere.

(CONTINUED)

GARDER

What's so good about being purebred anyway?

FRIEDA

(sighing)
Oh honey, did that Zooknock bully
tell you that? The manners on that
boy, I ought to whip him myself.

GARDER

Oh, Grass. Not you too! I'm not going to have a bunch of girls fight my battles.

FRIEDA

Well someone ought to.

GARDER

I'm doomed! I'll never have a beard!

He throws his face down into a pillow.

FRIEDA

Oh, quit being so dramatic. Your day will come.

He remains in the pillow.

FRIEDA (CONT'D)

I think you look dashing clean-faced.

GARDER

(muffled)

I'm sick of being different.

FRIEDA

Honey?

GARDER

(lifting head)
I said I'm sick of being different!

Garder pouts. Frieda chuckles.

FRIEDA

(smiling)

You know... your father didn't always have that beard.

CONTINUED: (2)

GARDER

(lighting up)

Really?!

FRIEDA

Mhmm. When I met him, they called him Peach Fuzz. There might even be a picture of him in my closet. Why don't you go find it?

Garder sprints out of the room to find it. Frieda chuckles.

INT. SMALL BURROW (PARENT'S BEDROOM) - CONTINUOUS

Trophies, books, and underwear fly haphazardly out of the closet. Garder finds a large cardboard box marked "Family Photos".

He lifts the staggeringly heavy box and begins struggling out of the closet. After a few steps, he trips on a bra and topples forward, photos spilling out across the floor and under the bed.

Garder gathers the scattered photos out from under the bed, but stops on an out of place piece of folded paper.

He opens it.

INSERT: ONE GARDEN GNOME - \$13.99. LITTLE HANDS TOY SHOP,

METRO CAPITOL.

END INSERT:

Garder stares at the paper, shell shocked.

FRIEDA (O.S.)

Did you find it?

Frieda enters and sees him holding the receipt. He looks up to her like she just crushed his newborn puppy, tears welling. Frieda's mouth gapes, she covers it.

FRIEDA (CONT'D)

Oh, honey...

Garder storms out of the bedroom, pushing her out of the way, tears streaming.

(CONTINUED)

INT. SMALL BURROW (BEDROOM) - NIGHT

Garder locks the door and presses his back against it. Tears stream down his face as he slumps to the ground, clutching the receipt. Frieda bangs on the door.

FRIEDA (O.S.)

Sweetie, please open up. I can explain everything. Your father will be home soon, come out, honey, so we can talk about this.

Garder's pain slowly turns to anger. He shreds the receipt. He begins furiously packing his hiking-pack.

FRIEDA (O.S.) (CONT'D) Please, sweetheart, talk to me!

FUDWICK (O.S.)

(to Frieda) What's going on?

FRIEDA (O.S.)

(to Fudwick)
Oh! You're here, quick! He found

FUDWICK (O.S.)

Receipt?

FRIEDA (O.S.)

His receipt.

the receipt!

FUDWICK (O.S.)

Oh, Grass. Garder! Come on out here! Let's talk about this!

Garder tightens the straps of his pack. He wipes his eyes, looks back to the door one last time, then leaves through the skylight.

EXT. GREEN GRASS PLACE - NIGHT

Garder is seen through a pair of binoculars as he walks through the grass in the moonlight, carrying his large hiking pack.

Sitting in a van, a bespectacled, mostly bald head peeks up from behind the binoculars to reveal THE COLLECTOR (57), a rail thin, graying man with an oversized head. His ferret scampers up to his shoulder to watch Garder with him.

The Collector looks from his binoculars to a small poster.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

INSERT: An exact illustration of Garder marked "THE RARE BEARDLESS GNOME"

END INSERT:

Looking back into the binoculars, Garder disappears into a thick patch of grass.

The Collector looks up, then throws his black van into gear and screeches away.

END ACT ONE:

EXT. WHITHERWHICH WAY - DAY

Sunny day, a few clouds. Generic suburb, houses look the same save for assorted lawn decoration.

Paper boy bikes around without looking up from his phone, aimlessly throwing newspapers at houses.

A MAN mows his lawn with ear buds in, seldom looking to see what he's mowing, be it grass or a bed of petunias. He sings along, half-knowing the words.

MAN

And I feeeeeeeeeeeee, feel the... (softly)
Duh duh duh duh (Loud)
Of your kissssssss!

INT./EXT. MINIVAN/WHITHERWHICH WAY - DAY

A minivan cruises down the street, the driving MOTHER blathering into her Bluetooth earpiece as the children in the back wage war.

MOTHER

And I told him, if he touches that thing one more time, I swear to God, I will-

EXT. WHITHERWHICH WAY - DAY

By the sidewalk, barely noticeable in the grass lurks the Garder moving stealthily along the concrete.

Garder barrel rolls from a small grass patch to a bright yellow fire hydrant, then dive rolls to the hedge sculpture of cupid sticking the pose almost perfectly. He backflips into the thorn bush and rolls out with minor wounds, limping away slightly.

### INT. DARK LIVING ROOM - DAY

Most blinds are closed, a BULLMASTIFF sits by the couch. Flashing T.V. plays off his longing eyes. He stares intently at the chair with a pair of human legs extended from it and whimmers.

Through the front door window, Garder is seen diving to the mailbox. The Bullmastiff begins barking furiously and jumping against the door. The TV volume goes up.

### EXT. WHITHERWHICH WAY - DAY

The Bullmastiff leaps and smashes clean through the window of the door, then tears after Garder, teeth bared and SNARLING.

Just as the Bullmastiff is about to pounce on Garder, Minni dives and tackles him out of the way. The Bullmastiff smashes into the mailbox.

GARDER

Minni? What are you doing here?

MTNNT

Saving you, what's it look like?

The Bullmastiff shakes off the blow.

GARDER

I don't need your-

MINNI

Look out!

The dog dives at the two, but they dive under it just in time. The Bullmastiff rolls, then flips onto its feet, ready to pounce again.

GARDER

Split up!

Garder cuts left through the yard towards a tree. Minni starts down the road. The Bullmastiff looks at both then chases after Garder.

Garder climbs up the tree and grabs onto a branch, dangling as the Bullmastiff snaps at his feet, barking violently, spittle flying.

Minni watches nervously from down the sidewalk. She looks down the road behind her and spots the paper boy making his route. She looks back to Garder then WHISTLES loudly.

### CONTINUED:

The Bullmastiff snaps to attention, then sprints towards Minni. Garder climbs up onto the branch and watches.

Minni crouches down at the ready as the Bullmastiff barrels towards her. At the last minute, she jumps into the street, catching on to a strap of the Paperboy's leather satchel.

The Bullmastiff skitters off the side of the bike and sits dazed in the road for a moment as Minni gains a safe distance.

Garder gives a fist pump to Minni's badass performance as he watches from the trees.

Suddenly, a squad of snickering red SQUIRRELS begin humming acorns at Garder's head, knocking him off the branch towards the street below.

INT. MINIVAN - DAY

Garder falls through the open sunroof of the minivan, landing right in the midst of the crazed TODDLERS.

They all go silent and stare. He stares back.

The children scream savagely and converge on him, tugging Garder this way and that, fighting for possession of this new tov.

The mother continues to blather.

MOTHER

To think how unruly her kids are, I mean honestly.

EXT. WHITHERWHICH WAY - DAY

The Paperboy hits a speed bump, knocking Minni into the satchel. He then reaches in for the next paper, still looking at his phone, and grabs Minni, throwing her like a paper towards a nearby lawn.

Garder is thrown from the minivan window, but barely catches the antennae, holding on for dear life. The car hits a speed bump at around 45 mph and sends Garder flying into the air.

The two land point down a few feet from each other, stuck in the grass. They struggle to no avail.

GARDER

Great, now look what you did.

(CONTINUED)

(CONTINUED)

14.

CONTINUED:

MINNI

Me? This was your fault! I saved your life! Again!

Ahead, the distracted lawn mower veers towards them. They struggle even more furiously.

GARDER

Just grab my hand!

The two reach towards each other, stretching.

The Mower closes in.

Their fingers touch, but can't connect.

Just before their demise...

GOOFY VOICE (O.S.)

I got it!

A flash of pink streaks across the screen, taking Garder and Minni with it.

Garder, Minni, and the pink streak tumble into a tangled heap. As they stop rolling, we see a lanky, pink, lawn flamingo, STRETCH (19).

STRETCH

Dang! I thought I had that one!

Turning to the gnomes...

STRETCH (CONT'D)

That was some great coverage out there! What are your names?

Garder looks up to him from the ground, rubbing his head.

GARDER

I'm Garder. Garder Gnome.

MTNNT

Minni.

STRETCH

Well it's a pleasure to meet you, friends! I'm Stretch.

Stretch extends a foot with a silly grin. Garder shakes it.

GARDER

Thanks for saving me back there.

CONTINUED: (2)

MIKE DITKA VOICE

Saving you?

Garder turns to see the source of the voice, BARRY (46) a tall (1'9") lawn bear with a bristly moustache and the voice of Mike Ditka. His chest bares the "C" of the Chicago Bears logo.

BARRY

He blew the route, that's what he did.

STRETCH

Oh! How rude of me. Garder, Minni, this is my good pal Barry. Barry, meet my new friends, Garder and Minni.

BARRY

Yah, well you better have some good hands because Lord knows I'm not passing to Pinky any time soon.

Barry extends a hand to Garder.

BARRY (CONT'D)

Name's Barry. I used to run a whole league of us around here, but interest started dying down after...

STRETCH

Don't sav it!

He covers his "ears" with both his feet, falling to the ground.

BARRY

(pointing to Stretch)
Don't mind him. He's a little
melodramatic.

STRETCH

(Uncovering ears)

What?

BARRY

Like I was saying, things started dying down when kids started stealing us lawn people.

STRETCH

Ahhh!

(CONTINUED) (CONTINUED)

15.

CONTINUED: (3)

Stretch covers his ears again.

Why would they do that?

BARRY

Heck if I know. Never used to be like this.

Barry recalls a more pleasant time.

EXT. WHITHERWHICH WAY - DAY

A nostalgic glow illuminates the scene.

Children frolic and laugh through glittering sprinklers.

A Man cuts his lawn to trimmed perfection, not a blade out of place.

A mother calls her four children in for fresh pie. They scramble, push, and race their way to the screen door after it.

BARRY (V.O.)

People lived outdoors, the children were innocent, you could hear laughter throughout the streets. But then, things started to change.

Boxes of childhood toys dumping into trash cans.

BARRY (V.O.) Kids started growing up.

Three skateboarders with shaggy hair cruise down the sidewalk, kick-flipping over hydrants and knocking over trash cans.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Shadows and muffled shouts of angsty teens arguing with parents and slamming doors.

BARRY (V.O.)

That's when it started happening.

EXT. WHITHERWHICH WAY - NIGHT

In the darkness, a stone, lawn squirrel returns home to find his wife and child being stolen by shadowed, hooded figures.

CONTINUED:

He moves to save them, then turns around. He makes his last gasp as shadowed teenager moves in, braces glinting in the moonlight.

EXT. WHITHERWHICH WAY - DAY

BARRY (V.O.)

One by one, just about everyone we knew started disappearing.

Lawns full of ornaments slowly turn bare as time passes.

EXT. WHITHERWHICH WAY - DAY

Present time.

It seems we're the only ones left these days.

MINNI

That's awful!

STRETCH

But that can't be why you two are here, is it?

GARDER

I'm actually trying to make my way to Metro Capitol. I have to find where I came from.

STRETCH & BARRY

Metro Capitol!?

In Stretch's mind he pictures himself on a Broadway stage, dancing the can-can for a sold out house with long-legged showgirls on either end of him.

Barry sees himself strolling through the football hall of fame, posing with the giant Bears statue.

Uh... guys?

Minni snaps her fingers in front of their faces. They come to and each pick one of the gnomes up in an embrace.

STRETCH

When do we leave?

(CONTINUED) (CONTINUED)

59

16.



## **Dog Show**

She squealed and reached down to pet the small black puppy that was nervously vibrating around in the plush bed with three others.

"They've all had their shots and everything," said the fat lady behind the booth. The lady's whole face sagged and I could tell by the way she eyed me suspiciously that she knew I didn't belong there. Elizabeth was petting the dog with one hand and letting it thoroughly lick in between the fingers of her other. *You stupid dog*, I thought, *I have to hold that hand...* 

"Aww puppeeee," she cooed. "Awww puppeeee!"
The table was set up with brochures and key chains and little stuffed animals of dachshunds and bulldogs and chihuahuas. I looked the stuff over and then patted the dog tentatively on the back with a forced grin. "He's cute," I offered. The whole place made me wish I'd brought a little bottle of hand sanitizer with me. There were dogs everywhere. Dogs, dog owners, dog food, dog toys, dog paraphernalia. The whole park had been taken over for the entire afternoon by some sort of dog convention, and it was Elizabeth's idea to go. I'd stepped in dog shit twice already.

"Are you a dog owner?"

"Yes." Elizabeth smiled. She was looking up but keeping her hand down within the puppy's reach. "I've got a seven year old, Lucy, and a four year old, Bert."

"Oh, but you must miss having a puppy don't you?" the fat lady responded, leaning in and scooping up another young dog, a brown one that had been drooling dumbly in the corner.

"Oh," Elizabeth sighed, "I guess I do."

"They're so loveable," I began, reaching forward again to awkwardly pet the dog. At the sight of my fingertips though it started yapping wildly and I jumped back in surprise.

"Oops," Elizabeth said, and herded the dog closer to her out of motherly instinct.

The fat lady glared at me once more. "Dogs have a keen sense for people," she said distrustfully. Elizabeth seemed to give me a glare too. But she perked up a bit as we moved on.

She was having a good time for once- that was good. At least I hoped she was. After the fat lady's booth we continued on down the whole strip of little stands and shows they had set up throughout the park. There were people handing out pamphlets and dogs you could adopt and some

corporate-sponsored booths giving out free samples of dog food and stuff. Even though I didn't really want to be there it felt good being with Elizabeth. I felt like holding her hand, despite the dog spit.

I kept on staring at the ground though, to avoid any more landmines. But whenever I glanced back up to look at Elizabeth though, I was blown away. She looked gorgeous. It was pretty hot out, and she had on this tight white tank top, a worn tank top that looked like it'd been washed a million times until it just smelled like her. She had on jean shorts too and had her hair pulled back into a ponytail. There was something about all that skin and that smile and that warmth that was coming off of her. It made me start to sweat.

Something was bothering her though, what was it? Words were falling flat.

The next booth we stopped at sold shirts for dogs. Jesus, what a racket.

"What do you think about this for Bert?" Elizabeth held up a small black shirt that read "Mamma's Boy"

I gave her a laugh. "Yeah that's funny. Want me to get it for you?"

She pulled her bottom lip in pensively. She was always doing that. I first noticed it back when we started dating.

Like this one time, early on, when we were making out on her couch. I was just concentrating on moving my lips right while simultaneously getting rid of the wedgie that my boner had created in my pants without her noticing. But she had stopped me.

"Zack," she had said, pulling in her bottom lip just like that, "what do you consider us?"

I had paused. Then I'd given a shot in the dark. "You mean like, boyfriend and girlfriend?"

To that she had peered at me with a friendly patronizing smirk before kissing me. "Yeah that's what I wanted to hear."

I remembered that, how she looked and her pulling in her bottom lip and everything. It was, like, the first time I'd ever openly called someone my girlfriend. It seemed pretty cool.

And now she was pulling in her bottom lip and eyeing the article of canine clothing. She'd been doing it a lot recently, pulling in her bottom lip all pensively like that. She held up the shirt and looked it over front and back. "I

just don't know about it, v'know?"

"Sure," I said, and we continued on.

We kept walking and I watched all the people chatting and dogs trotting by on leashes and stuff. The sun was bright and the trees were casting a lot of shade, but there wasn't any breeze. Some of the dogs were lying in the shade panting. Elizabeth pointed out a big gray puffball of a dog she thought looked cute and I agreed dutifully. She talked about her plans and her old roommate and she told me about her brother.

"He's just-" she grappled for words, "He can be just so- I don't know."

"Yeah..." I tried supportively. Her brother was two years older than us and had just dropped out after his junior year of college.

"He's smart y'know? He's so intelligent, he just doesn't apply himself y'know? He just smokes weed all day and does nothing and now my dad's all pissed at him."

I just nodded because I didn't know what to say. I'm pretty dumb about those kinds of things.

I'd shaken her brother's hand once. He'd smiled and said all the right words but I'd gotten the feeling he didn't like me. Neither did her dad. The only one in the family who did was Elizabeth's mom, and she only liked me because she thought I was responsible, unlike Elizabeth's last boyfriend who her mom called 'the drug dealer'.

Her mom had made us popcorn one day when we were going to watch a movie on the couch and she had asked me questions. "Wow," she had whistled, looking at Elizabeth, "Two weeks into summer and you've already got a job, Zack. You could learn a lesson from this one, Lizzy." And Elizabeth groaned.

It was true, I had a job. At a movie theater (not very glamorous). Most of the time working there I felt greasy and bored, and Elizabeth didn't like hearing stories from work. Maybe because there were no good stories.

How was your day?

Oh, I swept up dirty movie theaters for six hours, how about you?

Or if I did have any stories they wouldn't be interesting to anyone but me, like how this one time this little girl wanted to play on the racing game. At the theater there was this arcade of video games. Mostly there were cheap ones that were rigged or ate your quarters, but there was this racing one that was pretty good. It was bright and flashy and repeated, "TURBO RACERRRRRRR!" every minute which got people's attentions but annoved the hell out of me.

Anyway, one day there was this little girl. She was glued to the screen of that racing game. Mesmerized. She hadn't even put in any quarters but she kept pretending

like she was driving, turning the wheel and pushing the pedals and making engine noises with her mouth. I was working the concession stand and watching her. Eventually her mom came and tried to drag her away. But it took some effort. The girl kept crying for her mom to let her play. She didn't even want the quarters, she just kept saying, "Just for pretend, Mommy, let me play just for pretend!" But the woman was in a hurry and in a bad mood and she tore the girl away from the racing machine. I always thought that was pretty sad, how the girl couldn't even play for pretend and everything.

But anyway, those were the kind of stories I had from the theater and nobody really wanted to hear those.

Eventually we got to a booth that sold hot *dogs*. How clever, I thought. Elizabeth said she was hungry if I was hungry so I bought two. For a drink I wanted a Dr. Pepper but Elizabeth said she'd stick to water. We ate the hot dogs at a bench and neither of us was saying much of anything so I kept smiling in hopes she'd smile back and let me know everything was good. Except she kept looking down at her hotdog so I didn't know.

I brought up a news story to break the silence.

"Hey did you hear about that truck accident with that guy?" Some sleep-deprived trucker had fallen asleep on the road and accidentally rammed into the limo of some millionaire famous guy. The whole story sounded crazy.

"Yeah," Elizabeth said, "that was terrible."

I got rid of my smirk and matched her tone, "Oh, yeah, I mean it was a tragedy. But can you imagine being that trucker? You go to sleep for one second and then the next you're facing a million-dollar lawsuit from some celebrity in a limo?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I don't know, it's just a funny situation I guess."

"That truck driver should be put in prison," she stated with finality and nibbled at her hot dog.

"Yeah," I faltered. I thought it was weird how she could fawn over a puppy but be so heartless to some poor bastard truck driver.

After a little while I asked, "Did you know I used to run cross country meets at this park?"

"No, I didn't."

It was true. On cold fall mornings I used to come with the Cross Country team on a bus. I was never that good of a runner, but it got me out of P.E. I had a small rope backpack with a knot in the straps that I would take with me. It held my phone, water bottle, and a sweatshirt that I would keep on right up until the race started, when I'd have to take it off and stuff it into my bag and suffer the cold in my thin shirt and short shorts.

We ran that park every year. Norbuck Park, it was

called. It was sort of insufferable because at the end of the course, right when you think you're done and you're dying for breath and you're all cramped up, there's this huge hill, just to rub it in your face. Fuckin Norbuck Park.

I tried to tell Elizabeth about all that stuff but she didn't seem too interested. It wasn't too interesting I guess, but.

She had barely touched her hotdog.

Then I remembered about this one morning when Coach drove us all over to Norbuck Park to run. We were all dreading that damn hill and everything, but it was starting to rain. By the time we got there it was pouring, and the whole park was a sea of mud. It was coming down hard on the windows of the bus and we all were talking nervously because we thought we were surely in for it now. Suddenly though Coach spun the wheel, and we drove away form the park. People were perking up.

"What is it, Coach?"

"Is practice cancelled, Coach?"

He didn't say a word. Then he pulled the bus in front of a doughnut shop. It was a dreary Tuesday morning and Coach bought everyone doughnuts. I had leaned back with two seats to myself in the rear of the bus and enjoyed a chocolate glazed, indifferent to the rainy world passing by outside the window. Say what you want about the "rewards" of hard work and discipline and goddamn running, but the most rewarding day of practice I ever had was the time Coach bought us all doughnuts.

At the park I cracked a smile and was about to tell Elizabeth about the time with the doughnuts when I heard her gasp. I followed her eyes and saw that there was this dead bird a few yards away from us. It was all beaten up and looked like one of the dogs had gotten to it. The feathers were all matted down in some places and ruffled in others. Elizabeth let out a long, "Ohhh," and her eyes grew big and glistened. She seemed really upset.

"Aw," I said, pulling her in a little by the side, "the bird?" My indifference came out in my tone a little. Dogs eat birds, I thought, what's the big deal? But I still wanted to comfort her.

"Poor bird," she said softly. I feel kinda weird saying this but she looked pretty beautiful while she was worrying about that dead bird. Elizabeth was the kind of girl that looked *cute* when she smiled but *beautiful* when she was sad.

"I guess it was one of these dogs," I tried. I didn't know what to say. She was being quiet a long time. She was pulling in her bottom lip pensively again.

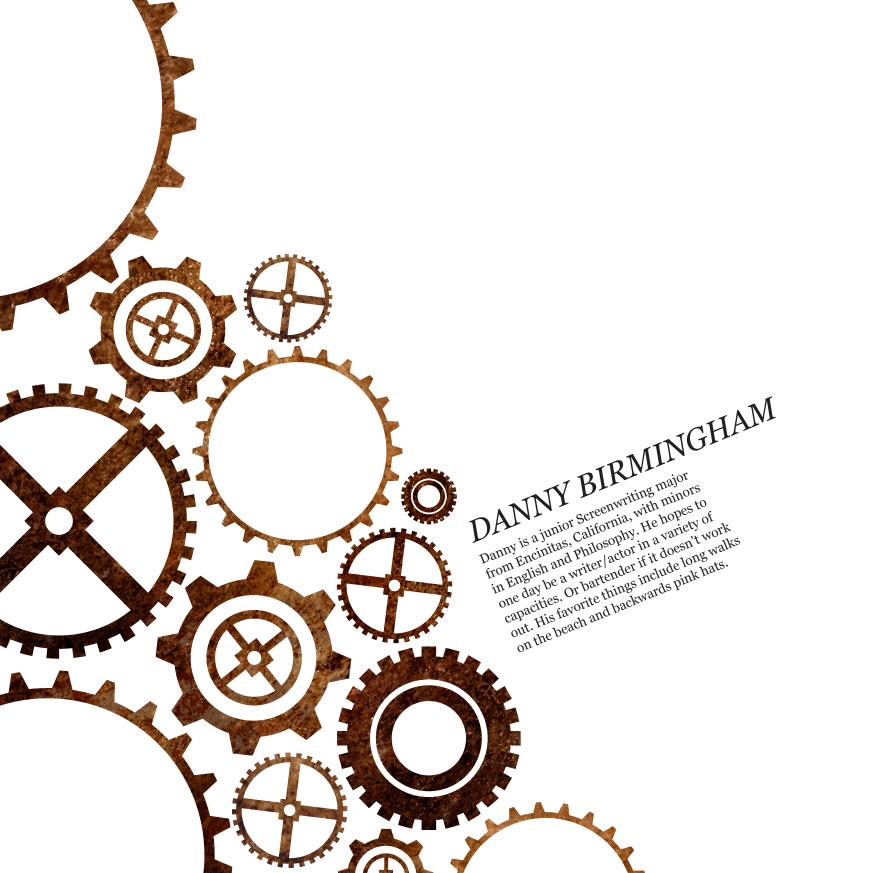
Then she said, "Zack I think we should break up."

I was shocked. Then I thought, I fuckin knew something was wrong. I knew it the whole damn day at the goddamn dog show.

"Really?"

"Yeah, I just don't think it's working out." She left to her car very somber and quiet.

I sat on the bench a while and started musing. She probably thinks that bird is some deep metaphor or something, I thought, but it's not. It's just a dead bird. I didn't understand how she could have all that emotion for a dead bird and none for me. And people were still milling around the park and dogs were barking at each other and the sun seemed like a small hot bead in the sky. I thought about how pretty she looked in her white tank top and how much I'd miss her. And then I thought maybe I just couldn't know about the dead bird the same way she couldn't know about how I ran around this park on cold mornings with the Cross Country team, or about that day Coach bought us all doughnuts. But I don't really know. I'm pretty dumb about those kinds of things. And after a long time I got up from the bench. I walked towards my car, trying to avoid stepping in dog shit.



# Overcoming Guilt and Avoiding False Necessity

Creating a Christian Philosophy is no simple task, for if it were, we would know precisely what it would entail and this essay would be entirely unnecessary. However, the components of a Christian Philosophy have been a source of debate for centuries, and, especially in the modern world, have been shoved aside by the obsession with rationalism, scientism, and other methods of thought that are becoming progressively atheistic. Yes, St. Thomas Aquinas seems to be the necessary centerpiece of a Christian Philosophy since he united theology and philosophy, but we live in a different time than Thomas. One cannot simply return to Thomism and consider the battle won or the philosophy complete.

Rather, let us examine the very core of philosophical thought, namely, the desperate human search for meaning and the biting question, "why are we here?" or, more accurately, "why am I alive?" Beneath our endless musings and rationalizations, we fail over and over to find a satisfactory or universal answer, and this frustrates our reason; it makes us feel inadequate and guilty for even existing at all. The idea that we need to be saved reveals this underlying guilt. Yet despite our shortcomings, we feel it is necessary to make sense of all this, even though our search is honestly quite futile. It appears that reason cannot function completely on its own. While faith cannot be proven, reason should not pretend to be an infallible practice; as such, in the face of the divine unknown, we must overcome the guilt of our own existence, and though the search for truth may be fruitless, it must continue so that we may ultimately be content with not knowing.

Let us begin our Christian philosophy by framing the historical context. In the early nineteenth century, "people were not ashamed to regret that worship...had transformed mankind into a herd of madmen, monsters of indecency, or ferocious beasts." Of course, not every person who practices a religion will be a perfect, shining example of what that religion would entail. Opponents of Christianity were quick to draw conclusions about the religion as a whole in the face of the horrors it wrought on the world, such as the Inquisition, and the supposed contention it had with reason. Eventually, "it was necessary to pursue a contrary method, and to ascend from the effect to the cause; not to prove that the Christian religion is excellent because it comes from God, but that it comes from God because it is excellent."2 Was it necessary? This is where it becomes somewhat complicated. It was only necessary to prove religion logically to its opponents, but religion is founded on faith, which bounces off of reason and ascends to new heights of knowledge. The opponents, though, needed to be shown that religion could, in fact, be reasonable.

Chateaubriand claims, in regards to Christianity, "surely one great proof of its divine origin is, that it will bear the test of the fullest and severest scrutiny of reason." He proceeds to show how

Christianity is reasonable, and though his argument may be somewhat flawed, it will be of use to us in crafting our Christian Philosophy. He continues to promote Christianity, writing, "sublime in the antiquity of its recollections, which go back to the creation of the world, ineffable in its mysteries, adorable in its sacraments, interesting in its history, celestial in its morality, rich and attractive in its ceremonial, it is fraught with every species of beauty." Indeed, its mysteries are most certainly *ineffable*. This was written before the Industrial Revolution, and still Chateaubriand was concerned with the preservation of *beauty* in the world. If he looked around today, what would he think? In our search for meaning, when we found no answers, we turned towards things we could understand. Machines, science, the mastery over worldly things distracted us from the guilt of our inadequacy.

In this shift of focus from the divine to the worldly, an era of infidelity to religion plagued the earth. When this happened, "infidelity also introduced a spirit of caviling and disputation, abstract definitions, the scientific style, and with it the practice of coining new words, all deadly foes to taste and eloquence." All of which moved rapidly away from any sort of beauty. Even this new vocabulary was hollow, and the words needed no aesthetic or sonic value.

Now, a true Christian Philosophy would entail an emphasis on beauty. Too often does it seem that beauty is abstracted and divorced from reality to be placed or experienced only in some afterlife. Chateaubriand writes, "but we cannot enter upon this important subject [of the afterlife] without first speaking of the two pillars which support the edifice of all the religions in the world- the existence of God and the immortality of the soul." Underlying a belief in the afterlife is the threat of guilt and the necessity of justice. Chateaubriand attempts to use reason to prove the immortality of the soul, and in doing so, hopes to show the opponents of Christianity its true genius.

He notes, "it might be asserted that man is the *idea of God displayed*, and the universe *his imagination made manifest*." One of the innate human missions in life is to 'know thyself.' If we are made in the image of God perhaps he is performing the very same act. A Christian Philosophy would entail this kind of human, personal understanding of God, even though it is limited. In regards to the immortality of the soul, Chateaubriand makes two arguments. He asks, "if the soul is extinguished at the moment of death, whence proceeds the desire of happiness which continually haunts us?" It is not the strongest argument, to be sure, but indisputably there is a *gap* between what we hope for and what we achieve. There is a gap between man and the divine. His next argument about the immortality of the soul is founded on conscience, but for our purposes we need not fully examine it. However, he claims, "by overthrowing religion we destroy the only remedy capable of restoring sensibility in the morbid regions of the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Francois Auguste Rene De Chateaubraind, "The Genius of Christianity," (1802) 1.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Chateaubriand, "The Genius of Christianity," 2.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 3.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Ibid. 4.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 6.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Ibid. 7

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 7.

heart." This rings true, especially in our modern society of alienation from beauty and morality. Our religion is reason, but how far has that really gotten us? Do we seem better off because of it?

I assert that the idolatry of reason is nothing but a distraction from our inability to find meaning in our lives. What is and is not necessary for us to know in order to be content is still up for debate. Chateaubriand defends Christianity, but he does not exactly offer us a new philosophy or a plan of action to follow. What, then, are we *supposed* to do in our lives? Blondel begins his complex analysis of action by noting:

This appearance of being which flutters about within me, these light and evanescent actions of a shadow, bear in them, I am told, an eternally weighty responsibility, and that, even at the price of blood, I cannot buy nothingness because for me it is no longer. Supposedly, then, I am condemned to life, condemned to death, condemned to eternity! Why and by what right, if I did not know it and did not will it?<sup>10</sup>

This "weighty responsibility" is a vague source of our guilt, and humans in the modern world seem all too eager to shrug it off and pretend that it does not exist. Reason, they assert, will show that there is no responsibility. If this is the case, why then the innate, *necessary* search for meaning? What are they after, exactly?

Blondel asserts, "it is good to propose to man all the exigencies of life, all the hidden fullness of his works, to strengthen within him, along with the force to affirm and to believe, the courage to act." We *need* these actions to apply to the meaning of our lives and to understand why we exist. This search for meaning is necessary. Despite the feats of reason, "pure knowledge is never enough to move us because it does not take hold of us in our entirety. In every act, there is an act of faith." We have faith that these actions mean something. We have faith in the truth of science or the existence of truth at all.

Blondel argues against dilettantism, in which life is treated as an amusing but meaningless game. This is an easy method of shrugging the responsibility and avoiding the guilt of existence. Proponents of dilettantism say, "wouldn't it be good to unload human acts of their incomprehensible seriousness and their mysterious reality?" This is seemingly what we have done to avoid the question, to avoid the guilt. It's so much easier to live in a world without consequence.

How does this apply to our Christian Philosophy, you ask? There is faith in every act. We cannot put our *faith* in reason alone. Blondel continues:

If, in the face of a truth that claims to be exclusive and before the despotic imposition of action, one balks or one steals away, it is that one has of oneself, of one's rights, of one's independence an ideal one loves and wills; one wills to be, since one is already laying down one's condition...all that remains important is self-love of one alone, me.<sup>14</sup>

We *will* these certain ideals and we will ourselves to make our lives meaningful. To be clear, "what we will, then, is that there be something and that this something be self-sufficient; we want the phenomenon to be; we want sense, life, science, we want all this immensity of the universe known and yet to be known which fills our eyes and our hearts to be, and to be all for us." We want to possess the mysteries of the universe and all of its wonders so that we can find meaning in our actions. Yet we simultaneously will the elusive incomprehensibility of these mysteries so that we can find meaning in the act of searching for meaning.

The will is very complex, and is perhaps the most prized faculty gifted to the human race. It seems, "to admit the insufficiency of every object offered to the will, to sense the infirmity of the human condition, to know death, is then, to betray a higher pretension; those facts are possible, are real, are conscious only as a result of an antecedent initiative." In other words, these feelings are possible only through God. In this longing is a gap, between what we can will and what we actually will.

What is our course of action, then? Blondel claims, "to love oneself by loving another sincerely, to give oneself and to redouble oneself by the gift, to see oneself as other and to see oneself in another, not to be solitary and to be alone, to unite with another and to embrace as we distinguish ourselves from one another...that is the natural cry of the heart." Let us recall Chateaubriand's notion of *man as the idea of God displayed* and *the universe his imagination made manifest*. <sup>18</sup> In knowing us God knows himself, and in knowing God we know ourselves. After all, a Christian Philosophy would maintain that man is made in the image of God. To commit to dilettantism is to destroy this relationship.

Now this does not mean we can, necessarily, ever know God completely. For, "even after we have posited, by way of a necessary hypothesis, the supernatural order as a scientific postulate, we must be on guard against thinking that we could prove its real truth through the development of its consequences or through its internal appropriateness." Reason, which could theoretically deduce the supernatural with these kinds of inquiries, will never lead us to a comprehensive understanding of the divine; yet this does not make the divine any less real, and we must not feel guilty for our incapacity. For our Christian Philosophy, the relationship with God is necessary for the nebulous grasp of meaning in our lives.

Faith and reason must not be mutually exclusive if we are to find contentment in a Christian Philosophy. Just as the body needs the mind, reason needs faith. Our Christian Philosophy cannot subscribe to fideism, the belief that faith is superior to and independent of reason. Pope John Paul II writes, from a historical perspective, "against the temptations of fideism, however, it was necessary to stress the unity of truth and thus the positive contribution which rational knowledge can and must make to faith's knowledge." There is no dichotomy between the two. Religious fanatics and obsessed rationalists fought each other because each thought they had found the true meaning of our lives, but

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. 9.

<sup>10</sup> Maurice Blondel, "Action," (1893), 1.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. 1.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 2.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 3.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. 3.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 3.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. 4.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 4.

<sup>18</sup> Chateaubriand, "The Genius of Christianity," 7.

<sup>19</sup> Blondel, "Action," 6.

<sup>20</sup> Pope John Paul II, "Fides et Ratio," (1998), 53.

in reality neither was entirely correct. For our Christian Philosophy:

It is necessary not to abandon the passion for ultimate truth, the eagerness to search for it or the audacity to forge new paths in the search. It is faith which stirs reason to move beyond all isolation and willingly to run risks so that it may attain whatever is beautiful, good and true. Faith thus becomes the convinced and convincing advocate of reason.<sup>21</sup>

Together, we may arrive at beauty. The search for ultimate truth always continues, but we must pursue it with a grin. Neither reason nor faith is infallible, and when they work in concert they correct each other. Thomas saw this in the Middle Ages. John Paul II quotes Pope Leo XIII, when he notes, "Just when Saint Thomas distinguishes perfectly between faith and reason...he unites them in bonds of mutual friendship, conceding to each its specific rights and to each its specific dignity." Thomism is dominant in the Catholic Church, but it is not an official teaching from the Magisterium. Similarly, in our Christian Philosophy, we will not simply reiterate Thomas.

To be clear, a Christian Philosophy is not "an official philosophy of the Church" but "seeks rather to indicate a Christian way of philosophizing, a philosophical speculation conceived in dynamic union with faith." Our Christian Philosophy is focused on the unnecessary guilt of existence and uses this as a foundation from which we can ascend to higher forms of knowledge. The scope of this paper is only large enough to cover the establishment of that foundation. The question of meaning is indeed necessary for humans to ponder, and even those who favor dilettantism face the question and choose to turn away, asserting that there is no meaning. To find this meaning, we must utilize faith and reason, but we will not necessarily arrive at any final truth.

This is because, "God is known in his absolute unity only to himself...inaccessible to created intelligence, absolutely incomprehensible to man." <sup>24</sup> Indeed, we would not be crafting a Christian Philosophy if we knew all of these absolute truths. Bautain asserts, "man, in his present state, is incapable of elevating himself by his own effort to the scientific knowledge of any principle whatever" for "he cannot abstract being from existence, nor existence from being." <sup>25</sup> This is rather obvious, since most of our scientific knowledge is grasped as an array of concepts and never entirely as a complex, singular entity.

Bautain continues, asking, "what would science be without principle and without idea? And what word could give man the principle, the idea, and the science of God, if not the word of God?" There is a relationship between reason and faith. We cannot get to God through reason alone, yet we should not seek him blindly through faith. He desires for us to know him as he knows us. In other words, "between finite effects and an infinite cause, between contingent and temporary existences and absolute and eternal Being, there is an abyss that reason will never cross." Again, there is a gap similar to Chateaubriand's hunger for happiness and Blondel's will. There is a difference between what we can will and what we actually will. So, too, there is a gap between what we know and what we seek to know. Faith will not

necessarily get us across this gap, but it at least recognizes the abyss.

At the core of all philosophy is a search for the meaning of our lives. We have no answers for why we are here, and we avoid the impending guilt by casting shadows over the question by creating the illusion that it never existed. It is necessary to face these questions, but it is not necessary to know all of the answers. That is why we have faith, and that is what my Christian Philosophy is all about.

We can talk about grace and salvation until the end of time, but they are nothing more than empty words. Whether we make sense of nature or divinity or revelation has absolutely no effect on their reality or their own independently functioning existences. Despite what we think or reason, we do not change what they are. Whether we fully understand the implications of the crucifixion has no relevance to the effects of Christ's sacrifice for mankind. Yes, God longs for us to know him but we do not know if he will be humanly heart-broken if we choose to ignore him. Our muddled interpretations don't even get us halfway there, but rather lock us into an inescapable tunnel vision in which we foolishly cherish a dim ray of light instead of marveling at the wonders of the sun without needing to possess them. I am not saying it is useless to ponder these mysteries; I only wish to show that there is no finish line, which is why we have faith. Just as the ancient arctic sea creatures still reign in those undiscovered waters, without classifications or special categorizations, so too do the truths of these mysteries operate in the recesses of our souls, and we must not feel guilty for not possessing them because it is not necessary.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup>Ibid. 56.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Ibid. 57.

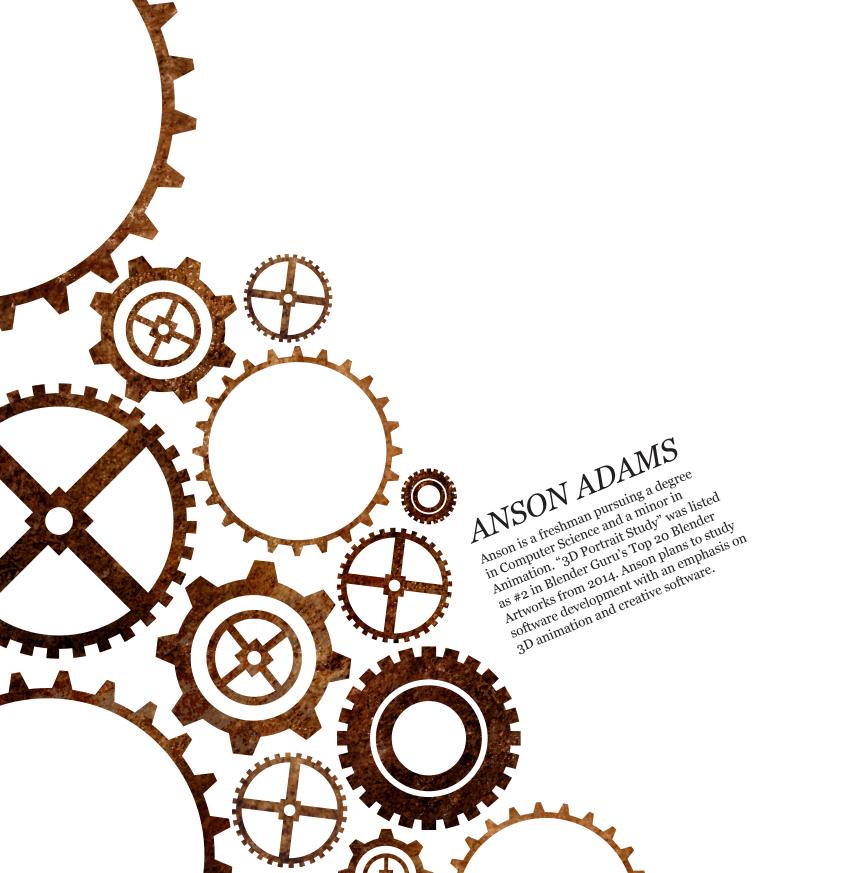
<sup>23</sup> Ibid. 76.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Louis Bautain, "A Letter on How God's Existence Cannot Be Proved," from *Philosophie du christianisme*, (Paris, 1835), 156.

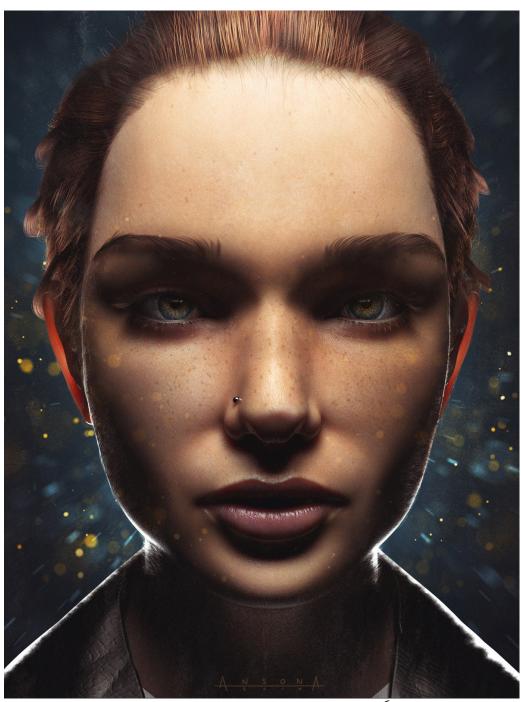
<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Ibid. 157.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Ibid. 158.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> Ibid. 161.



## **3D Portrait Study**











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### **Babble**

Jessie's therapist told her that she was "severely clinically depressed," but she always saw it as more of being blessed with disconnection from this fucked up world.

Depression is like the serpent in the garden. Its approach is slow and deliberate, but once it has you in its clutches, you're swallowed, never to return.

As a result, her entire life is a patchwork of disjointed movie frames.

Boyfriend.

Break up.

Boyfriend.

Medication.

(Alternative) medication.

That's it.

The times the Zoloft did allow her to come up for air were riddled with pain anyways.

When did it even start? It was impossible to place. Somewhere between high school and her mental collapse. Somewhere in that mix.

Forget and medicate on.

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School.

The neon slip was shoved inside her locker, beckoning her like a beacon of hope, but mostly debauchery. They specified a time and a place, but this information had tattooed itself into Jessie's mind long before then.

These slips were not a new occurrence to her. The distributor knew her well.

It's not as if she had a bad reputation. In fact, most people had never really spoken to her.

Getting ready for the night was a well-rehearsed production

scheduled for 9:50 every weekend.

Say goodnight to the parents.

Smear on more makeup (never try too hard).

Stuff the bed with pillows.

Climb down the two-story trellis (follow the signs of wear).

Walk through the darkness to the car waiting at 232 Avon Street at 10pm.

You could call the people waiting in this car her "friends," as some would claim. But as they hurtled through the suffocating suburban blanket of Georgetown, they only discussed their usual focus: the product.

It was Jessie's turn that night. The other roles were borne out of necessity: Erik, the bodyguard, and Nadia, the lookout.

Their destination was far outside the Stepford town safety of Georgetown. They raced past the cookie-cutter neighborhoods to the relative insanity of the nearby woods. There sat their place of sale.

The warehouse seemed starkly out of place in the middle of the towering trees, a dilapidated concrete mess that almost shouted that it held a secret. They could just make out the familiar sounds as they approached.

"Ready?" Erik mumbled, but there was no need to reply, as their symbiotic bond allowed for a sort of unspoken understanding. Business as usual.

The downward stairs brought them deeper into the madness with each consecutive step. They ducked under the remnants of the former slaughterhouse. Swaying hooks and tattered plastic reached for them longingly as they ducked under a concealed steel gate. That's when it hit them.

The bass emanating from the speakers forced them to take a step back. Even they couldn't be numb to that sensation.

It felt like home to Jessie. The bass throbbed through her as a second heartbeat as her ears adjusted to the sound. The electric melody was her little dark lullaby. She closed her eyes and felt her hips start to shift to the jagged deep house beat.

She opened her eyes to the typical scene of strobe and sweat. The crowd moved as one in front of the dark DJ booth. She floated through the crowd, dancing and searching for somebody else that was searching among the vacant smiling stares.

Everyone knew to look for Jessie. She was reliable in having what they needed. But, tonight, as she felt the bass vibrate to her very core, she found it hard to focus on the work at hand – it was the first time she had been out of her Zoloft haze in a long time.

People say to never mix business with pleasure, but it wasn't always this way.

Erik and Nadia found her, a regular in the underground scene. They proposed a partnership that had been very lucrative for her up until then, not that she necessarily needed it. Nobody needed to know that her father's money paid for her purposely-tattered black clothing. She thrived from the respect her work gave her - the girl who always has the product.

She worked fast. Slip the baggie in their hands; pocket the money without a second look. Slip to the other side of the room.

She was caught up in such a rhythm that she almost didn't notice it happening. A silent motionless circle stood in sharp contrast against the pulsating crowd, and a shrill scream somehow competed with the overwhelming music.

Jessie easily slid through the shocked onlookers, most of them much too high to process what was happening. Her rare mental clarity, however, was a severe disadvantage when she took in the scene: a young girl on the ground. She was on her back, convulsing, wide-open eyes fiercely focused on some unseen horror.

Jessie immediately recognized her. She had thought the slight, baby-faced girl had looked like her cousin as she slipped the molly into her eager hands.

No panic. Just clarity.

She knew she had to get away.

Jessie caught sight of Erik and Nadia and they slithered through the crowd towards the stairs, separate, but in singular focus.

She suddenly felt a force yank her off her course and back into the crowd. She was spun and faced with a tall, looming boy, eyes piercing through her.

"You" he spat, shaking her thin arm violently, "this is

because of YOU."

She was dragged back into the scattering mass.

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It was hot.

It was that type of hot in which skin begs for a breath of cool morning air, only to be denied by an unforgiving blanket of humidity, turning every inch of clothing into a prison.

Jessie found herself walking down a street, back in Georgetown – somehow.

Clothes from last night? Check.

Shoes? Missing.

Drugs? Finished.

Jessie turned onto her street just as the first streaks of pink and grey were cracking the dark night sky. Early morning songbirds broke the oppressive silence as she followed a path obscured to her prying well-to-do neighbors. She had done this same 5am walk many times before.

The balmy late summer heat already started to cling to her skin, further smudging last night's makeup. There was a distinct difference to this morning's long walk home.

The last few hours swirled in her head.

Guilt.

Unfamiliar.

She had never before considered the fallout of the hurricane in which she had always stormed through life.

Swirling, tearing, capturing everything in her path.

That young girl's face was scratched into the back of her eyelids – what had she done to her? How could she have done that to her?

No.

Not my fault, not my fault.

Need numb.

She cut through the woods until she caught sight of the "The Williams Estate."

Stumbling over tree roots, she marveled over how the obnoxious marble pillars managed to resemble polished

genteel prison bars. Not exactly the image Barbara would have hoped for.

Jessie slipped behind the sweeping weeping willow tree that enveloped the entire yard.

No lights on.

She scaled back up the trellis and swung her legs through her thin bedroom window in one fluid motion.

Her alarm went off: 6am – time for her meds.

Pop the pills, pass out.

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Dining table. Breakfast. From the rare presence of her father (his face may as well be an issue of the New York Times) and an obscene amount of food, she gathered it was Sunday morning.

Her sense of time was becoming even more of a jagged jerk; chunks are always lost. How did she make it to breakfast?

Submerged in her own personal sea of Zoloft – but somehow lucky enough to emerge for "family time."

The gaudy colonial-style dining room strangled her almost as much as the heat. Her stiff-high backed wooden chair felt like a torture device. The cherry red velvet curtains against dark walnut wood-paneled walls were just starting to make her eves water when Barbara entered.

Barbara was a hurricane dressed in Chanel tweed and Christian Louboutins sharpened to a point. Her hair was styled to weather her own storm, a coiffed helmet of Aqua-Net that managed to be both natural and terrifying.

Without a word, she grabbed Jessie's wrist, pulling a glaring imperfection to her face.

"What is this?" she demanded, pointing a manicured finger at a bruise that looked much too like a thumb.

The boy's face flashed in her mind like a strobe.

"I fell."

"Off of the trellis? Jessica, you don't fool anyone."

With those words, there was a resounding crack and collapse outside the window. Jessie went to the bay window to see Jose, the Sunday gardener, taking an axe to the trellis.

All at once, her fallen comrade didn't matter because – the boy. Her captor from the night before was watching the scene – all too causal – in the shade of the willow tree.

He was standing between the branches, peering out from the vines and smiling at Jessie like someone with nothing left to lose.

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Homeroom. Who knows what class.

Jessie emerged to hear an incessant sharp tap-tap-tap rapping on a desk. She looked down, still immersed in a haze, to see it was her hand.

She still hadn't slept. The image of the boy's Cheshire smile had haunted her thoughts day and night.

That girl, Emmaline Abby Jones, as she'd learned through her 3am research, died after that Saturday night.

Pronounced dead at 5:16am at Old Memorial Hospital.

Coroner's report to follow.

She didn't need the report; trust was her cause of death. She knew the exact pill she had sold the girl: Whore of Babylon. Her supplier had a sick biblical imagination.

Boy.

That smile – that smile never stopped flashing through her head.

She might as well admit she knew his name: Robert Kennedy Jones – Emmaline's brother.

He had grabbed Jessie in the crowd for revenge. In the midst of the chaos, she managed to throw another girl in his path and escape. But she felt rooted in that same spot – doomed to an eternity in the old factory. Up for slaughter.

Monotone intonations of calculus equations were starting to lull her to slumber when she caught sight of something.

Robert was smiling through the small barred window of the classroom.

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Ballroom. The stiff, armor-like silk clung to her skin beneath tufts of chiffon, giving rise to an unbearable heat rising to her chest. Her skin crawled with discomfort and loathing. She could feel the frilled neckline slowly slithering up her body, threatening to choke.

It was Cotillion day, and that alone was enough for Jessie to threaten to jump off the white rose (and baby's breath, don't forget) entangled balcony. It didn't help that she still hadn't slept since that night. Maybe this ridiculous tradition would distract her from the face that had kept her awake.

Erik and Nadia hadn't contacted her since that night. She had broken their circle of secrecy; she had been recognized, so she was out. Not much of a loss.

Girls dressed in white bon-bons twirled about the event's dressing room, picture-perfect future Daughters of the American Revolution.

She glanced back at her broken vanity mirror (that's what you get for not showing up at dawn) in disgust at her overdone, unrecognizable reflection.

Need to get out.

Lucille – somehow a former close friend – danced up, just as jazzed about the occasion as her archaic name would suggest, "don't you just love Cotillion day?" and skipped away just as suddenly, a thick cloud of Chanel No. 5 suggesting her flight path.

Now.

Jessie rose just as fast as her personal bon-bon would allow and swished, swished, swished with as much stealth as possible towards the door.

Then Barbara happened.

"Don't even think about it, not today," she hissed in a hushed tone, clicking towards her daughter with as much control as she could muster.

Jessie kept her face in a plaster of disinterest as she said, "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Jessie," her voice cracked "have you been taking your medication?"

Jessie stared at the rare wrinkle of concern on Barbara's Botox forehead as she spoke "yes, I promise, I'm fine."

Barbara lowered her tone to near unintelligible to avoid the sudden interest of Lucille, who had begun twirling a little too close for coincidence "I know you go out at night. And...and I know you've been different lately. I hope you know how... other things...can affect you."

"Barbara," her mother flinched at the address, "I haven't been doing anything – I've just been nervous about cotillion."

Her mother nodded in response. Jessie could slide through most of life, but Barbara had learned to become hardened to her excuses. She squeezed Jessie's waist and whispered, "don't get the dress dirty when you climb out the window." She turned on her heels and walked towards the door.

Jessie ignored the stares and rooted through her prep bag. She pulled her medication tin and – for the third day in a row – took a Zoloft and a pink pill marked "E."

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She pushed her way through the gathering girls as their "suitors" came in to retrieve them for the ceremony. Erik wouldn't be coming to meet her anymore – that didn't need confirmation.

She took a breath as the pills took their effect.

The familiar warm, whirling numb spread throughout her body, banishing the rising thoughts of the boy and the girl.

Free.

She swung her leg – bon-bon along with it over the edge of the balcony to follow her already-planned escape path.

As she lowered the rest of her silk-chiffon body towards a windowsill, she could have sworn...

Among the suitors stood Robert, in silent observance of her escape.

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Sometimes, when she surfaced from the numb, Jessie's mind would allow her a moment to remember the times before her world was put underwater.

It's not that she ever had one of those popularity princessturned-depressed-outsider sob stories. She had always excelled at being a loner – she liked it that way.

Stepford neighborhood, well-to-do family, nothing to worry about.

Except depression doesn't listen to logic.

Depression isn't what most people with too many opinions think it is: something you'll snap out of over time. Something in her brain was chemically fucked, and she couldn't do anything about it.

That's what made moments like the memorial so unbearable.

She couldn't recall how she made it there. She couldn't recall much now. She touched her hand to the inflamed, tender skin underneath her eyes.

She stood half-obscured behind her school's gym doors and looked through to the room full of blown up pictures of Emmaline.

Guilt.

No.

She rushed to yank her tin from her pocket and swallowed two more "E's" to relax – self-prescribing for the numb was the only thing keeping her sane. Anything to keep the everpresent nightmares at bay.

It seemed as if half of the school was there to honor the poor little girl lost to the evil of drugs. They appeared like a faceless mass of black, but she could feel the overwhelming sense of sad.

The mass went forward, heads down, placing tokens of grief before her pictures. A boy stood and spoke about the young girl, but it was just a murmuring buzz to Jessie.

She saw him again – outside her nightmares. He stood watching Jessie from the other side of the bleachers. He slipped behind the stands and disappeared out the door.

She wasn't about to let him get away. Not again. She needed the nightmare to stop: the guilt, the emotions keeping her from her vital numb.

Stumble across the gym, past the speaker, past the shrine to untimely death.

All eyes on her.

She stumbled out of the building to find the sun dropping low behind the trees – and Robert was just a silhouette, running and

She chased. She pursued him through alleyways and parks, never slowing.

She knew he was going to her house. He had a plan. Regret flooded her mind as she ran, wheezing. Her mind swirled as the trees of Avon Street reached down for her, threatening to seize her. She fought back against the sinister scratch, scratch of the branches.

Robert looked back at her, laughing, taunting, his face twisted into a smile as he turned around the corner for her street.

She broke through the tree cover to see him from afar, standing under her willow tree. Her pace never slowed as she ran in a direct line to him.

The closer she neared, the more he morphed.

His body contorted and swelled until he rose up against the willow tree, a red seven-headed, ten-horned beast.

She didn't pause.

She sprinted towards it as it directed its fierce, knowing gaze down towards her.

All at once, in the eye of the beast, the cracks in her life united.

Clarity.

The girl, the boy...

They were never real.

She had a bad trip at the rave.

Erik and Nadia left their unprofessional partner behind. The night that set it all in motion.

Her body couldn't stop her crazed momentum, still propelled forward towards the beast. Acrid vomit rose to the back of her throat as the cogs and fractures of the past few days clicked into place.

She was crazy.

The bruises, the fresh bleeding scrapes down her arms: self-harming.

Her mother's face hovered behind the slow-motion film of fuck-ups and madness – she had tried to warn her.

All of her pills, what brought her that treasured numb, that escape, brought her here.

The monster drew her closer as her head clouded and her heart pounded against her ribs. She lurched one final step and caught on a knotted willow root.

Falling.

She felt herself pulled deep – deeper than ever before – into the darkness as her body slammed against the tree.

Her body twitched and writhed as it numbed part by part – her mind the last to go, trapped in its still, bodily prison.

Her mouth seized into a twisted smile as her thoughts came to a slow halt.

At last – silence from the babble.

