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## 37 Clauses: Instructions Ignore the Narrative Voice

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37

*Clauses*

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*J. L. Hall*

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*Volume One*

*[So it goes—*

*So it goes.]*

*with great thanks to*

*Wilder*

*&*

*Tof.*

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(note: include page #'s or no? Needed)

By Introductory Prologue.

*Italics make such and such proper. This is what Mr. Rosenberg, the literature teacher once had by the voice here in the eleventh grade of that which is high school, taught me, the voice, here. But, he didn't actually teach this, but I did so wish to make the reference—the person-teacher alluded to being in fact of bones more dense than those airy ones of the italics—to make a point. For such places are full of things that make points and those such things are rules. Now this is no anarchism to be held here. Leave the debate of the vaunted or loathed, in equal measure, perpetually it seems round and bout, rules, of which the rule of law is the paragon and Luciferian deceiver simultaneously, for some scholastic hall. With oak wood supports and studies. Studies are so suited for studies, studies of rules and laws, fittingly enough. So leave the discussion of rules for those ruled over by rules, for any good or ill. For the rules here are not*

*the rules of there, if there be any absolutism that is 'rule' at all, within this world that is to be preliminarily set up as it is fit in a prologue such as this.*

*After all, the function of an introduction or a prologue is to establish the rules for the pages and words and semicolons to come. Semicolons feature here. Not here precisely; but there here (i.e. page \_\_\_) and so that's an appetizer taste, like ceviche.*

*In many ways, the tale to come is like ceviche. Sure, the large pieces are shrimp (meaning the big parts of more biting taste are, in other contextual uses and contextualizations, small parts in nothing more than sheer size), and there's always one bite that has too much onion clumped into it (meaning there is a part that leaves a little too stank a taste/smell in the mouth/nose/ear) and it's always better with lime (meaning, this is what it is to be and could ever be better, more palatable, yet is palatable enough; so the waiters tell me).*

*But this is not all terribly helpful; this is neither doing much introducing nor prologue-ing, being that the business of introducing and more so prologue-ing is an imprecise science more akin to old selling of snake oil than an actualized and established convention. Thusly, as those conventionally proper that, in fact, deal with a deucedly non-convention, would say, let us find another whichever way. And so a story before the story proper would do better, so thinks the voice that is not the narrative voice at all, at all:*

March 6<sup>th</sup>. 1993. Time stamped. *Goosestep...Hope*. So the poem (note: add proper citation), so it, goes. Not written yet. And backwards. But it (the it that is the poem) is likely born here and in a different time before its time and in a different mind from the one to pen the inverse in a time later, born in a different mind and then transmitted, efficiently, like antibiotic resistant bacteria. Thoughts/ideas/notions are just infections of the conscious embodiment born in that which is cyclical, after all.

The thought is born in a babe borne—yet to be born—enwombed still—yet to be named or noticed. Mother will vomit next week. Mother will be infected by the thought that a to-be-thinking thing is starting to weave the stuff of thinking below the lace-like thinning skin over her belly. Mother pees on a stick, as one does. Blue. Oh—blue. Blue is the sky, as it ever seems, the day she peed on the stick that became blue (note: specify what breed of blue as blue is vague like the milk ridden soup-mire that is bleau cheese melted and mixed with blueberries, and just as murky in its half-drunken opalescence). But as said, the thought was thought prior to then, in the babe yet to be born, borne within Mother. Abstracts are for abstractions of academia, and we yet may not wish to delve into abstracts, as promised, but this is not an empty

promise just one waiting to be filled, like an empty pint in a pub, empty then being that which is preferred, impregnated with anticipation, then? Yes?

Yes, the idea, that is, that becomes attached, as a perhaps undeveloped paternal twin to the babe borne yet unborn within Mother is exactly that which the inverted poem (note: properly cite, again) noted earlier.

Goosestep—yet, and this is the *Principe*, before—Hope. To this wee babe, yet unborn, this makes perfect sense, for while a Freudian notion would be a desire to return to the womb as a place of comfort, of bliss, the womb is the first evil encountered: claustrophobic and a nine month long session of water boarding style drowning, the first drowning an individual encounters in the corporeal plane. *Goosestep*. And then, then comes *the other part*. From the time that babe would exit the womb, would it not be reasonable to imagine that, like any other offspring, it shall venture to endeavor to its utmost to escape its mother, its parents, its womb, its sensory deprivation tank? For the womb, naturally or artificial as one hears the vaunted sciences near completion of any day or era now, is one of only two necessary constants to the trajectorial flight of the human life as an organic, a lack that gives that wild and plucked raspberry taste to the world that comes after, as now it, and all of it, is viscerally experienced, known, as opposed to that Cartesian purgatory of the mind and the mind—solitude—that preceded the first fawning of yet

developed muscle cords and lungs and excretory system. The other constant being the far less compressive and far more, initially, microcosmic process that is death, being that it flutters on and on and out as a vapor into an endless vacuum, thereby being beyond any dream of grasping. But the womb, the start, that is defined; that is finitude incarnate; that may be dissected to reveal the trash compactor it is, that must inevitably end and eject its cargo, unable to bind and hold a nascent being for all too long.

That is precisely what this babe thinks as it tries to swim through the fluids that encompass its vat, its shadow slated tank, trying to find the way out but—oh, no—the way out is set on a timer. And then eggshell timer has a month or two more until its rings its little ding off and off, putting Mother in pain—oh the pain—but it is nothing to the Goosestep of being suffocated in the womb and She doesn't remember Her own womb so the cycle of cruel sadism of the womb winds on, bound to spiral out of itself like any of the legions of conch shells that speckled any local seashore. No, that eggshell timer sits above the stove/oven dual set on the ledge of the fan/vent, ticking away yet. So what else should the babe borne yet unborn that is to bear the name of Mr. Charles, and shall to be met as meetings come about, do but think, as a Russian political dissident in a gulag, think about—oh the condition dear

and dire—thinking of the oppression of the confined world, in which he finds himself?

What else is he to do but think away his little babe thoughts in dreams and dreams and ether ventures in the further confines of that yet plum-ripe *mente*? Dreams, these dreams, he shall be a perfect amnesiac towards, just like Mother was to her time in the womb, upon his awakening, the awakening into the ignorance that is the lived life to come, the only thing to be remembered is that he is, certainly, to forget.

—forgot.

## From Morning.

Dark. It was dark. Dark in darkest day and darkest night; it must be night; night it must be. Left hand out, or right—is it right, right—to the left, or other side of the bed to that table, that little table upon which that pedestaled sun perches and shines when it's late but it's too late now. And then, then—then light. Light. But not the kind or breed which worms its way in through glass and past curtain and into pupil. Not even the irradiating warm—though it may just have been radiating, who could know—columns of particles projected by that smaller sun on the nightstand. No; it was the sickly, ghastly, glow of uttermost white from the mobile phone of Mr. Charles. It was more efficient to just glare at the glare of that little box than turn on the little sun and grope around, blind as an elderly mole rat, for his watch, wherever it had decided to lay itself down for the night.

After all, he had to know what hour of darkness it was; it was important. He would have to note it down in the morning when the larger sun that shone through and past and into presented itself to this populace of which Mr. Charles was, albeit in want of will, a member, a member of un-will if you will. And so, making note of his note for a later hour, Mr. Charles pressed that button, responding amiably with its meek click of a voice, on his little box of

light and rolled over and began to repeat the time noted in a whisper heard only by the ears of his mind.

3:18.

3:18.

3:18.

5:55. As scheduled. 5:55. As every day. 5:55. As each day in the remembrance of this man stiff as a confined cadaver under his sheets, this Mr. Charles, he chose to awake with those five minutes remaining, sweetening, ripening, before it was all to commence anew.

And yet, as he pushed the sheets aside, lowered his feet onto the carpet and took the customary deep breath before rising, not reborn but not alike before, the mark of the past stepped up out of the crowd to challenge this new upstart, this anewment. Annulment of that fledging lord of novelty is what the old champion, gluttonous as he was having fed upon all years prior, of habit demanded.

But the uprisen allegory (or metaphor Mr. Charles thought they were both pompous devices for an author to use, lazy even) of that which is novel and manifest change had struck his blow before the match even begun, made his maneuver before the forces arrayed themselves at daybreak as usual. For he did not abide by the conventions of the norm, of *this* world, as it was not in

his kin and lot. And so Mr. Charles crafted his own norm, a norm of normalcy in routine, in protest and opposition to this enveloping world, as foreign to him as a dream. So that's why Mr. Charles walked around Sasquatch butt ass naked until after his shower.

There this turning was begun, not at 5:55 as the old order had been want to do, but at 3:18, as Mr. Charles had forgotten his note he had so dutifully taken note to note. And this—this—was highly, highly irregular. Most irregular. And even more irregular in that the man himself did not note the irregularity as he measured the paces, a sort of morning song to accompany the trill thrush of avian cousins beyond the wall, from bed to bathroom to shower to closet to dresser, and out. Mr. Charles would like, more certainly would like as it takes little assuming to presume this, *you, you*, to know that he measures his steps like this as then he is reminded and proves to himself that he is like you. Just like you. For, as he assumes, you measure your steps too?

But, still that unnoted note was to, avoiding notice, lie on his nightstand below the pedestal of the little sun, scattered as seedlings at the base of some great verdancy.

### To the Old Place.

Not dark. It was not dark. Nor...nor was it light. Mr. Charles was unsure of what time it was or place or year. He awoke once more before dawn, in a room that was not his and was not any he recognized.

Though...though there was a resemblance to his childhood room. Fret not, this is *but a dream*. Mr. Charles does not know this though, as for Mr. Charles life is not *but a dream* so a dream feels very much distinct from life as the two fail to share the common commodity of dreaminess that would like both dream and life to be as *but a dream* and so indistinguishable. But that's a longer way to go about the long and short of it.

Such exposition was made possible by the bewilderment of Mr. Charles, as, as any sleeper, he did not have immediate awareness, and would not for some time, that he was dreaming and having not yet come across the art of the lucid dream he was caught in this odd place. This odd place of dreaming and holding some awareness of its oddity but not yet recognizing its distinction as *but a dream*.

So, so as mentioned, Mr. Charles awoke within a dream to a dream of waking up in his childhood bed. Oddly enough, his adult form—as he was not dreaming of the child *Him* but the now and adult *Him*—fit in the bed. He had had—oddly acceptable order of words in that repetition of such sonically redundant nature is somehow permissible—one of those racecar beds, speaking of the frame that is, that is molding specifically for children, and so fall just fall shy of achieving the classification of the rather and often unsatisfactory moniker of *twin*. *Twin* beds couldn't hold twins; they'd be

sardined for Christ's forsaken sake. Let alone a very grown grown man in that Mr. Charles measure precisely 6'3" and 183 lbs. Sure, a little lean, but still not a very...how shall one say...*compact* individual by any means, and so should have had every difficulty in fitting in a childhood race car framed, less than twin, bed. Yet, at least for Mr. Charles, while the size dimensions may be a paltry and frivolous detail, they mattered to the dream in that he did not question the validity of his fitting into this bed.

Oh, also the racecar portion, the frame that is, of the bed was red. Not yet ripened cherry but no longer a pale pink/white rosé that perhaps the venerable Speed Racer himself had his fabled car painted—gloss not matte—as. Everyone knows that red goes faster anyway.

Odd thing to associated a stationary thing like a bed frame with the quality of speed. But Mr. Charles neither recognized nor questioned this either.

And so, he waking up in this bed in this dream, he rises further into the ether, mixed with J. Alfred Prufrock (or was it Alfred J. Prufrock?) yellow fog, cloud of dream-stuff, and the room beyond the racecar bed takes shape, shape both of and in and beyond his memory of his childhood room, to, like many a dreamscape, ingest this yellow smoke that is the imaginative mind and birth

an expanse so alike but so much the xeno to the room in memory. And so it takes shape, this not non-room and Mr. Charles's not room.

Bookshelves laden with books from Dr. Seuss to Milton to Sigmund Freud (who would likely pop an erection in his grave over his being included in a dream), all rimmed with femur, just femur, bones. Femur bones making up the sidewalls and the shelf planks and even the legs of the bookcases were quivering femur legs. And this Mr. Charles did not question as the yellow fog parted further to unveil as the curtain lifting at the commencement of an opera performance.

The other wall of the room had its length occupied in totality by a urinal, the large and long papier-mâché-metal ones that looks like troughs and always have those little blue Frisbee discs that are supposed to quash the smell of thousands of bladders ejecting unto the resonate metal, to be swallowed and slurped as duty demands by the drains. The kind they have at stadiums, the like for football or baseball or any other sport during which a spectator must be that beautiful tightrope walk of drunk to endure for God so many hours. That's why the beer is just as pissy and overpriced: spectators will buy the beer at any rate to escape the sober impulse to fling oneself like a simulated person in one of those simulated games with *realistic* simulated physics down the aisles. To crunch and break one's back with the snap of a

peanut being bitten into. And that's why they have those kinds of urinals there. As cheap beer goes right on through you and turns an excretory system into a *drip-drip* leaking faucet. For, as like any animal braying at one object or another, one must keep the rotation going with one in, one out, as fast as efficiency allows. And those trough urinals certainly do that.

With two of four walls attended to, the imaginative mind of the yellow fog flees the room by faults in the insulation and reveals, like a magician pulling back the curtain on the saw-in-two act, the other two. Blank. Just blank walls.

And so the dream continues.

Into the Aluminum Dresser.

“What the hell is this?”

He knew the paper would draw this reaction; he had read it himself. Arthur Cole, despite his junior status awarded by being just that, knew his captain already well enough to have the foresight to recognize that such words were to come. A man did not have to be psychic to have snuck a peek behind the haze of that which lies between the present and the future to accurately anticipate the captain. The captain was frustratingly pedestrian like that.

“Cole, I mean what the hell is this? It makes no fucking sense,” cursed the captain. He had such a way with words. Not a wordy amount of words, but just the right combination to place the good captain squarely between the lot of sailor and a father who had grown tired of watching his tongue around his children and had realized some time ago that they were, probably as far as he could tell, old enough to where it would not be entirely socially unacceptable if the scampering critters would spew out the occasional profanity. Squarely between the two lived the captain.

And it was in his square office, door closed to the outside cousins in the force as privacy and professionalism must be maintain at all times, that the captain was presenting this unknowable query. For the paper did not make any fucking sense. Not to the captain. Not to Cole. Not to any other.

But that came later; this gets too far ahead. To the captain. To Cole.

“Well, we were able to surmise this O. Harrington, the man who signed that paper, as the poor sod we have down in the morgue,” was said without so much as a little gust of sorrow for the perfectly pristine corpse, aside from the throng of bruises and abrasions darting its expanse, resting the floor below. Cole’s voice often found that it could not move from its regulated tone and pitch; not that it desired to. But he almost forgot, “And he’s the one we found this morning. The one that lady called in just before six this morning.”

“That doesn’t tell us a damned thing. Unless we know anything about this Harrington. But we don’t do we. Do you,” muttered the captain without even allotting the opportunity for Cole to say the same. The captain had a way like that; a square peg moving through a circular hole that managed to force its way through and found it was right about whatever was on the other side.

“Come back when you know something other than this damned bullshit. Damned bullshit it is. Some nut ends up with a nutty letter in a gutter and we

have to treat it like murder. Like it's murder. Might be. Could be. Probably is. Just because the bloke has bruises and shit that may or may..."

"We have one of the residents of the building in which he died in for questioning. That's something."

"Something like shit, Cole. What do you expect to get from that one, Cole? That guy's half a kook just pacing the room in his brown fucking corduroy suit fucking counting steps and I saw him earlier. You'll learn, Cole, you'll..."

Cole left, left before the captain could finish. The captain did not notice, did not even hear the door clunk shut or the footsteps sliding assuredly away or the silence that is spawned when a person leaves a room where they had planted their presence and so removed it from said place and left a vacuum. That was how the captain saw Cole. A vacuum.

This is what Cole thought as he walked through the forest of cheaper cubicle desks to his own, en route to clean up this mess, to take a moment to fill himself up with scab-like crusted pastries and mudskipper coffee (spiked of course what other cliché could one expect from a man trying to fill himself like Cole). Not a sliver thought about the case. Not the damned paper thought. Not O. Harrington thought.

Just fill up.

But that would come later.

Later.

## Of the Modern Monasterial Stone.

He takes his coffee black. Always black, and always the same roast. A person of adventurous tastes would almost recommend any of the others scribbled in chalk upon the wall, from Guatemala to wherever else coffee takes eager root in soil and pocket. But no, this “John,” as he blandly serves his name to the unenthusiastic barista, will not be moved to deviate. Not today.

There is always some satisfaction to be found in the act, however, even if it is just lying about one’s name to an employee of this month’s trendy coffee shop, all flowing together as if but a dream. And while it is normally but a small, if welcome, pleasure most days, the man elsewhere known as Mr. Charles cannot restrain the smallest of smiles creeping, but for a flash, at the corner of his mouth, before retreating back to its lair. Mr. Charles exchanges cash and change, brown corduroy suit adapting to the bodily changes required of the act. 3.18. 1.82 is your change, sir. After the brief, allowed, flare of

enjoyment, Mr. Charles drifted back into himself, the barista and the counter flowing ever further, away. Out of reach. Or was he beyond their reach? Away as he stepped to the other counter, four and a half paces, to await his order. Yet it was all drifting further away than that, as he remembered his groin seam tear between *this* world and him, his. Nothing was as close as four and a half paces. Four and a half paces. Nothing was as close.

Coffee for John. This chirped echo from the distant world brought all that had drifted back to their old measurements in a moment. Mr. Charles gave a quick shake of his head, as if awaking from a shallow slumber, only to diving board flop into the dream. They must be getting slower, more complacent. Those, those people must think that just because he is a regular and quiet and not worth...no. No. Do not become. Become part of the wisps of the dream that Van Gogh swirled about and around and within, no not within as they were more like electrons about a nucleus. He the nucleus. They the electrons. To be clear. Mr. Charles noted a thin, moist film envelope his palms, threatening to creep elsewhere.

Twist, his wrist, with two rapid turns, to loosen the watch. He tried to calculate the duration this episode had wrought as he brought the little circle into view. Approximately two to three and a half minutes, with a margin of

error of roughly fifteen seconds to account for decreased reactionary time, an unfortunate aspect of these episodes. An unfortunate aspect. Unfortunate.

Thank you. He did not quite meet the eye of the third employee, third among the pretty barista and the chubby manager, behind the counter. He never did. Why should he? Turning, without catching any other eye as the afternoon rush swung in through the door, Mr. Charles began to measure his five and a quarter steps, complete with a finishing turn, in order to take his preferred seat, by the window wall, with his back to one more solid. Only two steps were managed. On the third he faltered. Someone was there; someone was there.

He just stood there. That man just stood there, staring, looking, a gargoyle recently added to the coffee house and so out of place in its gothic reservation. Don't make eye contact. Don't look at him. She did not want to look right at him; then she would have to acknowledge that the gargoyle could draw breath and that was a most terrible concept to consider.

Keep reading the paper. Drink the coffee—been sitting here too long trying not to look. He's infecting you, with that troubled mask plastered over his face and the coffee firmly placed in his claw like a jewel irrevocably set into some horridly overdone work of semiprecious metal. His medusa eyes

are turning you to stone, so that another gargoyle may join his kingdom of stone and stillness and stillness and. And.

And what was I thinking about? Yes, Carol, get back to yourself. Drink the coffee. Keep reading the paper.

This had never transpired in all record of noted past transpirations prior. Never before had Mr. Charles come to the accustomed oasis of mystically altered water to find his usual spot taken at his usual hour. Of course he had calculated the probability and was currently reviewing it within himself as he stood in awful suspension before the usurper. But it still did not compute. It ought not be possible for her, one of *this*, world to intrude upon *his* world that was his job he did the other way around. It only worked one way. Right?

It could not, just as he could not understand how coffee was really, truly, made into the beverage, from the bean that is, that seethed into his palm but Mr. Charles did not notice that. No note was taken of that. And that, that is what transfixed this male gorgon in place. Not the young lady before him. Not the environment about him. Not the blasting weather. Naught but the sheer concept of what conspiracy of probability brought all these mechanisms together to transpire as he found them today. To break the rules of the established worlds and their respective orders. Mr. Charles did not appreciate

this uninvited guest. But how does one shoo away, like a neighborhood cat (no tag of course, like that matters to the description but sure) discovered the bathroom and it laps from the toilet bowl and it is successfully expelled from the house but not before leaving a scratch or too (as a cat of course, must, do this) and one must go to get a rabies shot but that's silly that wasn't...Hold. This doesn't apply well enough; it's too irrelevant. Mr. Charles just wanted to non-communicative woman to leave. That's all. Leave out the fat. That's how it's done best, like pork belly: not at all. Damn their it goes again. Back. Back.

And so the stalemate persisted. Fortunately for Miss Carol and Mr. Charles, there were few, and fewer still invested with any caring, present within the shelter of the coffeehouse to bear witness to their accidental standoff. He, knowing actually what he desired but could not bring it about. She, having all power to bring a truce to bear but could not direct her desire for this unfortunate circumstance to end in any such utility. Both visitors to each other without an actionable powers, like Superman's father hologram thing (always found it odd like it's a weird—and *incredibly* convenient—device) in the fortress of Solitude. In the world, sure. But not able to act, of own volition, on it.

Unfortunate. She doesn't know what she's done. That's what the third amongst the baristas behind the counter thought, looking on from the front

row seat to this most delicious moment, towel in hand as it licked the cup clean and cleaner and then some. She does not know that this man came in here everyday at the same time ordering the same bland drink and sat in the same uninspired place and stayed for the same amount of time.

The clock tower shrieked out the determined time and a motorcar swam by, past pole and light and pedestrian and poodle. As if awakening from a shallow slumber, Mr. Charles came back into himself, into the dream again. The time was already spent. No matter; no. No. It was a matter; but no matter to find resolution here and now and here with her.

Giving a slight shake, the gargoyle shed its dust and stone, no, twisted itself rather as shaking would be too comfortable a movement, and floated towards the door as if upon its wings. At last, at last he was leaving and gone and done with. Carol had forgotten to keep reading and drink her coffee. Her coffee had grown, regressed rather, to coldness. But she took no note of that.

Floating, as if upon leaden wings that allotted a slight hover as to only just avoid the dreaded floor (the third amongst the baristas behind the counter following with his twin orbs bored into his skull because this was most entertaining like it was painted so so well, he would say if he could really be heard surely) Mr. Charles departed out the door. But something else did not follow Mr. Charles out the door. His coffee. Even after having branded

and seethed into his hand, it was deposited on an empty, smooth table by the door. Left, abandoned by its adopted father, the cup of coffee cried out, bawled, for someone to hold it once more. So the third of the baristas behind the counter meandered over, picked the infant coffee up, and threw it in the trash.

Into the Back.

He was back in it again. Mr. Charles was back in the dream of his room, his childhood room, again. He did not recall any part of the concluding moments of the dream after the yellow fog had parted to reveal the walls last time. No one really remembers the ends of dreams anyway, even if they continue on. One does not remember those last truths of a dream.

So he was back in that not yet ripened and not yet pale red racecar bed. This time, there was no yellow fog, as if he were picking up exactly where memory left off last time in the dream. Two blank walls. Femur bookshelf wall. Trough urinal wall. Same as before.

But this time Mr. Charles sat up; he did not move before as only the Dijon mustard seed fog encapsulated any of the energetic movement. Now, with the fog already slurped away by whatever lay outside these dream walls, it was the turn of Mr. Charles to move.

He sits, raising himself from a corpse in a coffin sleep pose, sits up, rising, like a vampire waking to night in its lair, a la Dracula, stiff on a hinge. Now, the import of the remaining two walls being blank resounded through the dream mind of Mr. Charles.

There's no door.

Mr. Charles does not look left at the urinal trough or right to the femur bookcase and hardly seems to notice either or both or any. Hardly is hardly

apt, no yes, he does not notice either of those walls at all. Only the blank walls, both sans doors, draw the surveying pinprick eyes of Mr. Charles. There is no door.

Not moving from the still post-Nosferatu era vampire sitting state, the dream mind of Mr. Charles turns and turns and turns. No door. No door.

As his mind in dream turns the dream world room begins to turn and turn and turn, rotating around the focal hinge of the racecar bed, as if it all was a dryer machine tumble. Or a lotto globe filled with numerical spheres hollowed with nothing but cooling air inside them in turn.

Turn and turn and turn and the dream turns and.

## By Way of Word.

“Charles?”

Mr. Charles had been restrained to the police interview room, the kind with the one way mirror and all that which one sees in the cinema and all that, not the actual cinema as cinemas are not police stations but rather the movies shown on that moth win thin screen with policemen patterned upon that screen from time to time. Mr. Charles liked the cinemas. Fake stories in a fake world. This fake world account of the same scenes in police interview rooms was thus far rather, rather underwhelming.

Until now, with the neighbor Mr. Charles—the one he liked so much as they had an understanding, nonverbal contract-compact to keep to own spheres—walked in. Right, the neighbor was a policeman. Policeman Arthur Cole.

“Did they assign you a-as you live in the building?” Mr. Charles questioned, beginning the interview in earnest.

Arthur Cole did not speak as he slid into the chair opposite Charles (note Mr. Charles is not handcuffed; Mr. Charles has not been charged with anything it is important to remember that this is just questioning and the interview room was all that was available for the time being). The chair looked big wearing him. Arthur Cole did not fill it up very well.

“No. Just luck of the draw.”

“I suppose.”

Mr. Charles looked right at Arthur Cole and Arthur Cole looked right down at the papers in the file before him (really just one paper was the Harrington case was still fresh like venison carved straight from the deer fresh) and someone was probably looking at the both through that one way mirror-window.

Well, actually, it's prudent to note that no-one was watching through the window-mirror as who cares about an interview between neighbors, even if

one was wearing a brown corduroy jacket. You don't see too many of those now adays.

"What can I help you with?"

"Do you know a Mr. O. Harrington?"

"Who is he?"

"Charles, do you know him or not?"

"What has he done?"

"So you don't know him?"

"Ought I?"

How unproductive questions can be. Neighbors now in a police interview room trading questions like friends blindly exchanging cheap and rather unfulfilling Christmas gifts in what will probably be the norm practice of White Elephant. What elephants have to do with end of the year holidays is hard to discern.

Anyhow, questions get you no-where. Especially when one side is asking non-questions from non-lips and the other is asking question from lips. Might as well be talking to that mirror with no-one behind it.

"Figured. Thanks anyway Charles."

"Pleasure, neighbor."

Without being dismissed, Mr. Charles breezed by Arthur Cole who remained seated, the former as an overladen air balloon, seemingly floating but weighed down with stone and stone and a man in corduroy. The door swung closed. Mr. Charles left the station. Arthur Cole kept looking down at his solitary paper, anti-filling the room, as if it were expanding, growing away from him.

From Slop Arrival Stop.

Mr. Charles arrived at the office at 8:02. This never happens. Never 8:01; never 7:59; and certainly never 8:02. Then he would err and be late

from time to time like the rest of *that* world and oh no he could not drink that punch. And yet here he floated, stone wings of his gargoyle form prior chipping to pebbles, late.

Few had noted the precise extent of this precision of preciseness. None had cared. Until the creature and its ability were divorced on this day. Not one of the others chattering and clacking away in their offices and cubicles and break rooms could find the root in the messy divorce of the ability and its creature; the creature left with not much in the settlement. He floated more than he, the gargoyle creature, did on the median days prior, adrift and without aim, bereft of his former matrimony.

For the gargoyle had been disturbed, been roused from its accustomed perch and tossed to the streets below, a world of which it had never navigated in proper prior, only observed, to seek and not be of (like watching poison dart frogs—say *Auratus Super Blues*—hop around a terrarium as they could kill you and you could kill them with oils on hand and stuff and they would play one touch games of tag with crickets).

As so was Mr. Charles. He would leave it to someone else, someone outside the worlds of *his* and *this*, to decided whether he was the Super Blue or the heat-swollen finger pricking the glass. As so was Mr. Charles with decisions. Leave to someone else.

But the hum of the office, a most unimpressive termite mound, thrummed on. And Mr. Charles did not note the unnoticeable reaction either. His mind was on coffee.

“Charles.”

Oh. No.

“I can’t believe I have to say this to you and I don’t want to with your record and all. But you’re late.”

Mr. Charles did not respond.

The dream was talking to him (can dreams talk?).

“Hey—so—I mean I’m going to let it slide since it’s only a couple of minutes and your first and all but...but we have some good people in HR if you need. You know.”

Mr. Charles knew and did not respond. He would want someone else—that any someone else mentioned prior—to know that his answer the question above (same page; not sure as nothing is final yet) was to the negative. Dreams can’t talk. They’re like silent movies that have those shaky little slabs of words between the gesticulations (he always thought of Charlie Chaplin then did they have Charlie Chaplin in *this* world?). But there was talking, beyond the base interactions that is. Like the coffee shop. If a non-dream, thing could manage so much. A mudskipper could manage that much

and Mr. Charles wasn't even sure those joyously, like a toddler watching the Christmas window displays on 5<sup>th</sup> Ave, critters existed as he had never seen one. But this has gone on too long; time is stretching too long here. The speaker (soon to be identified) would not have waited this long to continue (and yes shocker it's the same speaker shocker; that Mr. Charles is silent he certainly does not find that surprising). And what is being criticized is still going on. Ridiculous. Back. Back.

"Well, right, good talk, Charles. Don't forget to read the memo." And Harry O'Callaghan, the immediate superior to Mr. Charles in the office, walked away past one of the throng of secretaries, the monologue just performed being ushered (like how a character is shovel out of a room in those Cinnabon ready made comedy shows when another character needs the first to leave because forcing someone out of a room is supposed to be humorous, right) out of his mind, as he needed that space for something else. But that was later. Keep getting ahead of this. Sloppy. Back.

Mr. Charles sat at his desk and did not move. He could hear the secretary stop Harry momentarily with a chirping shrill (perhaps a wee bit too stereotypical, Mr. Charles sure to agree, but this character won't pop up again so no need to sweat it). Again, chirping shrill. What's up with him?

“Don’t know. Just got to keep an eye on him so he doesn’t go all Langley on us.”

Marvin Langley was a former employee of the office; he had not quit. A week of more or less isolation (depending if you included the tendencies of Mr. Charles as isolationist but he was of *his* world after all so count that, don’t, doesn’t much matter to the plot) was his only crime. That and entering the office at the close of the week, after hours, and hanging himself in the employee bathroom. Mr. Charles had seen it, after; Langley did it poorly; the sloppy knot only made him suffer like a hooked bass flopping on a splintery dock for a few minutes more. That was the evaluation Mr. Charles had given, and still gave, the actions of Marvin Langley. Sloppy.

So for Harry and that faceless girl to say that Mr. Charles was treading in the footsteps, as a child might do after a friend in newly fallen snow, of Marvin Langley could not be, to the conclusion of Mr. Charles, any more inaccurate. Marvin Langley was sloppy; Mr. Charles was not sloppy.

Out the Want.

“Arthur, is that you?”

Yes, why yes it was. Arthur Cole returned home early the day that O. Harrington had arrived upon that magic carpet of aluminum and iron into the vaults of the precinct's morgue. There was really no lead to go on, beside the note and the pacing man in the corduroy brown suit, so Cole figured might as well take an early day after interviewing the latter (that will be gotten to later, a misstep to be sure but it'll be alright). And take an early day he did (as if that weren't evident).

And there was still another task awaiting him.

After the incident at the coffee shop, Carol had been shaken, not knowing quite why but still—still something about that man and his look and his, his manner she did not know but it wormed its cancerous way past skin and bone and marrow to whatever lay further in, filling. And as such, she had not been much able to wait for Arthur to come home as to utilize his shoulders to share this burden or perform surgery to excavate this filling unease out from whatever lay deeper than marrow.

“Yes, Carol. I took off early today.” With that she almost expected him to come walking into the apartment with flowers or a bottle of wine or something, thinking first she was the reason he had taken off early. She was silly to think that. To correct, it was not she that thought she would be silly to think that but others of better judgment (already suggested at but where's the

fun in being direct?) thought, and think, that. Anyhow, she expected something. And the hands of Arthur Cole were empty.

“Why home so early?”

She could not hide the disappointment, him not having thought of her, as she puttered about the living room then kitchen then whatever other corner remained. Cole knew why she did this; to seem occupied would disallow a direct conversation.

Just a slow day at the precinct. Or that’s what he would be inclined to say; another bit of useless flapping of the tongue, not getting to anything he wanted to say. He wanted to tell Carol about O. Harrington and how this case, though nothing besides its peculiarity (again, shall get to that later; patience) made it unordinary in that a corpse was a corpse, felt different and he felt different and had floated home as if he were a sculpture of stone levitating upon wings of stone and. And, he would say nothing. The tongue of Arthur Cole was empty.

He’s a quiet man, but not this quiet. And he’s just standing there, like— but he won’t say it. Carol knew this. Although Arthur and she and been cooking and cleaning and fucking in the same place for about only just shy of a year now, Carol had slid many of the tiles away and opened most of the puzzle box that to her was Arthur Cole. Most.

“Well, I was thinking we could have an early dinner since you’re home early and we could go out after and try that new Latin place, you know with the tapas and dancing. You’d like to go dancing with me right?”

“Yes, Carol, let’s do that.”

“Excellent I’ll get the leftovers from the fridge and we can have a quick little dinner you know how they do in Europe and then let’s go out and dance and...”

Carol and Arthur sat down to their little square table in their little rectangular apartment to little circular plastic containers of day old Thai food, still heaping over those circular containers despite being leftovers as they are. They ate and spoke and ate and ate and filled their bellies and the gut of Arthur Cole was empty.

### Within the Short.

Back. Again. Back in the dream world mind of Charles. Same room. Same walls with two adorned and two not so much. And still there's no door.

But, though, the room is no longer rotating and Mr. Charles begins the dream yet already in the Underworld style vampire just awoken sitting position. No need to rise this time. No need to move. No need at all.

And so there is no movement for some indeterminate amount of time for Time is not Lord in a Dream as the Lord of the Dream is, purely and simply and aromatically, Sex.

Freud would pop an erection, in his grave, at the notion of Sex ruling the Dream, too.

Yet, Mr. Charles found fault with this notion. A voice told him first: *Sex rules the Dream*, gurgling up from the urinal trough; and then another—answering in the style of the pool game of Marco Polo—voice ejaculates from the rigid femurs of the bookshelf contesting: *Sex certainly does not rule the Dream*.

Urinal voice disputes this: *asking for bookshelf to cite evidence*.

Bookshelf cites: *the sexual record of Mr. Charles*.

Urinal retorts: *the files of the dream mind world hold no such records*.

*One cannot cite something that does not exist*.

The bookshelf quivers:

*Exactly*.

Without Sufficient Solicitation.

The bowl was empty. Pity. Have to fill it up. Oats. *General Marshall's Pure Oats*. Healthy; good for the heart. That's what his doctor had told Marvin Langley.

The flat that Marvin Langley resided in was not anything particular to find interest in. An uninteresting table with uninteresting food thereon that

came from an uninteresting fridge next to an uninteresting kitchen counter. That, with the uninteresting bedroom, living room, and bathroom, made the entire residence of Marvin Langley uninteresting. And the man appeared so just the same. Slight crook to the nose, small rodent mouth, avian cheeks. Uninteresting dress. Marvin Langley.

But while the gilded surface of Marvin Langley and all he owned did anything but shone and glittered, today would prove to be anything but all Marvin had been and experienced.

After consuming the carefully measured portions of *General Marshall's Pure Oats* and robing himself in his jacket, Marvin took his one last customary look about his roost before closing the door behind him, heading off to work his punctual eight hours at the office. And the flat, uninterested, was quiet, and slept.

But it was to awake before the customary time of Marvin's regulated return. No, today the knob of the door turned and twisted and groaned, uneager to wake up before the allotted time, until it gave way at last, nudging the slumbering door to pirouette upon its hinges inward. A figure stepped through. But not Marvin; the apartment would recognize Marvin. But the flat did not care, as it was uninterested.

Yet the figure was interested in it, the little pet that slumbered yet. Slender it slunk in through the door and returned the wooden guard to its post where it thanked the shadow for allowing it minutes more of sleep. From uninteresting room to uninteresting object the pine tree, tooth pick as it was, slithered and wormed, ever obedient to the lawful order of the sleeping flat, returning every groggy member to its bed when disturbed, as had been done with the door.

The flat would not recall how long the malnourished shade swung about its innards, prodding about the wooden and plastics entrails. It would not recall the visitor at all, for it let the flat slumber on as it went about its swooping and pecking, pecking for some bit of corn amongst all this plain grass.

But, as pleasant and mannerly as this meager visitor was, it had to bid the bedridden flat farewell, for it had other appointments to keep, and soon Marvin Langley would return to rouse the flat in earnest. Not to be amiss of such company, the thinning figure, as was befitting such a tactful and observant guest, left its card, in case the flat would desire the visitor to come calling again. With that pleasantry seen to, the little shadow found a hole to slink out of and the flat slept on, forgetting about the little visitor, uninterested as it was.

In the Know.

The other interview wasn't any more help. Arthur Cole had gone a couple floors down in his building on his way to work to interview the old lady that had found O. Harrington, that man now resting in a tin torpedo tube in the morgue down at the precinct. Cole should be at the precinct. But some uniform hadn't bothered to interview Mrs...Mrs...

Well shit he forgot her name. Probably Russian. Accent sounded something like that. Probably immigrated and husband died and so she's a widow living in an apartment that looked like it was owned by a death's head moth.

But Arthur Cole had never heard Russian, so what would he know.

And her name was Miss (never married, a maiden to the end of her days) Salzburg. German. Ashkenazi Jew German actually.

So what did he know.

Miss Salzburg (Henrietta was her first name but that was likely only first learned upon the reading of her will as the arbiter reads out full names then even with the parts of names that are never used, like the moth furniture of Henrietta Salzburg) was a widow though. Cole got that right.

So what did Arthur Cole know anyway.

Of the Avian.

“In other words, I’m saying it’s over, Marvin.”

You’re saying you’re sleeping with someone else, in other words. This is what Marvin thought but did not say to Sharon, with her blonde hair and eyes never meeting his but darting to her nails and purse and phone and the

waiter. Rude, by the way (I'm sitting at the same eating place so this sentence, just this sentence here, is not Marvin's internal dialogue; I know convenient but what can you do—it serves a point). Maybe it's the waiter she wraps her legs around at night. It didn't really matter whom; what mattered is that she was leaving him after all these months. Who was he kidding, of course it mattered whom.

“Marvin, listen to me, it's not that you haven't been great. You've been great. But it's just that I think I need something else. I think it's time for us to move on and who knows I think we can still be friends.”

Bitch. This is Marvin; you can almost see him mouth the word but its lost in his anxious groundhog twitchery. How dare she feed me that washed up line, as washed up as she is in that whoreish makeup slathered across her face as if she were some poorly painted porcelain doll, ready to go have some other man wriggle inside her for the few feeble minutes he can last after this. She's probably going to him right after this and that's all she can think about, the whore. No; stop.

Marvin was letting himself get angry, this he knew. Again, you could tell if you dismissed his twitchery. His hand was viced about his glass of tap water and would have shattered the thing if only he had any strength in his arms, for he was no large man. He had not touched his likely overcooked pork and

potatoes and whatever else was on his plate. As she continued on, hand movements and all and not caring a spit about his silence Marvin determined that to be angry, at least now and publically, would be to let her win. He would find a way, some other way some other time. For now he would sit and listen.

In other words, Marvin Langley was taking it all very well.

He's so quiet, as always. It unnerved Sharon. She couldn't find her words with Marvin just sitting there, not even fidgeting in his seat. (But still with the twitchery it's different than fidgeting). To but escape this torture, for she felt it was a torture for her to explain to Marvin, in so many words, that she was sleeping with someone else without actually saying that, in so many words, as that was the last thing she wanted him to know. But of course this is why this conversation, this audience, was being held. Because she had been seeing someone else for about a month now.

And besides, she told herself, this is the last bit of discomfort she'll have to deal with in this whole ordeal and then after she can go home—to the one belonging to her, not Marvin, of course—and feel comfortable, so comfortable. Just had to wrap this up somehow and be done with it.

“Do you hear me Marvin? Do you understand? We're over but you're not to blame and I hope we can still be friends.”

“Yes.” And I know I’m not to blame, Marvin Langley added to himself. You, Sharon Jackson, are to blame, to blame for inviting someone else into your sheets or crawling on all fours into the very sheets of that inviting someone else. Either way; it didn’t really whose bed the act or acts had transpired in. Or who it even was. Except it did matter. It did matter very much to Marvin Langley.

Eventually, this troublesome matter over the restaurant table, with one having finished their course and the other having defied the consumption thereof, had to come to its close. This satisfied Miss Jackson as she stepped out over the curb, glancing just one way, crossing the street in that strutting gait she had. It did not, however, satisfy Mr. Langley. And he thought, watching his former whatever she had been to him cross the city street, why should he wait and trouble and suffer in the want of knowledge of the whole thing—and the other him—when he could just as easily solve it all now.

And, of course, for practical reasons, I followed him. As it didn’t matter if I followed around these people of this other world as they weren’t real and all. I just like the drama. Had to entertain myself somehow. Though this talking to myself does get somewhat drab, as vague as that is. But back to it, again. Just remember, I’m in the background this whole time. And actually, a good note would be to remember that I always am; that’s how all these scenes

can be viewed. But I'll drop reminders thereof from time to time. If I remember. But that's enough. Back to it, again, for real.

Thus decided, the council within that neatly combed cavern atop the mount of Marvin Langley ruled that his former whatever she had been to him ought to be followed, and this mystery that would otherwise plague him for days and nights and nights should never become more than a seedling.

The uninteresting little man from the uninterested little flat was about to undertake the first interesting undertaking in recent remembrance. And this excited Marvin Langley, as he set off, as a housecat shadowing the hopping pigeon, after his mark.

Well, the difficult part now would be to face him in the office, Sharon thought. You see, Sharon Jackson and Marvin Langley were both employed at the same office, in the very same office as Mr. Charles.

Yes, that Mr. Charles. There is no other. The only one not of this world. Is this subtle enough?

She, Sharon, was glad Marvin wasn't her boss or anything; that would make matter quite, quite thorny. Sharon consoled herself with their more or less equal standing of employment within the office as a measure of social security as she trod block from block to block, unaware of her shadow leaping

paces upon paces behind. That was the boon of being Marvin Langley, the uninteresting little man that we was. None looked, and none saw.

At least there's some luck today. Marvin recognized quickly that Sharon wasn't on her route home. This much he knew. His little heart beat as a rodent finding itself nearing the end of some labyrinthine construct, anticipating the reward at the end. But there was no hardened dairy product at the end of this urban maze for Mr. Langley, but something quite else.

She was close, and this excited her. Sharon felt almost faint upon her stilts for legs, the breeze combing through her blonde hair threatening to topple the whole of her. Her palms developed a film; her legs quivered more and more with each step. Soon. Soon, she would be there and she would hear her name, "Sharon, Sharon," called so melodically it whispered her as a spring trap lure to that building cobbled up story after story of brick upon brick upon brick, so as to resemble a kiln to her, the rest of the city cold and uncaring spires but that oven held heat and warmth and comfort. Sharon glowed, a coal heating itself in anticipation of being thrown into the cast iron stove, as she had never done before.

He watched her, perched behind a sparse throng of some faceless, faceless to him for the eyes of Marvin Langley could carve out but one face, sapiens, step through the eager throat of the revoltingly archaic construct of

brick—the building must be a hazard, really—and into its inner confines to be consumed. He would have to dare the same venture, into the maw of that beast that had swallowed up that former, former for he saw little more than a lurching bird wearing her skin now foreign as she was now to him in her shedding of him, woman that had meant some measure of something to him. A faceless man passes by Marvin, brown suit wrapped like the wings of a stork. Nuisance. It would take some matter of time to bypass the sphinx of wood and glass barring that consuming throat; but just some matter of time, and so the housecat set across the street to coil up in the anticipated capture of the pigeon, landed and roosting as it was now.

“Hey are you home? Hello? I did it. I ended it with him. Marvin. Now it’s just the two of us. God it was uncomfortable. I’m worn out; can we heat something up from the fridge and put on a movie? I need to wash that talk off me.”

Sharon had her own key to the rectangular apartment, for the sake of convenience. Her words, heralding her arrival into this domain of warmth and heat and comfort, would not go unrequited.

“Of course, Sharon. I’m glad you did it; I know it must’ve been tough. Come here.”

“Thank you, Carol, I couldn’t wait to get back to you.”

And so Sharon slid, as a key into its assigned lock, into the arms of Carol, the same slender Carol that would be sitting at a square table with circular plates in the same rectangular apartment a month from this day with Arthur Cole and his empty hands and tongue and gut, just as she had sat with him at that same table in this same apartment for over ten months before this day when Sharon Jackson the pigeon came in with her key as she had done so many times before. And as they did that which need not be named for implication is need enough, a slight plunk signaled that the neighbor had returned home to the adjacent unit as well. But they two did not even muscle stutter at the sound, it being left unheard, for the neighbor was of no consequence, no consequence at all.

By Pass the Wider World.

Marvin failed to riddle his way past the sphinx of glass and wood. (I saw him try, a good show). But, as the noble housecat, he was patient when it came to his prey. So he waited, waited through the entire night with rise and fall of sun and stars and moon and all that lot coming and going again.

And the patience of that feline watcher, stone and grounded at his station, wings for the time clipped, found purchase in the midmorning (yes I came back this itched of too-good-to-miss). There, there comes that she-bird. Sharon. Her name was now a reverberation within another Marvin Langley from another time. For this Marvin Langley desired to know, desired answers, and little else.

Fortune was to him in that bobbing blonde woman took no note of him as he resumed the course of the following day in his respectful pursuit. It was a weekday, so that little she-avian would be heading to its labor. Best intercept her before then.

“Sharon!”

Miss Jackson hardly had time to turn around before she found herself face to face with a little man. Shit, hope the pepper spray will do the trick. Wait. Wait, it’s Marvin, Marvin but breathes away from her face, naught but motes of atmosphere serving as the gulf and buffer between them.

“Marvin? Marvin, what the hell are you doing here? Are; are you stalking me?” Sharon then knew it was a mistake to take her usual shortcut, a commonly abandoned alley connecting two of the more congested veins of the city. All the world bustled around them as winds whipping up in a torrent, as they stood, momentarily in a calm.

“I have to know why. *Why*, Sharon. I mean what did I do what did I do I mean I was nothing but good to you and I know you’ve been fucking around with some other guy I know where you were last night after—after we spoke, *you* spoke those words to me—but you didn’t mean those words did you? You couldn’t, just couldn’t.” With each word Marvin Langley dared one step closer to his former whatever she had been to him. And in turn, as if responding to

some dread dance, the erect bird took a matching step back from the maddened housecat.

“Hold on a second, Marvin. Just calm down...” Sharon choked on each word, each a thorn pressing its way up and out her mouth, her mouth that just hours before tasted lust and comfort and now was forced to taste this putrid unpleasantry.

“Don’t you tell *me* to calm down. You lost that right when you, you. You. You always told me what to do, always always always. Well you know what, you’re not done with me. I’m done. *Me*. I’m done!”

Neither the housecat nor the bird caught the lunge. Next they knew, the thin abyss between them had shrunk to but the width of a nail. Both faces, petrified, in shock. And then the blonde plumed bird sunk and slumped into a contortion, still—still.

Marvin had not even noticed that he had brought a knife with him, his hungry claw. But he had just meant to follow, to pry, to get answers and get it well. Or. Or had he known what he would do and slid a claw into his paw in preparation, knowing that this was the one and only outcome. He stood there, so still and so like stone that if he were not standing one would be hard pressed to tell which of the two temporary visitors to this little detour within the city was in the pocket of death.

Well, he would have to hide the body. There was now that matter to see to.

### Outside Freud.

The argument did not continue or progress from there. Oh, the one prior in the dream—Mr. Charles returned to his dream mind world—between the urinal trough and the bone bookcase. They had both been silent for some time now. Though, again, Time is not Lord of the Dream. But that was already established.

What is yet to be established, however, is who or what or where or why is the Lord of a Dream. Mr. Charles, gargoylian perched upon that not ripe not dull red racecar bed, was quite convinced it wasn't he. Or. Well he could be Lord of this room but then why. Why. Simply that, why would he be? Mr. Charles could not satisfy that. He was not dissatisfied but rather not sated

with that answer. The potentiality that he, Mr. Charles, was Lord of the dream was like cutting yourself off halfway through the buffet at a wedding and halfway through draining the open bar into your gut out of decent respect for the bride and groom even though you know they can afford you to fill your gullet and they won't mind as they're not focused on you.

Mr. Charles felt like that hypothetical scenario may or may not actually just be a memory. But he could not tell. Any which way, the description was apt as the aforementioned, possible resolution of the issue of Lord did not bring satiation. And Mr. Charles so wished to be satiated so the whole present aim of the dream mind then was to satisfy this wish-hunger of sorts.

For the third damn time, one could very well say that Freud would pop an erection, if his genital tissue had not degraded and rotted, at the talk of dream as the vehicle for the end of desire and wish fulfillment. Yet, what, truly, was, most truly, the wish to be fulfilled?

## Of Oh He.

She didn't like him from the moment he stepped in through her doorway. She did not get up to get the door for him. Miss Salzburg never kept it locked anyway. Never kept any locks, anyway. She had survived the war. She was harder than half the half-men in this city by kilometers.

It was either that or locks reminder her of something quite else. Quite else from the war that is. Mr. Charles had been the only one in the building to ask Miss Salzburg about the war. That's a different time—and a different "he"—anyway.

This "he" is the sleuthful detective Arthur Cole on his round of interviews. Well, it would end here, rounding the tally up to two. Arthur Cole would attest that he had only two interviews thus far in the O. Harrington case as O. Harrington had done him the disservice of leaving very, very little to go

on. One might even go so far to say that it was O. Harrington's own fault that the case of his death/murder/accident/mortem remains unsolved.

One might.

The old lady didn't take to him, Arthur Cole knew this much. This much so that he didn't even bother jotting down any notes if he had brought a notebook but he didn't as that was a rookie move. Everyone knew that no-one took notes. Everyone knew.

Cole creaks open the door, a door that could use a gravy boat's worth of WD-40. Until then, the door would wail and wail and wail and—yes, open. There are two lights on. One by the rocking chair. One in another room off to the left casting its horror-story-empty-mansion-castle-sheen into the midget foyer via the living room (must be a living room what else could it be but it smelled so but what no-one can live in such a smell maybe she can't smell that well) where the old lady sat in a flower patterned rocking chair. The fabric was flowered patterned, that is. Not the wood. Wood can't be flowered patterned but perhaps not everyone understands that.

Arthur walks in, the floorboards probably in need of just as much WD-40 (a pleasurable little word/phrase/title to be uttered) at that now not wailing but formerly wailing door. He mutters a greeting but it wheezes out

like the last squeeze from a bagpipe as its shoved into the closet to rest until the next family reunion, next gathering of the clan so to speak.

Miss Salzburg just looks at him, this man, as he sits down in the flowered (could be tulips or even daffodils now that would be intriguing, yes) pattern chair opposite her. For a moment she loses sight of him. Her chair seems to have swallowed him up, like the crumbs lost unto a plate while eating a sandwich and then scooped up after and eaten as one ought not too waste. And he was just as filling as sandwich crumbs.

Miss Salzburg should feed her chair more.

“At what time did you find the man?” Arthur wheeze once more.

She stares...

“Uh—what state was the man in?”

Stares...

“I mean—what sort of dead?”

...

“Can—can you hear me?”

The man couldn't damn well speak. Miss Salzburg thought this as she sat, looming over the man that could not fill her chair, looming over though she was orders of inches shorter, looming as an electric lamp over a moth fluttering towards it.

Fluttering as a flubbering vassal approaching a gilded chair.

But the chair of Miss Salzburg was just flower patterned and moth  
infused and the lungs of Arthur Cole were empty.

In Absence.

Odd. How unlike, how unlike her. Carol had not heard from her blonde  
haired fascination for a couple days now. She pattered about the rectangular

apartment, as a songbird darting about its cage, wholly forgotten in how to sing, pouring all that energy that ought to form notes into movement.

She fluttered from bookshelf to stove to cabinet to rust sofa to bookshelf again. The place had never been so clean. Cole had noticed, noted a change. But, as before and as would become, his tongue was empty as he stood at the close of each day, having returned from dutiful labor at the precinct, as a gargoyle perched upon the ledge of a cathedral, too petrified to step off that ledge into what lay before him.

She wanted to file a missing persons report; Carol wanted to file that report. That would be easy enough with Arthur being on the force and all. But then she would have to explain why she filed the report and how she knew Sharon Jackson. And that, *that*, she could not bear herself to fill up the empty Arthur Cole with.

But was Sharon really missing? A possibility, a potentiality, a feasible plausibility brimming with potency, emerged in her mind as a blind mole rat bursting unto the surface, so visceral was the revelation. Sharon might not be missing after all. She, she could have tired of it, tired of her. Maybe all those gilded and delicious words whispered and moaned between sheets were naught but forked.

Arthur Cole watched, ever at his post, as Carol froze solid with a book in her hand, about to place it on the shelf. She had become as petrified as he was, stone, granite. And Arthur Cole's tongue was empty. And she too was empty.

To the Start.

It is late. Dark. Darkest night in darkest life of the darkest... Marvin Langley was pacing the grounds of the office he frequents during sunlit hours. It is no sunlit hour; the moon reigns as sole and indifferent queen in this hour. He did not remember how he came in here. It was after hours after all. Hands ran through rebellious hair and tears mixed with snot and sobs turned to muted screams, twisting themselves into the pretzel of unknowable laughter.

He had done it. *It*. Sharon was dead, a corpse, a stiff, who knows where for Marvin does not remember the last couple days as they are a menagerie of shock and anger and urgency and bottles and more bottles. He knocks his bottle, last in the succession of that grim throng that have mocked and comforted him in equal measure from their circular lips hour after minute after hour, onto the office floor. It shatters. Not immediately—bottles do not always do so—but rather bounced with unexpected vigor from the cheap carpet and made a hasty union with the shin of Marvin Langley, there which it did in fact shatter.

How the hell...the damn thing doesn't break on the ground, hard, but on my fucking leg what the. The. Marvin is stopped mid fury. He is bent over like a child just having noted an anthill at its feet, mesmerized. Except there are no ants at the feet of this late night visitor to the office; he is not even

looking quiet so far as the ground. His own leg, his own shin, will suffice, for the death of the bottle in its marriage with his woven pant and flesh would not be without a final word. That velvet ichor, already beginning to rust in its own fanciful way in the air conditioned atmosphere, pulsed, as a band marching forth on a turf field days before the game so they may practice and get the tempo right, from one singular gash down to dribble and gather at his feet.

It's been a little while since I saw my own blood. The last time I saw blood. Blood. Sharon. I, Marvin Langley, killed her. I killed. I—I can't. I don't know what I can't but I can't. I need to wash this. Need to. Bathroom, down that way. Turn knob. Faucet knob next. Too hot, much too hot. The other one. No, now that's too much. Too much of the other. There. Wait. Who is that looking? The mirror, in the mirror. I don't recognize you, *Marvin*. You have blood on your hands. Of course I do it's mine I'm bleeding from my damn leg. Which you deserve. And more; you know you deserve more for what you did to her. But I don't want to go to jail; you know I won't last. You know I'm not talking about that, Marvin, but the other thing. Yes, but. No. Yes. I. You must. You mean, that I should, in other words...

Yes, yes, in other words:

Marvin Langley hung, most assuredly dead, in the men's bathroom stall of the office for approximately three and a quarter hours before the morning

shift of the sanitation staff found him there, his limp body being an addition to the décor of the wash closet that one could not help but note. The janitor would not think it; the management would not think it. Even the jittering mass of employees that would toss about, like a rubber ball at grade school recess, the rumors of why Marvin Langley hung himself would not think it. But it was true. It was sloppy. Just as his work with that blonde bird, it was sloppy. Marvin Langley was most assuredly sloppy; and Mr. Charles would be the only one to think it, the truth.

Mr. Charles was missed was he not? He was not present for some time and so was not here to account these recent events. But he imagines them and so. And so, non-events by non-people are just as like imagined events. As both are “non” things, that is. So they are so, whether so or no, for all is just one form of “non” or another.

And don't worry, Mr. Charles will be present, Observer-like (from Fringe, the show, kind of a cult following to be honest) in the back. So don't worry. Not all non-events will be imagined. Don't worry.

Via the Other, 'Scape.

Back. Back into the dreamscape-land. Yet, yet it is changed now, altered, for Mr. Charles. Some dark, dark *thing*—event it must be—must have transpired to bring about alteration here in this more ethereal land, as, as Freud would posit and get hard immediately afterward, nothing happens in a dream that is not simply a ripple-echo from the corporeal. There is no severing the two. There is no lobotomy for waking and sleeping, all and both being one.

The dream was still in the childhood room of Mr. Charles. Bookcase of femurs. Wall spanning urinal trough. All that jazz. Oh, well, actually, jazz music playing too. Miles Davis. Probably. But the most encompassing alteration was the man pissing into the urinal. Back to Mr. Charles—of course—and peeing into the urinal. This man, this minuet man, was like a wee avian. Sort of. An avian fed of oats in that oats are not the preferred feed of

avians, the product being then something, some *thing*, a little off from the normative and expected constitution of an avian.

“Hello.” Mr. Charles said this to the man of a back most turned just as much to the urinal. Just said it in that general direction more like. It ruffled the muscles in its back. Like trying to get the last couple drops of urine out.

“See, no mess. Not so sloppy, huh,” the avian croaked back.

“Sir, you seem to be mistaken...”

The avian *sir* turned about to face Mr. Charles before he could finish. Well, either of them, technically. A few drops of piss trickled to the floor. Blop blop. And then, done. But the man still held his dick out like he was going to keep peeing and his hands their to support. But no no this was not what cut Mr. Charles off. No no not in the least. It was the face, a face contorted in slanted avian features in a perpetual post mortem gawk of strangulation. The eyes bulged like those of bull frog. Tongue held wagging limp out to one side as a retriever that has been left in the car for a few too many minutes. But worst of all was the crooked angle of the head. Tilted to one side, a ghastly rope that none would see yanking upward in whispers so that the head could not snap back into its more natural, more beating heart organic, position. It was the head of Marvin Langley.

“You always did look down on me, Charles,” Marvin spoke.

Marvin spoke. Marvin spoke for all hell! A corpse spoke though gone and long gone and in a dream no less. How the hell...

“Don’t worry Charles. I know this is a dream,” the tongue just flopped about the mouth like a puppet being yanked up and down and up, while the eyes fixated at some ghastly flies buttering around the femur bookcase behind, “And I know I’m dead. If dead is the word to use.”

“And,” after a pause, probably would have been to lick his lips but a corpse, however animate, cannot command muscles quite so far, “I do NOT speak *for* hell. Choose your vocabulary with greater care. You’re *supposed* to be the reasonable one in all of this, after all.”

At this point the dream would likely respond to Langley addressing Mr. Charles in such a manner as to have Charles’s mouth sown shut or just simply meld into the rest of his skin like Neo in the first of the Matrix trilogy. But there is no demonic seamstress here. Neither is Mr. Charles some sort of futuristic robot and computer Jesus Christ. So neither of those things happen. Charles, simply, becomes in his dream what he had become to so many others so many times before. He is stone. He is a gargoyle. He is *the* gargoyle. He is to gargoyles as Lucian is to werewolves in Underworld. Not a father proper but a father in the sense of a literary movement. No seminal fluids have passed anywhere; there is simply an exemplar born. As befitting his new

honored position, Mr. Charles not only finds words stuck in his further than gravely throat, but more so that no sonic rivers usher from his cavernous gullet other than the echoes of whatever emanates from the dream-world scape that is the exterior.

“I do don’t blame you, you know,” the hung man spoke once more, “but that’s just what I’m supposed to say. Of course I blame you. You’re a dick. A dick for not realizing. A dick for not caring. Odd expression isn’t it? Dick. Why must genitalia always find utility as a negative verbage? Yeah, I mean look at it; it looks like a pickle that had been forgotten for twelve years in the jar and so developed some weird fungal outgrowth that was only slightly hampered in growth just enough by the brine as to restrict the ‘shroom to one end and not the other. That’s a dick. Not pretty but not evil. Not even antagonistic. But the nature of dicks and dickery aside, thou art a dick, sir. Bet that’s the first time that’s been said.”

“W-www-whyyyy...”

Charles hardly barely could recycle all the syllabic material ejected by the hung Langley to pose this question that didn’t even carry the tone of a question but nonetheless arrived.

“Well cause you have to. You *have* to listen to my Hamletian soliloquy.”

“N-nnnn-ooooo...”

Marvin Langley ceased his puppeted movements across the urinal backdrop stage behind him. Marvin continued to explain to Mr. Charles all the real point as to why he was here in this place at this time. He explained it all. And all throughout Mr. Charles could not muster another utterance. Not a one.

The words of the invisible rope hung man are not muffled by exposition because there's some great secret to hide to drop later. No. It was, is, simply, due to that Mr. Charles himself did not make much sense of it himself, and will need more time digesting the time as his attention was divorced from the words brought not with tongue wagging but fish bag shaking when he heard the sound of piss resume. And Marvin Langley had not turned back to the trough.

From 'Vantage.

Look at her; look at her. She must have heard; she looks so shaken up.  
Maybe...

Harold, Harry, O'Callaghan was walking his usual route into the office building in which the company that employed him and his management services was situated on the thirty-eighth floor, meshed between two other floors occupied by two other companies that in turn were flanked by others and so on and on through all the floors of that glass and steel termite mound. He, Harry, was walking his normal path in through the front entrance, to the elevators to go to his floor meshed between others and others, and had his eyes locked on their usual morning cuisine. Never even notices the brown corduroy suit pass him at the exact same place and same time as every day. Watching him watching her. Observer. Lens. Back to it.

Her, sitting at the front desk acting as one of several receptionists for the uncomfortably clean and glassen ground floor. She was employed by the building and not one of the crammed companies above, which made her one of a select few. This much Harry knew about her, and that her name was Carol. (I knew more after all; so much can be gleaned about a person by watching those around her or him, her in this case).

The employee of one of those companies, a Marvin Langley, had been found hung, at a rather skewed angle, in the men's restroom inhabiting the office of O'Callaghan just two days prior. Sloppily says the report. No it doesn't that would be absurd. Stop projecting. Any-who-how. What was

truly an absurdity was how all the termites within the mound had resonated of the reverberations of the strung man, some buzzing and chirping, others mute. Carol was one of the mutes.

But this could be an opportunity, the chance he had been waiting for, Harry considered as he walked past her, invisible now but bidding his time as a spider plucking its web in anticipation. With the emotional shock of the incident with Langley he could be a shoulder for her, and then. Then *more*.

Yes, that could work. But he would have to see to the other man, her man, in order for that to work. And for that, Harry would have to be more sufficiently informed as to position his forces accordingly. Fortunately, Mr. O'Callaghan, manager of the office, had thought of just the man as he maneuvered a neat, almost military, about face in the elevator about a month prior. The doors, today, just as that day a month prior, drew towards one another in metallic attraction. (Odd temporal jumps but should be discernable; the mind wanders). And on today, as that day prior, Harry smiled.

He looked like an animal. Tasmanian Tiger to be exact. *Leer* personified. Snaggle tooth even when teeth not crooked—mouth just shaped that way.

But. And. Those tigers are extinct, are they not?

If Only.

Lucky for him, lucky for Arthur Cole, in a way, that the interview a little time ago with that looming Miss Salzburg was no discourse. Lucky as in, as it so happens, that she didn't really know anything new and/or of substance anyhow. So—as luck would have it—Arthur Cole, in a way, was spared some time.

Lucky.

The transaction of luck wasn't a two way exchange, however. Miss Salzburg was spared no, if little, time by that transaction and, in more truthful terms, the transaction the cells of her body made with the Wall Street of seconds ticket line marching before her very self. She had little BP left.

*Buying Power.*

So she had to sell. Sell. Sell.

Sell.

But she had a conundrum. A funny word for a problem, that is. Well, not so funny for her. Course. So she, as she sat in the waning flickering of her lights in the flowered patterned furniture of her moth apartment (moths, it seems, are attracted to flowers too but that makes little sense but Miss Salzburg need not make sense as another non-person; her non-personage shall be proved, scientifically, after a little more investment of patience) decided her course. Of course.

Of course like a vendor on an abandoned street corner she would have to hunt down her purchaser. And Miss Salzburg was not foreign to hunting. She did plenty of it during the war. Food. Shelter. Security. Not too tricky to hunt for if you were a much younger Miss Salzburg. Actually, the prime reason she stayed an oh so fair maiden is due to her oh not so fair method of hunting. Not so much wolf but spider. Arachnids have a much higher success rate of making kills, after all, and profiting by those pursuits.

If only she had been a mantis instead. If only.

But at her age, Miss Salzburg couldn't hunt shit with sex. If there is any hope for this non-world then one better hope to whatever fucking god is the god of fucking that sex is a vestigial hunting tool for that old woman. A bit like canine teeth on humans.

So, sitting yet still as a perched gargoyle in that same moth flowered chair, Miss Salzburg set her short selling sights on a purchaser. And, as luck would have it, she would not have to travel far.

Luck does indeed have it. Whatever it may be.

Like This.

Mr. Charles had not had *the* dream for some time now. He had not to any degree. As he walked to work—for he did walk the entire length of eighteen city blocks to and fro work each and every day as trains were deviations, subways were deviations, and buses and bikes were even greater deviations from what he did not know, but deviations nonetheless—every day of the days of which he had held this employment. Occupied with his thought carbonations, Mr. Charles clak-omped his way to work. He did not know why the dream and Marvin Langley had not come to him for some time now. Nor would he. It is a tricky enterprise indeed to discern the threads thatched into one's own dream production.

Most people deviate a lot in their gait. A fun fact Mr. Charles observes and relates in what few conversations lend themselves to a chatty inclination. People change pace; people change stride length; people even change preferred foot. A shocker to most to be sure. But not to Mr. Charles; Mr. Charles does not deviate, even in regards to gait. It took years, you know. I took absolutely years to figure out the ideal stride length and pace to move most efficiently, to get to point B briskly but without working up a socially inappropriate degree of sweat. Sweat would be horrid. The word itself even seems to perspire. Whether on page or off the tongue. It devolves into

aqueous drops and slip-slide down and down. Sweat. So, naturally, Mr. Charles would avoid any deviation in gait that would led to such a dripping discomfort.

He had detailed this to a co-worker during, Mr. Charles, under the course of the corporate New Year's party. Mr. Charles doesn't remember her name. Plain name likely. Without regard more numbral tag, the whole interchange went something like this:

*"...and that is why sweat is—is tasteful..."*

*Mr. Charles twirled with the toothpick stuck, Arthurian, to a pitted olive at the bottom of his Martini glass as he spoke these words, concluding his expository exploration of the virtues and vices, mostly vices, of sweat to a co-worker at the New Years party. Her name was Naomi. Naomi Sagrado. Mr. Charles was sure to memorize all the names of his co-workers. Just in case.*

*He had yet to take a sip from the glass and of the swig drink whirling within. He never did; in fact, Mr. Charles had never imbibed any modicum of any of the alcohols available for human consumption. He had his reason. Not terribly pertinent at present however. Naomi twirled her own drink, in thought. She was a wondrous five foot four, a good deal shorter then Charles then, and wore the woman sort of slacks of a darker shade, near black but not quite that charcoalish, as this was technically the workspace after all and a blustering*

*white blouse, kind of like the kind flamboyant pirates wore, kind of like Inigo Montoya (you killed my father, prepare to die, he said) from The Princess Bride. Except the ever caught in the slightly breeze blouse of Naomi was whiter. Not a stain indeed. She wore her hair up, always up in a bun and without glasses as she always wore contacts as she always found them to be more efficient. Naomi was a women of many 'always.' She always wore the same; always ate the same; always an ever present always of always-ness. Mostly. Though she was finding always to be very difficult to keep always. For instance, when debating sweat. Always deferential, Naomi could not help but feel an urge, a duty at very least, to at least provide for the opposition of Charles, without regard for correctness or otherwise. So, after pensive twirling her own Martini, which she had drunk out of quite a bit already, Sagrado spoke.*

*"I do admit sweat can be rather...unpleasant. Sure. Very few like the smell. But it's not a matter of liking or not liking, you see. We would not even have the luxury of debating sweat if sweat had not been biological invented. You see, sweat makes us more uniquely homo sapiens sapien than even our vaunted frontal lobe. It is erroneously taught in schooling, see, that it is the brain that allowed civilization to rise from the primordial cocktail. Sweat is the staple of the civilized society. As essential as bacon, eggs, and scalding coffee for diners. You see, sweat allowed our physically feeble ancestor to hunt. At the time, when*

*beer bellies were not in fashion, the most efficient manner of hunting was to run the prey, whatever it may be, to death. See, the average human at the time could maintain a jogging pace for miles and miles on end thanks to the cooling powers of sweat. Sure that came with a cost as sweat can take a toll, but being able to successfully carrying out a hunt would pay that tab and then some. That jogging pace, you see, was fast enough to keep most prey at a trot. Now, a trot for almost all other animals causes a heat problem. As most, like dogs, cool through their mouths, they have less than efficient systems. So while most other animals could out perform in the short term, the low but constant strain was enough to build and build up heat and heat and heat until...until the prey simply collapsed from exhaustion. Then it was a simple matter of finishing off the beast, whatever it may be. As you can see, it is thanks to the odd process of secreting saltesque fluids unto the outer dermal layer that was one of the prime variables that allowed humanity to become more than a lanky ape that shed more and more hair and fur with each generational model," Naomi took a breath, "We simply capitalized on the corporeal limitations of biological constructs. Playing a game of chicken. Kind of like a fever. Kind of like capitalism. But also kind of like a fever."*

*She just stood there, after having orated as she had. Mr. Charles had not anticipated this. Mr. Charles was not prepared for such a deviation. He...he had*

*never had so many words spoken to him before. And yet they could not be avoided, as it is very hard to dodge the projectile currents of sonic air that carry such mental weight though the space between. It, this, she, had deviated far, far afield from the expected course. Mr. Charles had to do something. Mr. Charles had to right the ship. So he did not drink from his glass. So he did not fidget. And so he did not keep his own always of non-deviation, figuring two rights make a left or something, and so began to seek to combat deviation with deviation, seizing upon the minutia of the words presented to him and plucked out a tiny, electron sized, bit of information to serve this end of deviation as answer to deviation. Kind of like a radio reverend reading from the Holy Bible.*

*“Actually, on the note of fevers, that provides a p-p-problem,” Mr. Charles stuttered. Mr. Charles did not stutter. What the actual hell. Mr. Charles usually did not swear to himself; it was uncouth. Go back to righting the ship, go back to fevers.”*

*“A-a-act...” What the goddamn fucking bitch. Whoa, new record for internal swearing on part of Mr. Charles. Albeit, not unwarranted. This time he not only stuttered but could not finish even the first word. Actually. Could not actually finish actually.*

*Naomi Sagrado was watching this co-worker of hers with something evidently logged in the wrong pipe. What else could explain his tough time*

*talking and his, almost cliché, tugging at his shirt collar with one hook finger, and beginning to perspire ever so delicately on the space between temple and brow? Sagrado does the thing, the thing that is always to do in such a circumstance. Two large cleave steps behind him. Swing back free arm like a wood-driver golf club, and swing swing SWING it back in full stroke. On the follow through her golf club arm vigorously smooches his back, like two drunks pressing their mouths together. There. Naomi Sagrado had done what one must always do. Give a little thump on the back. The force she was able to muster in such a dire situation pleased her. As she took two large sweeping steps back to her original place, facing Charles, the left corner of her lip curled up. Now she would receive thanks. Now he would crumple to his knees in adulation and gratitude for her most excellent course of action and gracefully execution thereof. Charles would go to his knees.*

*Yet Mr. Charles neither crumpled or went to anything. He just stood there, twirling his olive impaling toothpick once more. Was that supposed to be a slap on the back? Did she think he had been chocking? Did she think that would've saved him? Naturally not. This was even more of a deviation, a deviation Mr. Charles was very, very unsure of how to proceed with, like a fox chasing kid mountain goats and endeavoring to pursue up sheer cliff cheeks. Unsure of*

*footing, that is. So the mouth of Mr. Charles, for perhaps the first time when it ought not be, was empty.*

*Ah, he's showing deferential treatment to her, allowing her the honor of speaking. Okay, sure, Naomi would speak. Duty, again. So with pride, she picked up where he had left off before she saved him and so as if not a stride had been lost she spoke once more.*

*"Yes, let me lend you a hand than, Charles. On the subject of fevers, they are quite like sweating. A game of chicken, except with bacteria. A game of chicken hoping that the RNA of bacteria will unravel before the DNA of homo sapiens will unravel and so perish first. And like sweating, the killing factor is heat. Funny. Funny, right? Heat, the life-giver as nothing could live without the heat of the sun, also kills more. More than cancer I bet."*

*Bet. Now, with her bets hedged, Naomi figured the field and day were won (won for and of what she was not sure, just having the ethereal notion that she had gained something, whatever that may be) and so you see her about face, and walk away. Mr. Charles just stood there as all five foot four of his former conversational hostage tottered off, swallowed in the primordial of office space booze and sweat. Sweat melting into sweat. As he was, distastefully perspiring as he twirling the toothpick on and on and still did not take a sip from his Martini. As he knew that would not fill him. Martini would not fill him. The*

*Arthurian impaled olive would not fill him. Even inventing another deviation to (fire as to fire) combat the phalanx of deviations that he had just been held captive by, would not fill him. And so Mr. Charles stood, in peripheral orbit on the New Years office party, and was empty. The ball dropped on a scene a little way off. Cheers. Glasses raised. One glass to drop and shatter and bounce off the carpet floor and shatter as a fumbled chrysalis on the shin of Mr. Charles. The contact evoked a tear and some red ichor to scurrying down to dive into the thin office carpet. Mr. Charles did not notice. Mr. Charles did not even hear. For even in his emptiness, it came back to him. Marvin Langley, the dream-hung-by-the-urinal version of Marvin Langley was there. There a baker's dozen steps in front of Mr. Charles, tongue hanging wagging out again and whole self hanging if noosed like in the dream. Eyes directed in the general direction of Charles but, as before, wavered off in their bulbous focus. Looking at and not at Mr. Charles, still standing empty, empty looking at the dead but alive dream-ghost-poltergeist of Marvin fucking Langley float next to Naomi Sagrado, the former conversational hostage. His former conversational hostage. Like a ward-prayer over the sacred rumored grave of Santiago de Compostela.*

In the Bastard Space of Between and Around.

How. How. Mr. Charles thought the great, crushing thought of *How* as he continued his ca-clomping walk to work. The memory of the conversation with Ms. Sagrado at the office party...the office party of New Years had happened *before* Marvin Langley had so sloppily hung himself. Hell, the past and live Marvin Langley had even been there. And yet, yet the visage of the hung dream and dead Marvin Langley *was* there. There in the memory. There in his mind. Therein...but...but *How*?

And, of course, Mr. Charles, on his routine walk to work, is asking the wrong question. Dead wrong. Funny as Marvin Langley is the dead one, technically, and there was just a lot of dead wrong talk of a dead guy. Admittedly, maybe not quite funny. Kind of funny. But, the point is that Mr. Charles was asking *all* the wrong questions, naturally.

So, gargoyle as he was, Mr. Charles took the most deviant of deviations. He did not continue his walk. Oh no. He instead as thinking and walking at the same time do not produce much in either for a gargoyle, being of stone, must take time, must concentrate more heavily, on one or the other. Inorganics, sure, can think, but the lack of electrical popping currents do hammer such mental motions. Not that Mr. Charles was, in fact, made of stone. Now that would just be silly as no golem had wandered the Earth since post-lapsarian pre-pax romano present-old testament times. The story with the golem and something is put in its mouth. Or even not Old Testament Judaism. Could simply be Mesopotamian. Or any other related civilization that blossomed and then shriveled and then blossomed once more to only face shriveling once more but is now hardy like a prickly pear (which don't grow there) as of late. After all, they all share the same stories. Gilgamesh. Noah and the Flood. Some parallels are just not parallel enough as to not actually be parallels. More like two lines "V" shape from the same point and *then* running

parallel. Parallel is a rather inefficient and misleading word for things that should share something. The lines never touch, never touch so why? Why parallel? What about step-siblings? Share something, but not related on the more organic and birthing level. Just not, for the all loving Christ that the tell-weavers of the aforementioned golem story would likely write off as but a prophet, (so what does that makes His, Christ's, love then?) parallel, just not parallel.

So in the decision that was born and raised and then expelled by Mr. Charles took him by the ear (as the hand would be too gentle and when was the last time that a thought truly worth having was gentle?) and led him. Led him into the coffee shop. *The* coffee shop from before. Yes, not too odd for Mr. Charles to swing open, gingerly, as a trepidatous child sneaking into his parents' room when it's not 'no good time to go in there' but he had a nightmare and wants to check on the Xmas gifts they wrapped and hid under the bed so good he isn't very noticeable so his parents don't notice him but he notices them as twak thwump thwump tha the bed goes and goes again. For four minutes and a sigh and snore snore. Like that. (Out of breath, by the way; take some time to breathe here; sure is needed; have some white space then)

Careful, with trepidation. Another oddity. Trepidation. Intrepid. Not the same, but have the same parts. Like genders, I mean sexes. Genders are more identity fluid, after all, being nothing at all that can't be changed all along. 'Trepid.' That's the part. So what would '*in trepidation*' be? Not dictionary. But does the child of the couple *trepidation* and *intrepid* work out or do they get a divorce, they two, the word-couple that is, on part of their child conceived in every conceivable adverb to describe the manner of the process. Tenderly. Furtively. Aggressively. Fruitfully. (That's a good one.) Ardently. Moronically. Sloppily. Like Marvin Langley. More less 'hung in the employee bathroom' sloppy and more 'holy shit that's a burst, that's a lot of seminal fluid' kind of sloppy. Crass (sounds like crab-ass mashed together) but sufficient. But Mr. Charles is forgotten in all this. Or. Or is he? Perhaps some of his own normally non-deviant but now-slightly-deviant thoughts as his swing-swung the swang-swing glass door to the coffee shop were borrow. Not the swinging. Or the swunging. But the thought. Not his specifically. But

the brand. A brand of thought; that's a funny thought. Perhaps if there can be brands of thoughts there'll be name brand ones and generic ones and who would prefer which and who would prefer whom and of whom do we speak now? Who has nothing to do with whom. It is the who inside whom we speak that is whom we who are who are eager to speak about and see who may be the product of whomever it may be. Who now? Ah, Mr. Charles now. Now that all such and such time has passed he has already ordered coffee (as it be a social sin not to order coffee in a coffee shop; that would be like not buying a pack of condoms at CVS or marshmallow toast at Wilfred's; made that second one up—who knows if there's a Wilfred's—but if there is they should serve marshmallow toast, a niche, but a likely profitable one as then Wilfred's could corner the market on marshmallow toast) and sat down. This time, there was not whoreish (as the casually and competitive amateur and limp cock professionally would label and deduce without much decided effort) Carol in his seat. So Mr. Charles had his coffee and his seat and all circumstance of all probabilities of all his possible worlds were aligned and as per the laws of the quantum Zodiacs Mr. Charles ought to be content. But, as the word 'ought' ought already to have betrayed and minutely as a minnow foreshadowed, he was not. Mr. Charles was not content. For, sitting directly across from him, escaping the bonds and bounds and barbarity of that which is dream-scape,

sat the hung Marvin Langley, sipping what must be Irish coffee, as Irish coffee is more specific and more interesting. And Mr. Charles was certainly interested. Wouldn't you? To see a hung co-worker, limp tongue still hung out and neck all a-crook, sitting across from you at a coffee shop after having ceased to grace dreams and such from far too far a time now. Wouldn't you be, be interested?

By the Left Hand, the Right Does Not Know.

*It has been three full weeks of observation. The subject follows a most routine path. Work. Home. Work. Bar. Bar. But after a couple days there came a deviation. She, this Carol, as you named her to me, would frequent a locale, a residence, that, after some—if I may say so—artful excavation, was revealed to be in the rent of a Mr. Marvin Langley.*

*Now my first instinct was to believe that this Carol was carrying on an illicit affair with Mr. Langley, as one would be quick to deduce. However, it soon came to my keen attention that her relations, of a most sexual nature, were not with Mr. Langley but with the other inhabitant of the aforementioned location. A Miss Sharon Jackson. I came to this conclusion after having observed this Carol visit the mentioned nest during hours under which I, as well as she evidently, was aware that Mr. Langley was not present on the premises.*

*It took little effort thereafter to uncover the identity of that other, truer, individual, the noted Miss Jackson. Now the two would occasionally alter venues to the residence of that Carol, a most rectangular apartment rented under not only the name of the woman in question but also a Mr. Arthur Cole, when the schedules of their respective men leaving the respective locations vacated suited the women best.*

*As instructed, I set about collecting evidence of this most secretive affair as to accomplish the contracted aim of splintering that Carol and Mr. Cole, for whatever end, you, my employer, saw necessary to seek my services. To this end, one morning after Mr. Langley had abandoned his quiet little apartment for a day of labor, I let myself in to that residence in order to find a tell for the affair from Miss Jackson's end to then plant in the apartment of the other woman for Mr. Cole to conveniently uncover later and draw his own, hopefully hasty and correct, conclusions. At first, the apartment was quiet unassuming, with little to nothing of interest. But, behold, as is the vice of many a lover, I found a letter or two, a set of correspondence between the two women, saved, preserved, spared, by Miss Jackson, tucked away, nestled, in-between the cushion and left armrest of a particularly worn and glossy recliner. She could use a lesson or two from an expert in such things, such matters, myself.*

*And, as you may surmise next, I go now to place it in, if I may say so, a quite, quite clever little nook in the apartment of that Carol for Mr. Cole to find at a later date and that will, I assure, produce the desired end and effect.*

*With that, I leave you, employer, with this second to last correspondence between us two, on this matter which I have most heartily enjoyed. You shall hear upon completion. Don't forget the sum agreed upon.*

*In other words,*

*O. Harrington*

Harry O'Callaghan found this letter, as the others penned to him by Mr. Harrington, to be tiresomely long. Much fluff. A species of written pillow. Fluff, fluff, puff. O'Callaghan rose, paced, letter in hand, to the dwindling fire churning away in its brick pit, and burnt the letter.

Unlike Any Other.

It had been a day, a day like any other for Mr. Charles. Pleased that it was as any other and without any noted deviation, he ascended the three

stories, counting the steps, knowing full well how many the sum would work itself out to be (but nonetheless one must be thorough). Already, as each rubber sole of his polished Oxfords kneaded step after step beneath it, Mr. Charles was running through the order of the next day, the next tomorrow, knowing full well what it would amount to. The same like any other.

And this pleased Mr. Charles.

What did not please Mr. Charles, however, was what he found once he reached the third floor, the floor into which he had burrowed himself in for the past few years. Turned to stone, Mr. Charles bore silent witness to the port of his neighbors—they were friendly but distant he liked them—very much ajar with a slender, meager shadow of a man decidedly ejecting himself out from the place where the neighbors Mr. Charles liked so lived and through the wooden tooth of the door. He did not belong there; he was not they. This slender shadow that is. Not pleasurable at all, not. This non-event was leading to a very event feeling sparking, jumper cable snappering, inside of dear, poor Mr. Charles. Like an automaton of fiction, long dusted and dreary and dead, sparked to life, Mr. Charles spouted at the twig of a shade.

“That’s not your apartment.”

This gorgon declaration by the beating automaton petrified and nailed the meager shadow to its place, wedged in-between the out and the in of

hallway and hall. O. Harrington, specialist extraordinaire in the arts of whatever an esteemed employer contracted him to perform, quite expertly, if he may say so himself, contained and wriggled himself back into form before this arrival.

“Just doing a bit of house sitting for the good sir and madam here, see. See they are out of town, you know, and want their treasured little cove here all in order, you know. You see, I’m a friend, a perfect pal, and that’s that.”

“That’s not your apartment.” Mr. Charles did not bite the hook the little shadow cast before him, spitting and splattering it away, to quite the surprise of the aspiring fisherman, who was all too assured of his own prowess to grasp that his ploy, expertly deployed if he might add, fell so short. (A shadow-ghost-ephemeral-incorporeal-smoke non-person cannot make a lie take mater non-non-real form; trust that the logic is there, basically these non-people just aren’t good liars). The two remained as pillars, rumbled and shattered by the tremor of their recent acquaintance, waiting for the other to fall.

“I must call the police,” Mr. Charles declared, to himself as much to his opposition.

“No, no no no; wait, wait.”

O. Harrington, drawing upon another art of his many arts that earned him the employ of so many esteemed employers seeking whatever arts they wished him to perform, plucked himself out from the gape of the doorway and flung his meager self, aiming, expertly so, to grapple with the clanking figure before him that sought to undo his work, his good work for his good employer, so.

Arms locked, the two spun about so that, for but a breath, O. Harrington was in the former position of Mr. Charles, the back of the former now to the stairwell, and the latter now facing his meager compatriot, locked as they were, comrades in arms. But wait. Wait. What was he doing? They were in contact, two, together in touch. This did not please Mr. Charles. No, no no this did more than displease Mr. Charles. This displeasure, no this revulsion, hammered and cobbled the visage of that larger man into a mask it had never quite known before. Brimming, as a glass shining with a pint of beer harvested from the tap, of disgust, Mr. Charles let go of the other man.

This too, just as the foiling of his deception prior, took the most professional shadow of O. Harrington aback. And aback he went; as for a shadow he could muster no greater grip upon the cold construct before him than air could take hold of and whisk away a moss encrusted hill. And so O. Harrington, the expert of hired arts, fell back and back and back, down to his

death. And Mr. Charles remained as a gargoyle atop the stairs on the third floor, a tombstone, none too pleased.

On the Marveled Mountaintop.

Marvin Langley returned to the dreamscape of Mr. Charles that night. After all, he, Marvin, had not said much of anything at the coffee shop. Just appeared, evaporated like drunkenness in the afternoon sun of a music

festival into whatever space was there prior to the hung ghost, and no more. So, naturally, there was not much more to say more on the matter, and it may be more efficient to skip ahead past that, after all, as, naturally, the encounter of a skittish gargoyle and the ethereal of one that held little parallel (damn that turn of phrase again, again, parallel is anything but the same and the like, but that need not be gotten into yet once more) to the prior construct of stone more so in their shared fleshed existence. Not flesh anymore. Nothing is flesh anymore, if one takes out their phone and looks it up. Try it. In sincerity, try it out. A dictionary definition will not tell this, why should it? It would and is much more convenient for all if all are and will be flesh. But they're not. Not flesh that is. This mattered to Mr. Charles, this matter of flesh or no (he shall give a rationale for the extinction of flesh; fret not) within the confines of this dream, that night, this dream, in the scape that is dream of Mr. Charles, wherein Marvin Langley appeared to him once more.

They were not—and this be the grandest and most grandeur inducing deviation and facet—in the childhood bedroom of the man that ever, ever, introduced himself with the article of 'Mr.' They were not there. They're somewhere else. And yes, the change in verb tense matters. But only for that one line. Were. Now are. Now were again. Just did a little time jump; like Billy Pilgrim. But this is no Pilgrim and this is no Dresden and this is no

moonscape. This is, and was, dreamscape. So jumping in time is no worry here in dreamscape so give no worries, whittle away worries like a middle schooler, getting his first and second pimples, whittling a twig into what he thinks would be a knife but it can't cut shit, so he learns that's how things just go, cutting down into something that can't even cut it, whittled down into the years and he can't even cut it anymore like the twig turned ED knife (cause knives are fairly phallic so that works) from his middle school days when he received his first and second zits. Like that; don't worry.

And, curiously, as far as curiosity is allowed to go on its traveling leash, Mr. Charles neither had worry nor whittled, to a point, concern that he was somewhere quite else in the dreamscape with the hung and dead, but not, co-worker. So, like any person without worry or concern he asked, simply put simply:

“Where am I?”

“Simply put, I know I'm dead. You don't have to tell me. I'm not like any or all or whichever of the pox like Trinity of ghosts and phantasms of Past and Future and Present that visit ole Mr. Scrooge. Because you're no miser like him. No, for a miser must be miserable. And you are not the miserable one I am I am miserable because you won't let me go let me go you keep me in Purgatory. And not that bullshit one Dante flirts with. His Inferno is more like

the real Purgatory. He just sugarcoated it all so his work would sell. See, all was commercial. Even then.” Marvin Langley had righted his head, eyes coalesced to where they ought to be, and no longer hovered. His tongue still hung out of the mouth of the dead man, though. As his feet reverse alighted next to Mr. Charles, that somewhere else that was wherever they were came into focus, like turning the singular knob on one half a binocular eyepiece. They stood on a mountaintop. Like Moses. But neither were burning. Neither were a bush. Or was it Abraham? It was, was it not? All this shall be yours and your seed shall sow the nations of this Earth. Paraphrased. That’s why quotation marks would not only be unnecessary but superfluous. None are academics here; we can forgive each other a certain degree of laxity. Academia, the bloated and curled hermit crab herself, was in fact what the pair, the paired men in this dreamscape, was looking out at. Not a flowing expanse, like ruffled bed sheets, of Jordan and all that green that shall turn to dust, as promised, and turn verdant once more, as promised, as the Jordan was promised not by Jordan but by the godfather of Jordan. Just a hermit crab, the very image of one, curled in its shell, frozen and gluttonous, not moving, having been overfed decades ago. That was that which Marvin Langley and Mr. Charles were looking out at from their not-Moses

mountaintop. The bloated and frozen and rigor mortis hermit crab, not of, but, that is Academia.

“Where am I?” Mr. Charles asked again.

Langley continued. “She doesn’t speak anymore, not to me. That’s why I brought you here. Or, rather, you had me bring you here to bring me to see me and you bringing each other to be brought to her to bring her that which needs to be brought but we didn’t bring a grocery list so how shall we feed her?”

“Where am I?” Again.

“I did not name her, you know,” Marvin sauntered on in word while feet remained encased in metaphorical cement, like Houdini thrown into a river if he had actually done that magic trick, “as Academia is so, so shallow. And pedantic. Shallow and pedantic. I’m probably quoting that from something I saw on TV that has nothing to do with Academia. But since it has nothing, really, to do with Academia, I don’t have to use quotation marks or citations whether MLA or Chicago or whatever city they’ll name such a superfluous and indulgent practice like citation forms next.”

Speaking of next, what happened next is what is of real importance here. The rest, and rather the rest of the dreams dreamed in day-dream turned night-dream dreamscape led to this one, little, wee little point. Like the point

of a nano-scapel, if they—they the powers that be in engineering and nano-science, if those are fields that are pertinent—have invented that yet. Sharp enough to make one cut on one level lower than that which may be seen. And so, what happened next? What happened next, next, is that, that, Mr. Charles woke up.

“Where am I?”

From Down.

“You have something on your face.”

This was the first time Mr. Charles had heard the tenant two floors down, an old widow, speak.

“I presume you’re looking through the keyhole, yes?”

“Yes I am, boy. Don’t trust those glass things in the door. Can look both ways if you know how.”

Mr. Charles did not know how to do this. Mr. Charles thought it odd that this tenant—neighbor could work too but not really immediate being two floors and all—would not open the door. She had said the first word is all, looming in its moth-dusted boom else he would not have heard it from the hall.

“Are you going to unlock the door?”

“It’s unlocked.”

“Shall I open it for you? Are you unable? Are you too short?”

As soon as Mr. Charles said this, now standing a forearm’s breadth from the door (it did indeed have the looking glass usually in the middle removed and had something more resembling a nut or a worn cog in its place), he realized he had been absurd. Of course she could reach. Even if she were a pygmy.

Miss Salzburg could taste the odor of the neighbor’s, that particularly particular neighbor, newly applied cologne of faux pas and gritted a dentured smile. She had him; she had him in the hunt now.

Minutes pass. Probably. Neither looked at watch or clock or any other clock keeper of temporal measurements. Not even a cuckoo clock. Not that

there was a cuckoo clock even there. Just that even the temptation of looking at a cuckoo clock would not have been sufficient. Since cuckoo clocks are tempting after all.

Miss Salzburg gathers that all the gathered ingredients for this first feint of the hunt have marinated long enough. He was still outside, not willing to make a mistake again either by leaving or by speaking and this she knew oh she knew from all those long years of hunting. It might as well be reflex by now—hunting that is—and like an opiate or methamphetamine though Miss Salzburg had never sampled either but having someone barbed, subject to another's will, must be the same. And to take the parallel she imagines one more step she cannot help but turn and slunk against the door she needs not to watch she knows what is happening just let the meth and opioids take hold, crystalize in membrane and synapse; why did she ever give any of this up why not tug play and pull at others.

Miss Salzburg continues her self-administered and self-produced drug trip on the inner side of the door. For likely minutes. Can't cut the ride short.

Can't cut much of anything short (put that on a motivational calendar with polar bears high-fiving pandas or something of equivalent nauseating material value) these days but eventually one must come down (as that other, more established, cliché) and Miss Salzburg was coming down so—

So now, now, is the time Miss Salzburg turns the door knob, turns it and does not open it. It is a check, check to check as if the pulse of the cardiac arrest patient but Miss Salzburg is still high—a little high like smoking a gram of whatever as a gram will more than do and waking up midday the next day still high and craving that fun onion powder snack-chip—and judges. Judges like putting the back of the hand (as palm will sear more likely—skin is thinner—and is an inaccurate thermometer) when checking the door handle in a burning house to know if fire is having its meal on the other side specifically. Judges; judges and pushes and—

Empty hall. Empty.

What the hell. Mr. Charles had left, minutes, ago.

He had less interest in the wiles of non-persons than the non-supposition of the non-Miss non-Salzburg. What the hell did she non-expect?

Now to think of it, what the hell did Mr. Charles expect?

### To Miss Understanding.

Arthur Cole had found the letter. (Assumed; likely; most, most likely found). Yet, in its planting, the expert O. Harrington could not help a bit of dramatic flourish, and mercy. Ripping off all identification of the recipient, for the letter was meant for Miss Jackson, and but leaving only the sender, Miss Carol, Harrington had sought to spare the other woman. Why drag her down too? Base knowledge of an affair would be more than sufficient to accomplish the task so judiciously contracted out by his esteemed employer. But he would have to add, add a little something. So the master Harrington played the role of an anonymous tipper, having scribbled on the back some vague clues (can't remember what) as to still lead Cole on a hunt, but a blind one at

that in which the likelihood of sniffing out and felling Miss Jackson would be as slim as the meager shadow who penned the tips.

But Mr. Harrington had not reckoned with the formidable deductive prowess of the policeman now pacing, driving a gulley down into the floorboards of his rectangular apartment as a snowplow through the deepest drift. One name and one name only was birthed in the empty mind of Arthur Cole, and found purchase, feeding in his cranial womb. Charles. Mr. Charles.

You see, as Cole, rattling like an overworked boiler, chugged along in his apartment, his detective powers had swarmed to conclusions from the vague (damn still can't remember; hope they're not important) tips, all but dismissing, blind, to the contents of the letter itself, intent solely on working these wormy clues from their delicious hooks.

Must be *someone she sees every day*. Must be at work; that's the only constant in her day. Mark, hit.

*Must be someone you would not expect*. Must be a man—arrow wavering—that I wouldn't think her attracted to.

*Must be someone close*. Close, physically close. Close to us close to me as the tips are given to me. Who would I not expect that lives close to us that she works with? Charles, Mr. Charles. (See where non-thoughts from non-persons lead: to such non-sense; he can't be serious). And to that cul-de-sac

the labors of Cole's expansive detective powers drove him, charging him a fixed fare, knowing its passenger had cash in hand.

It takes days to get the timing right. In the time in between, Cole took to the metaphorical (as one must put in a good metaphor here and then) watering pump of beverage. See, Arthur Cole had not been much of a drinker. Something with his job and alcohol didn't mix. Probably because corpse fluids, which one can see from time to time, just brim and brine their way out of the bodies that were and are and are to be no longer, looked and smelled and sounded like liquor. Liquor does have a sound. Take a bottle of tequila or gin out to the sands, shove it in said sand like a champagne bottle into one of those ice buckets at fancy restaurants, and whisper Bob Dylan or Chance the Rapper or Dizzie Gillespie into it. Science—if such a thing is thought of thoroughly yet—could very well state that that's the why to coax and coo liquor into speaking. Could say that. Has not. Has not not. So could. Do that and the voice of whisper climbs its way back up those lyrics and climbs into the technical term for earholes and whispers them back to the person, speaking backwards. So liquor is like an echo, filling a space with a sound and a voice that it did not create. Echo is such a fucking mooch.

So, as the professional detective he was, Arthur Cole traditionally did not like liquor as those backwards whisperings tend to muddle and fuddle

with his focus on his work. Like solving murders. Or planning them. Not that he had. Or will. Arthur Cole, let the record show, has neither nor will never murder someone. But he planned one and one murder only. Won't be a straight zig to guess whom. Mr. Charles of course. That's not too sharp of a volte. Perhaps even disappointing. But days spent imbibing (fun word, should walk up and whisper that in each and every ear in a bar next time) liquors of all differing colors and voices will do that. Have someone dream up a disappointing murder for a reason who knows why. Yeah, could say jealousy or vengeful pageantry. But science has not proven that either. Has not. Has not not. So one could say either whichever way. But motives don't matter, not even here.

The imbibing of alcohol happened all over the place. Alone. Socially. In the tub with no water in it. All over the place. As Arthur Cole needed to cast a thorough net of his alcohol imbibing effort for it to work, for it to plan the murder he would never commit upon Mr. Charles. The details don't matter, like motives, not even here. One can make up the made up murder oneself as it will be not more nor no less real than the made up one made up by Cole. As it's a non real thing thought up by a non person (if you asked Mr. Charles, regardless of how or whichever way he liked Arthur Cole, which he did in that removed sort of neighborly way) than it matter even less, being one degree

more non real. So Arthur Cole imbibed and imbibed and planned and planned and it was all just empty puke like every time he turned to yakking over those days, just dry heaves, as Arthur Cole was empty, the liquor having clung to every cell and hidden within his vacant veins.

Fortunately for Arthur Cole, the days of Mr. Charles are no empty ones. After some excellent effort, Cole mapped out the daily schedule, void of much in the way of deviations, of that other man with a fair measure of success. Work, walk, work. One day the other man, the other man named Charles, deviated, sure. To a coffee shop, floating in there and ordering a coffee and leaving. Suspect, suspect indeed. It had to be suspect because Charles was the prime suspect of Arthur Cole and, befitting of suspectry, suspects act suspect and so a suspect stopping by a coffee shop and ordering coffee and sitting and imbibing coffee and leaving is suspect. Especially because the thing that one ought to really be imbibing (as imbibing only, as asserted, really only has it place placed next to a more particular act) is alcohols of various forms and colors and voices. So, to make up for the suspect acts of the suspect, Cole decided to imbibe more that way, to even the imbibing scale, as his investigation continue on and up, imbibing more and more.

And that, that is today, for today, now, he would face Charles as the latter came home from the day's labor. But first to the liquor cabinet; find the

bottle. The empty gut of Arthur Cole needs to be filled with something, after all.

“Evening, you son of a bitch.”

“E-excuse me?”

This was now the second interruption immediately prior to the awaited return to his notched nook that Mr. Charles has suffered in recent memory. The last, with that dreadful and dark little man—which Mr. Charles had to hide, though he was no expert in this art, of course as any inquiry into the matter would spawn, whether to guilt or misunderstood innocence, quite the slew of unpleasant deviations from the usual program—had revealed itself more plainly to the gargoyle, having now resumed its perch from the last encounter, petrified in its stupefaction.

“Don’t ‘excuse me.’ You know what I’m talking about. I found out. Bastard, I know what you did.” The draughts of mediocre liquor were now filling more than the gut of Arthur Cole; they brimmed over and flowed and gushed as a torrent galloping downstream after a hard rain to wave aside a beaver’s dam, filling every hole and vein and nerve.

He. How could. He knows.

These non-person do have their moments, even if of non-moments their non-actions do produce these odd opposite of non-resultant events; confusing

sure just give it a minute to think it through after the narrative here is played out; there will be time for that; there will be time.

Mr. Charles did not know which forked folly to follow. Admit or continue to lie. Yes, he had carried out an evil deed, quite evil if you ask some people.

No people or persons or otherwise individuals to ask here, though. Real ones at least. Besides Mr. Charles. But it does little could to ask oneself for one's own opinion.

But, as to the matter immediately at hand, admitting to the ill act would but bring about more unpleasant deviations. Yet Mr. Charles also liked Arthur Cole. And Carol. But also Arthur Cole. And he did not want to sully the arrangement and tarnish the silent agreement of noninterference the two sovereignties had held for so long.

Stone chipping for the first time, though only to flake away the faltering plaster bonded to his face, Mr. Charles moved that portion of his being and muscles for the first time in this encounter.

“Yes. I did it. I killed the man who came out of your apartment some time ago. A Mr. Harrington by the credentials borne in his personal effects. I admit to it.”

The face of Arthur Cole was not empty; it bent back and forth and round again, the flood in his veins charging forth into a formerly unrequited anger throughout brow and cheek and eye.

“You, you think you can pull me around like that? Use that fucking case against me? You can’t get out of this, Charles, you won’t. I don’t even care how you know about fucking Harrington but you haven’t killed shit.”

Arthur Cole had taken several steps forward, still in his socks—he had not factored shoes into his plan—and emptied the gulf between the two men.

“And now I don’t want to hear shit from your mouth. I’m going to fuck you up for every time you fucked her you...”

Mr. Charles did not hear the rest. A bowling ball, conveniently attached to a limb, Mr. Charles could not distinguish, could not note, which limb, of the brimming Cole found the singular pin of a human head at the end of its lane. And it did so again. And again. And its cousin joined in the sport. Strike after strike after strike down the bowling alley, for Arthur Cole, when a full man, was an expert bowler. So much so that he and his twin bowling balls felled their pin before long, and so the shoeless and mismatching socked legs, most conveniently attached to hammers of sorts, took over the cracking of the formerly stone pin.

Dark. It was dark, but not night, to the eyes of Mr. Charles, lying down, curled as if returned in a beat to the womb from which he sprouted, when he could faintly make out the shimmering shadow of the neighbor he had so liked lurch back into the hole, gate slamming down. This shadow is fatter than the one that fell down the stairs. Mr. Charles thought this. This will certainly cause, and is, a most unpleasant deviation. Mr. Charles thought this too. And Mr. Charles thought no more that day.

Wait for him to wake.

In The Unwoken Mind.

In the mean, mean

/time of this slow, slow crossing

/of the median

/between 'thought no more'

/and 'wake,' Mr. /Charles did not dream.

/We are done

/with dreams here

/as dreams are

/done with,

/simply put.

/Rather.

Up.

Wake; wake.

### As If It Were For Him.

O'Callaghan sat in his study. Only a pretentious man would have a study. But that's a non-non-judgment on the pretensions of a non-man so it can slide. He even had one of those decanters for his scotch which his son would drink out of bit by bit as he smuggled jokingly small amounts of that booze to his peers so they could get the late middle school equivalent of drunk. He, the son, just marked the original fill line of the decanter, took a

wee bit, and filled it back up with water. As suggested, he was in middle school at the time. So not all too bright.

O'Callaghan assumed his son learned that trick from some book or play he once read. Probably a third rate one that his teacher peddled as a new age classic that'll likely be forgotten before the decade runs out. That's why he kept the real stuff elsewhere. In the globe. It opened up into a bar you just slide the top back and it opened to a bar.

As stated, O'Callaghan's son wasn't too bright as that hiding spot would not have been hard for, let's say, a potato animated Frankenstein style to find. Ridiculous example but serves the point. Just as the point of letting his son get away with stealing frankly shit booze from a glass decanter—wasn't even the crystal one as that one was in the globe too—was the point of keeping from taking O'Callaghan's time in form of actively interacting with his son.

Especially as the older boss man had very, very important business to attend to. That's where the utility of the study comes in. Good for business. The one wall to his back as he sat in one of two comfort-enveloping chairs that swallowed one up was a barrier of books. From Chaucer to King. And he had read about half of half of them. Read half of them half way through and never finished that is.

So the chivalric decorations on that woodenly ribbed wall would serve a half decorative purpose being half read as they are as O'Callaghan attended to his real business. Reading wasn't real business anyhow. O'Callaghan, taking a ginger sip from his glass with two cubed stones, thinks Chaucer or Milton would agree with him on that. Especially Milton, having the inability thereof. And Chaucer just adds to that assertion carrying more weight.

So, dallying done with but dally-dally must be attended to to mirror the dally in O'Callaghan's mind, being as this was his fourth glass, being as his was not a man of much robust constitution, being as he was a light weight bitch. With that attended to be sure, Carol was at the center of the business, what O'Callaghan was sifting through liquid colored Sahara to see with oculus proficiency at the bottom of the decanter.

He swishes his booze around the glass. Takes a sniff. Then a sip. As if it were wine. Doesn't know how to treat the proper booze properly. Doesn't know how to treat his business properly.

For he is impatient. For O'Callaghan resolved to act on the business mulled over in his cave of halves tomorrow. For he had run dry of patience.

### Between the Two Nots.

Salzburg never cared for her. And Carol knew this. But Carol, as individuals such as Carol are want to do, would not help but want to help the plastic bag reading “Thank You For Shopping With Us” human that was and is and shall ever be Miss Salzburg into the elevator with her groceries.

“Thank you, dearie.”

Bitch. She doesn't mean it. Probably doesn't even need that cane of hers as it's steel tipped and so no good traction so just for this tap tap tapping she's doing now as they ride up the elevator. Carol looks at the elevator ceiling. Ding. Ding.

Ding.

“Dearie, we’re here. Oh how this generation gets lost in their daydreams sometimes...”

Carol, just peering over the two loaded bags she bore, tottered out of the elevator after the waddling and steel tipped cane tapping Miss Salzburg, like a duckling that imprinted on a rooster so not terribly far off but not right. A rooster is too wrinkly, that’s the part that’s off as there is no or little documentation exists of wrinkled ducks.

She’s jingling the keys. She knows damn well which it is and how to get it into the lock she’s just fucking with me as always. Carol thought this.

I’m trying I’m trying I’m trying. Miss Salzburg actually was trying, panicking almost. The damn key...the key...it wouldn’t. Go in go on in already no the key and that just reverberates off the lock like a slivered and not weighted arrow lopping off in failure, departing its meeting with a chivalric coat of steel. Not a very warm coat. But Miss Salzburg was arming up, as trying to get a key into a lock with Parkinson’s helping out gets the kiln going. And Carol was heating up from having to hold those grocery bags full of canned prunes and goose liver in front of her face.

One of those cores heating, like the heat of a core of a planet can be an exoplanet need not be, need be remembered. But that shall not have to be an

exercise as Carol's little impatience, as her more immediate neighbor may attest to, could cook a meal right quick, if such language makes any sense.

No one gave a shit if Salzburg had Parkinson's anyhow.

### In the Waking.

"Charles. Mr. Charles?"

Flutter, flutter little eyelashes, away as newly hatched butterflies like monarchs when hatching and let see. Come to see like in any whichever film these days when a character need come back into consciousness so the audience jumps into his or her eyes. This is how Mr. Charles came to again.

Fluttering and with Carol, bent over him, nudging, nudging, kid at a dead swallow poking nudging, to get him to flutter into wakefulness. Carol. It is Carol. Yes that is her name.

Mr. Charles must have uttered a slow joint crack type of groan as some stimulus seems to have given that bending and nudging woman a renewed vigor and purpose. Nudge. Nudge turned into nudge nudge nudge nudge.

Wait, wait. Wait Carol he isn't ready yet. Your neighbor on the ground needs a moment more before waking back to flutter his stone wings on his way again. He ought to be left for a moment.

Fine. If Carol will not listen then they both, her and Charles, shall be left both there as it is perfectly fine that they be left there. Not ideal. But workable. One can always bring a rock to the lake to skip if one cannot bring the lake to be skipped over the rock.

Exactly, doesn't make sense. It would make more sense to be able to take Carol away from here and leave Mr. Charles to lie for a bit longer but no there aren't good ears on that one, no not one ounce of a good ear. On any of them really.

So as the couple, one hammered beyond even a nail's belief and a nail has seen all the hammering hammering can amount to, and the other just rubbing the former's back as if it'll help expedite the process to any semblance of sleep sooner, as two bulimics trying to alternate helping each other expel yet more food stuffs, as such were Carol and Mr. Charles left there on the floor outside of the separate places they happened to separately reside within.

Of Consideration.

It was starting to mount. Pressure, that is. Arthur Cole had been on the case—fantastic lingo—for a week and little had been produced beyond the corpse still resting in the morgue, and the corduroyed interviewee, and the note, and the old lady interview, and the scene of the crime. Yes, it had been breezed over. Arthur Cole had been able to discern the location of the crime, the murder if one must insist on attaching that crusty title of a monikered lapel label. No need to backtrack too much. Just to the main points then:

*Carol had left Miss Salzburg at last in the latter's apartment with the newly delivered groceries and was heading to the staircase. She sees a trace of a blotch in the corner. She doesn't remember dropping anything. She knocks on Miss Salzburg's door. Miss Salzburg of course had not locked her door, though it doesn't take Carol too long to figure this out. When approached, the enthroned Miss Salzburg, suspiciously so as she seemed to have found her way to her throne-chair-display with a little too much rapidity, says nothing was dropped. Carol goes to look again. Miss Salzburg appears behind the younger woman's shoulder as the more youthful lady is kneeling down to bring some sort of interrogation to the splotch of a trace blotch. Again, with too much rapidity. The older loomer remarks that, that is not a food blotch. But rather...bend down all the way all the way to all fours brushing Carol aside and on all fours bending down like a wildebeest lapping the edge of a watering pool and lick, Miss*

*Salzburg licks and likes...and declares, but rather, it is but rather blood. Carol doesn't move, yoga class kneel position frozen. Carol turns as Miss Salzburg turns her door in on itself again to stand not locked again but closed, having gotten inside, likely to her throne again, so very rapidly. And Carol calls the police straight away.*

There that wasn't so bad. Not too painful of a backtrack. Now to the original point, whatever it was.

## On Vein Bright.

Oh, please, the previous point just one sentence previously mentioned was not so far back as to warrant this sort of jump.

Ridiculous.

Anyhow, with all facilities gathered once more, the pressure was mounting on Arthur Cole, having found the scene of the crime and having produced the corpse still resting in the morgue and having found the note and having endured the old lady interview and having spoken with the corduroyed interviewee. Having these things amounting to his last week, Cole thought these havings were not too much to have at all as they were amounting to having only having pressure by each discovery's weight amounting to pressure on Cole's back having already being weighed down. For the weight which fills not weighs heavily down on the empty, pressure weight filling not and just turning in on itself to weigh more down.

That was all these havings filled Cole with. Pressure.

Pressure to be rid of these.

Nonetheless, work did need to be done, little matter whether it filled or emptied or did either or neither halfway, whichever way. So like the filling of a morgue tin dresser with a body, almost folded neatly and put in. Like socks. The corpse was socks folded in on itself and put into the drawer, sure, with some intentionality but with absent mind. The body, in that regard, is, obviously, less folded but one can still see the creases. Toe knuckles. Elbow hinges. Hip scars—rapid growth.

So Arthur Cole moved to work his work way ever forward to the last means any officer of the law finds any reasonable hope in a case that just resists, and resists and resists. Introspection, the key, of course. But no, not Cartesian or Stoic or even Marxian, whatever that tertiary sort would appear to take the form of. No, rather, the introspective of the modern day. The introspection that finds its queue and enlivening impulse from external-spection, whatever the term were to be, if any. Figure it through; it makes entire sense. See how much a face is painted; see how naked forms are draped over with drapery of all of avert styles and colors and smells; see how the smile is the most acceptable expression as it is perhaps the most external being that it is an exaggerated, a large movement that is, of the face, the face being central. And the hazed eyes, rolled this way and that and not grey-

misted like that of droned men, of a man down to sleep in a morgue. The only close comparison really then between a drowned man and a morgue sleeping man is that both have or had cots of a sorts, whether cloth or cool stainless. Swing, swing, on the stoic hinges that are closed, each rocked to sleep by waves or by increased company.

So if expression of all types is turning to an externality, why not introspection even then? So that's what Arthur Cole, as he left the precinct on this particular night, sought to do, and sought to pursue.

Now, what is the heuristic guess that Cole is to now pursue? He wishes something corporeal; he wishes and elects to pursue it in the evening; he wishes not to inform any or all of whereto or wherefore he goes. Sounds like he goes a-prostituting, no? He very well could as Arthur Cole, for once, having his wallet full of cash, change from some larger purchase of what he does not know. But Arthur Cole, as any individual, neither perceives nor observes himself proper as other would be wont to do. And so, he does not do what the observable thing to do would be, and instead of wriggling his unfilled flesh in an attempt to fill one that, frankly, has no real need to be filled, Arthur Cole goes, instead, to get coffee.

And the minute detail as to where this Arthur Cole goes to get coffee, in lieu of a protestorial pursuit, does indeed follow more of that which an

observer or perceiver would expect and find fittingly congruent and a near matter of course, is that the locale to which Cole goes to get coffee is the one and very same that Mr. Charles was detailed stopping by much, much earlier. Let's say, it's the only one close that's still open. That should satisfy any question of conceivability, of why. But why need why? For it matters less to which coffee shop Cole goes—so this one being more of a convenience than anything—and more that he did not go a-prostituting. Plenty, anyhow is done without much reason behind it and so a non-person would, logically, only need a non-reason to do a non-thing or even a thing, if they could. Makes, perfect sense, absolutely clear as Tahoe. Mark tone in previous sentence. Mark it well.

To point, veered away from now and likely again, is that Cole goes to a coffee shop and doesn't do anything, at all, else. As it may be from a time to another time, that which is not done may amount, and even usurp, that which is done.

A skeleton crew mans this ship. Just one set of skeleton-attached femurs still work this coffee shop at this hour, whatever this hour may be. Matters not. This pang of near guilt for disturbing the otherwise graveyard like emptitude of the shop whispered to Arthur Cole as he entered the shop. The door even clanged its chime for God's sake. As such, he was very much an

intruder, an intruder into this, this space with a near hallowed aire, at this, this hour. Cole had always been a man of stature than one may denote as a slight slouch forward of the shoulder, thin as the elbow bones of a bird that is, and this was no less true now. Well by no means a contemporary Quasimodo, Cole could certainly have been perceived as a man of decent height and not more so of the poise of a deflating balloon, the first of the legion at a child's birthday party, if he would only find a way to pop and prop those shoulders back. If only. Matters less. And if only he would shave more or less often than one every other week he would have something either more or less than a near perpetual patched beard, neither full nor bare shaven, empty of the professional or rugged virtues of either, to whichever such virtues may be assigned.

Another late physical portrait, and many more are wanting in fleshing out perhaps. But so it is often that such things come about not when perhaps warranted but when useful. Note the difference. After all, there is the danger that a character description too late runs the risk of clashing with the pre-painted inner piece woven by act not appearance. Yet, why do the literary sciences say this? Are words that clash, that conflict, that undo, to be feared? Is mankind to tremble at the notion of strife? Was not that race built upon rubble and ash of all that apish locust came into contact with? Was Darwin

not correct wherein competition for resources and mating rights and fucking just for pleasure are concerned?

Perhaps not the last one of that trio from the last sentence. But perhaps, perhaps again, that is why promiscuity for pleasure cuts the cuckolded, if applicable, so deeply. It doesn't fit into the necessary; fucking as opposed to reproduction is not needed for the continuation for the species. Note the difference. But it is for the individual, that much is sure and none are excluded from this. So the species is in conflict with the desires of the individual. Freud would pop a boner at this, too, that old atheist rising to much, it would seem.

The point of this pointed point is that such things hurt and seethe, as they do. For, see, if Arthur Cole were aware of indiscretions, he would not be in a coffee shop as the harm fell into that third category and so then it would be possible that he would go out a-prostituting or trying to fill not his gut not his liver not his not, his whole entire self, with booze of every strain and breed that may be brought down from a shelf. Those seem to be sort of reasonable response, and very charged one, emotionally so, like neurons during the process of channels opening and closing, sending their current message along their suspiciously flora resembling structures. Thusly—here came that word again—if those pursuits would denote an emotional charge, wound up like

Ford Model T's, and Arthur Cole was not pursuing such pursuits then the act of going to a coffee shop, excluded from those other two, denotes, as denoting was mentioned, a lack of emotion. So, the empty Arthur Cole, normally trying to fill, was not even trying to fill himself, as he was devoid of charge it would seem even about this, about the case, which he rather seems to wish to empty himself of and flush out. Precisely, then, flushing out. As it is known that coffee tends to make a person piss more.

But it's hard to piss when there is little to no water in the system, as Arthur Cole was currently of that condition as he pre-mature autumn leaf fluttered down, but faster than those of later weeks as there was still some semblance of useful life therein, onto the table with a chair with its back to the wall. Certainly would have been a poor state to go out a-prostituting or drinking in as dehydration makes for poor performances in the variables that are required by both of those.

So, again, as he sat down, slouching over his cup, 12oz *precisely*, of coffee, he bent, near willowy, almost to drown in his cup. Deflating, deflating is what it was. Not the case and not the cup of coffee but the place and the time and the person. The person behind the coffee counter, that is. Sure, Arthur Cole did not know him, but he knew the look the last among the

baristas cast his way. Leave, I'm about to close down, what the hell are you doing here, go.

*What the hell are you doing here.*

That look. And where had Arthur Cole seen that look before? No, no flashback. No, no memory. Only the slim and shady reflection of his visage in the coffee held captive within the cup he was presently bent over.

*What the hell...*

The was the kind of wood that feels like plastic. That's how much lacquer it had on it; it must have dripped of the stuff. Cole wanted nothing more to dig his nails, as into wax, into this plastic-wood table as to hold on, hold on to something as he knew nothing about what the

*...Hell...*

that's what he had been being put through, pure and simple. Sure, not very descriptive, for who has been to hell and back? As the saying goes, as the saying goes. Arthur Cole had not met such a man so he just had to infer from the facts, a once and only now application of his detective utility belt, as great as the Great Detective, as The Bat, as Batman. But he looked more like Bruce Wayne after the *Breaking the Bat* (paraphrasing title of course) storyline, in which Bane breaks the back of the bat and so that once champion of Gotham and fighter of crime end up in a wheelchair. One sort of needs a back to fight

crime, as a superhero must. And now, then, if the parallel—which is not actually parallel as the saying ‘parallel’ is demonstrative of anything but similarity or congruity as may have been already explored within—is to hold, what is the object that is to be the Bane in the life of Arthur Cole? He sure did not know. And that made it all the worse, naturally as the saying goes. For would it not be more terrifying to wake up paralyzed from the mid-back down, not knowing how or who or what or when or why, than waking up in that condition, already knowing all those things? Would not the person dropped into that position out of a life totally other prior be like the classical amnesiac waking up in the middle of things?

Though, it may be supposed that some function knowledge and comprehension of Batman and the connective substance to grasp that which has not only just escaped the perspiring breath of the spoken voice, but also the mind of Arthur Cole (of course minds are accessible, none, in any world or non-world or any of the territory all the so ever in between are exempt from having his or her or whatever other pronoun is now appropriate head/mind jumped into) as he was thinking this in just this moment, thinking of himself likening to the Bat, that is. Absurd, as the saying goes. Sayings can be one word, after all.

Yet, Arthur Cole as the Bat, though far, far, less wealthy, goes beyond the surface mentioning of they both holding variously respectable titles of 'detective,' their application thereof that craft being of two pronouncedly differing expressions. It goes beyond that, the detective, as the saying about such sayings goes. Beyond as a matter of one factor, and one factor in particular. But to just jump and get to that in exposition would deprive much of the fun of its fun. So if it, the conjunction, may already or is yet to be seen, wonderful. One may suppose it matters little, as it is just Arthur Cole after all and a continually emptying non-person character can't be all too pivotal or central, can he?

As much as Arthur Cole enjoyed this internal back and forth, to whatever and whichever extent it followed the trajectory of the words uttered prior, there were other things and matters and proposals to tend to. Principally, the proposal of his body to actually, in fact, drink the coffee that he had been drooped, like a piece of dirty laundry over a chair that the former wearer tries oh tries to internally convince may be worn one more time, over for whatever and whichever amount of time now. After all, coffee must be drunk, regardless of the drunkenness inherent to the drinker. In fact, actually, drinking of the more colloquial sort must be one of the prime pillars upon which the coffee industry rests, as a hungover person or litter or personages

born from hungover-dom naturally and, seeming, instinctly gravitate towards that black, oh darkening black, ichor of water liquid that is changed, in its essential composition, by the introduction of that bean mushed pulver. Yes, coffee must be drunk, and so certainly the coffee to be drunk must be drunk by Arthur Cole, as none other is reasonable to assume the duty of drinking that which must be drunk right now other and Arthur Cole.

And so Arthur Cole took, took his sip. And his sip, his sip, went like this:

It quivered beneath. Prima Nocte. Or however the saying goes for socially sanctioned rape in the Middle Ages, or whenever such things actually came to pass. That was not how it quivered. No...and not like an autumn leaf, as utilized as that expression may be, either. No, it quivered something quite else, quite other. One can imagine it, the slight outtake of breath before the intake of liquid of substance and dependent sustenance on whatever it may be so imbibed. Disrupts the surface; a bad practice. One disturbs that which lies underneath, naturally. And while there are no fish or any sort (hopefully) below this ichor sheen, it is more principle than practice to develop an allergy to disturbing this or that thing.

With the surface wavering, lips draw near. And near still. The waves calm out, cancelling each other as functions of wave are wont to do. Sort of

like an inhalation of the liquid, maintaining the equilibrium by inhaling the exhalation that parted between the slow sliver parted lips. Trading breaths. Breath of air for breath for mind alternations. After all, is that not the desire here? If Cole had gone a-prostituting or drinking and familiarizing himself with the finer points of alcoholisms, that would be mind altering as well. But they are moot, not like the archaic meeting form, but done, over, irrelevant moot. Such a form of a word that mirrors its linguistic functions. *Moot*. There is a finality in it, as if after slapping this label on a vein of conversation one must either bold or socially blind to venture a continuation of that which has been condemned to mootness.

Yet, the moment here, the actualizable moment, is anything but moot. After all, if it were moot, what good would there be in its exploration? Little, to be sure, as the saying goes. And Cole, within this time, had chugged down the coffee—all of all in one go—just like...

...that.

Yet, all the rest cannot be swallowed down to the same “n-th” degree as the rapid slurp up of coffee. And by the rest, it ought to be evident as this point. No? Exposition then, but only one sentence, one word even.

Carol.

Arthur Cole sat there, at that table in that coffee shop with his back to that wall, unmoving and with empty cup in his normally empty hand, for a good twenty odd minutes more, unmoving. He knew the entire, the whole extent of it, of the time, just after slurping down his drink, that the barista had eyes trained, with an avian intensity, on him, naturally. It may be time to close up. It may be past due for a customer to be sitting here any longer. Could be any of these, and yet the concern of Arthur Cole remained empty, empty as he was in all but thought. But thoughts are inaccessible; thoughts are vapor. Cole himself stand a better chance, as the saying goes, drinking down what was non-left in his coffee cup than any other could penetrate the bulwarks, cracked open like a bivalve recently ransacked of its fleshier inner trove, of another's mind.

But, see, Arthur Cole is coming back to himself; he has wandered back to his innerness. He has stood up. He has walked out the door. He has left his coffee cup.

To quell the wailing of the orphaned, abandoned, little 12oz cup, so intimately met with its adoptive father only to be drained of all vitality and left to rot, the barista took pity, walked up to the sniffing cup, and basketball shot it into the far trash bin. 3 points.

Cole was all too unsure of where one might be able to wander next. The bothering that has bothered him sat on his shoulder, as obnoxious as a pirate's parrot and as persistent in lingering there like a drunk t last call that swears just one more drink and he'll be good he'll be good but he never is good no never. So, like any good owner of troublesome pet, Arthur Cole just proceeded to take his pet bothering on a further walk, and went to the park.

Central Regal Park did not have gates that close, despite its extensive gothic imitation fencing. Kind of like Central Park in New York. But this is not New York it is a non-place and while Central Regal Park is then, by deduction, a non-park it needed to be named, naturally with a non-name as non-places cannot carry names but still need to be named (an essential distinction between having a name and the process of being name) as too few of the places in this non-city bear non-names by some sort of lack of foresight. Or just people don't notice the names of places; perhaps these peoples herein don't. But Central Regal Park was different; one could not, by no means of fortitude in the realm of the wills, fail to note the non-name so named of the non-place place. The words were enumerated in their lettral form in a brassin arch above the principle entrance, flanked on either side by those imitation gothic stretches of fencing.

## **Central Regal Park**

Just like that. Larger,  
of course, naturally.

Well, artificially, more like it, yet that may be a moot point or no or/and Arthur Cole had already past underneath that arch, filling its in-between and emptying it with his increasingly formless form in the darkening wisps of the night, both as quickly as the next, denying the expanse its solace from passerbys and then, as if he were just teasing, allowing it to refract back into an embrace of nothingness.

And so Arthur Cole entered Central Regal Park, in some odd hour which straddles night and morning yet without the tinge of sunlight, and walked his pet bother bothering all the bothersome way. At least, unlike the dogs that often were the domesticated creatures that frequented the park both upon and unshackled from leashes, his pet didn't have to shit, being that it was a pet of his mind and so refrained from corporeal manifestation thus without the very embodied need to shit, and so Arthur Cole did not have to pick up and shit. And, like most park patrons that don't have a quarter of a mind occupied with the thought of picking up shit, Cole gave no proper note to the park around him. You see, when one is thinking of picking up shit, the individual takes greater note of the surrounding environ as to evaluate whether "oh shit, I hope I don't have to pick up shit beneath *that* tree" or "shit, picking up shit

next to the pond would be so much nicer as it'll perfume the smell of shit" and so have that quarter of a mind set of surveying the land for suitable locale for (un)suitable activities. Like George Washington, in his early career. Except with a little more defecation.

So past willow and pond, refracting in its embracing silence the luster of only half a light from half an illuminated moon and casting the tentacles of electrons that had traveled oh so far and had oh so long to go all over the wooded crowd around, and trimmed hedge-bush Arthur Cole walked, not paying half or a quarter of a mind to that which he saw and walked past and that which attempted to fill him. For sights fill the eyes and so fill the brain which fills the mind (sciences being of divided sayings regarding the divide(s) between brain and mind, if there be one) which then ought to fill the conscious construct within and subservient to the mind. Yet Arthur Cole was not filled with these things for such reception requires comportment and attention, neither of which Cole currently held as the steps taken upon gravel and dirt and grass, standing at attention like a Communist address in ole Red Russia, occupied that subservient attention of his conscious self. This is a point which the sciences regarding mind-brain/brain-mind do not quite address yet: subservience. Is the organic form itself the master or is the ghost in the machine in charge, as the saying goes? Naturally, the form is the

chained master (as some of the ole Greek greats would harkened if much harkening can be done with dust addled bones) that pulls the consciousness, linked, with it. Like a man receiving the mob execution of wrapped in industrial chains and thrown in the river. Sure, the man is the man proper but he is not what is propelling himself into and downward further still within the waters. The chains are, directing the course of the man that is. Yet they are linked—a habit chains have of having—and so both descend ever further into the envelope that is the river, that is age, as both body and mind follow the decay that is age, and both will rot, as age tends to do, and like the man mob executed, sentenced to drown wrapped in cheaper iron, the man-mind perishes first as consciousness is the first organ to go with death and the body lingers on, to be nibbled with the invasive carp that roam the trenches of modernity's rivers. And as the rules of rulers go, the stronger, the more resilient, rule, and since the body always, always, survives the mind, the former being the one possessed of a greater and more lasting fortitude then, it is the one that rules the duo. To be survived and surpassed by so transient a thing as the organic form gives way to fragility, to some notion so contrary to pride as to be rejected by all men in all times as even then materialists and zealots alike lose faith in their faiths, being that their limits become greater than themselves, that such a school of believes receives no love, no adoration

from throngs, as it avoids nihilism and its fatalistic tendencies of nothingness and gives way to the admission that the body is the height of achievement for the mind, making every man and every woman the descendants proper of Ozymandias, wordings echoing and works consumed by sand.

This is why men and women and all others (if others there are to be) are so often left unfilled, unfilled in their proper selves. As they are the ghosts in the machines they were conceived to be and born into, heirs to nastiness, brutishness, meanness, and of a short stature in the grander measures of things. Naturally, no note of this is taken within the withins of a park, within a city as a park without is then much less a park and much more the expanse that was before the before that was and is the history of successful reproduction of the sapien sect species. So as his subservient consciousness was split, Arthur Cole made no note of any of whichever of these one could conceive of, and so, as the saying does not go, ended up by the central lake of Central Regal Park, having just walked his pet botherling around the banks thereof, not noting a thing a long the way.

Until now, naturally. Could it be just that it is fitting for Arthur Cole to note something or even nothing of note, yet noting nonetheless. Perhaps. Could it be just that such is the way that eventual events turns out and that this is how it was meant to be, as the saying goes, without any will shaping it

as all this was set before and thus is immutable, even in the face of wills more filled than that of Arthur Cole, though that wouldn't need to be much.

Without regard from whence the note came, such as it were, Cole, still holding on the leash on his pet bother, gazed out over the park lake. Out of a matter of course he could see the other bank. Park lakes are not terribly large lakes, as a generalizable rule as per the mandates of lake-park sciences and theoretics. Yet, along the, frankly, meager length of lake span that crossed from the other to this other there ran a length of light that defied the constraints it was within. See, the length of light, straight over, was more than the length to the other bank of the lake so, insofar as matters that matter much, a stretch of light was contained within a span of lesser length than itself. The length of the light (from whence or where it could not be gleaned and mattered little anywho but it could be a park lamp or the moon or a parked car which never had its fog lights turned off) was as a white of which no white ever was, white being light undeveloped, larval, and so infantile. Of this, Arthur Cole had no doubt. Of the whiteness of the length of light. Of its excess, contained.

He stood like that, as it were, for some time, though without any visible clocks in the park and no watch on the wrist of Cole one could not tell,

watching the irrefractable length of light marking its containment as a bridge, daring him not to look back. Nor did he. How could he? How could he look back now? Not that there wasn't any way back but rather that Arthur Cole was still, was no longer on his walk with his pet bother, for to be on a walk one must be walking, as too long a delay denotes the cessation of said walk. Why was this? Why indeed. Perhaps only Cole himself proper could ever tell and at the present time he was looking yet at the uncontainable, yet clearly contained, bridge (sans hand railings, naturally) across the most artificial lake, and not speaking, allowing the lake to remain filled with the vein of whiter than all other whites and not overstuffing it with any empty, insufficient words of his, of Arthur Cole.

And the End—Is—Never the End.

The ambulance arrived too late. They tend to do so when needed most; a dog runs in front, prompting a screeching as rubber emits naught but screechings; the lights don't change fast enough; some sadistic moron tries to follow in the wake of the ambulance, only manages then to be the car equivalent of clotheslined (must have something to do with some cut of meat, naturally) as another moronic, stressed in a juice-presser of time when in reality the latter moron would've had enough, guns an intersection just as the first aerial wave of the ambulance's wake begins to pass by and so, naturally, more than clips the former moronic. Both perish; the ambulance falters, unsure of which scene it is obligated to attend to, but only just falters, keeping course. Could be any or all or none of these, of course. But the matter of most factual fact was that the ambulance, whatever the scenarios that abound, arrived much too late.

Mr. Charles was already sitting up in the hallway, propped like a mannequin soon to be shipped off to a second-rate outlet mall that won't mind an out of style second hand mannequin, whatever style insofar as mannequins are concerned may be. Mr. Charles was drinking once more from the waters of the socially acceptable levels of lucidity. So the ambulance came too late to be of any use, too late as it could've been done without, though that was without knowing.

Perhaps it really could have stopped and been of more help to the two crashed moronics.

Mr. Charles was left sitting in the hallway, as desolate and that did seem, yet paramedics do not have it in their job description to just help people just sitting in hallways, so they were unneeded and needed elsewhere where they were not. Half slump, half poised as the poise of manners tends to indoctrinate, was how Charles sat, staring at his left shoe. Why his left, he did not know, though his gaze always tended to veer slightly left when thoughts dance around as thoughts are liable to do, and so that detail matters little in and of itself but more as indicative of the inner processes of this man by the name of Charles, as he certainly was not verbally divulging anything of late. He could, if he so desired, as his neighbor he so liked as she had so kept her

distance thus far sat, in a similar pose but a little more slump (must be a lack of proper manners in her rearing) across the wall from him. Carol, though she did not know Mr. Charles very well—as beyond neighbor and coworker she had no need or lust to see him outside of those circles, not anything against him, but there just wasn't the need of any sort—she remained in the hall with him. Out of concern. Out of curiosity. Likely a cocktail blend of the two, likely.

While he, the man opposite her she must have, at any given hour of the day, been physically closest to but never close, as the saying goes, as the walls were thin and cubicles were thin and, frankly, he permeated her days ever since they had first actually crossed paths in that coffee shop. Carol hadn't even recognized him the next time she happened to spy Charles, coming out of his apartment as it were. Or the next time. Or the next, as it goes. But, eventually, she even got it and got him in regards to what role he performed in the courses of her own particular days. Perhaps that could explain why she sat here in the hallway, half slumped, staring at a man she hardly knew stare at his foot he appeared as if he hardly knew. Mr. Charles, as it were, was more of a constant than any lover or coin habitant or mistress that she had ever had. How is one supposed to navigate such a thing, how. Less a rhetorical question than a rhetorical statement, for if the answer to a question is implied, need it be asked with the mark denotative of asking?

And so it went like this for the better part of half an hour—no need for a hyperbolic stretch of time—with the two sitting as such and staring as such and such and such. Expressed as such to give a sense for that time for thirty minutes straddles a mote of time and a sizable crumb proper. Yet, like all stillnesses, for all is ever in motion and motion is in all (efficient, a chiasmus is), it must be stirred up by the picking up brought on by the shimmering of the breeze denoting the social strains, the infectious impulse to speak, to utter, anything, something, please, say, that comes hand in hand or whatever extremity to extremity that come with the presence of another individual organic being of sapien sentience.

Then who first.

“Took their time to get here.” It was Carol, naturally, as enthrallment in a thing already enthralled in a thing other is only a shadow of the original enthrallment, borrowed, a fraction of a degree removed from the prompting of the prime trance. She did not stumble; she did not falter. In her voice, that is, as so many attempting to breach the neo-concrete fortifications of a prolonged silence, unsure of how to formulate such a prong of attack. Carol was not such a one. The words, decided, pounded into place as hobnails into steel-toed boots...crude, vicious, and often done over zealously. She was trying to distract him, to be sure, to shit on another is to lift the other of the another up.

Such does the grounds of preschool teach, the coming years hoping to unteach but Hammurabi's code as concocted upon a yard of wood clippings and flung snot is not so easily abolished, so not easily replaced by Puritanical notions of turning the other cheek and, in that case about as literally as literal may be for an expression, flee to a whole new world.

Naturally, Mr. Charles did not respond to her declaration, however hammerish in its Hammurabi-ery it may be, as was the predictable outcome of such a probe. One must, must try again as a staring enthrallment is far from a trivial knot to unknot.

"Sure took their time to get here."

There, yes, there. The same but with the addition of just one, but oh but one, word. That demonstrates adaptation. That decries an integrity not to yield the original meant meaning, for the meaning of the prior utterance was meant indeed. And one wouldn't want to muddle the meaning by compromising too much. Thus, the rephrasing on the part of Carol was less a diplomatic middle ground and more a continued assault, trying to tear the trance down in the fad established by the Berlin wall, on the silent staring of the man slumped before her.

"Took their time."

Even, even better. Yes, brevity is efficient, to the point. No fucking around, as saying goes.

“I have to look for a new apartment,” was all the meekness that sluthered forth from the lips of Mr. Charles.

He (paraphrasing his own phrase) roughly repeated:

“I have to find a new apartment.”

—

“...I mean they didn’t come *that* late...” The eyes of Carol were still fastened to the inescapable pin board of Mr. Charles. The eyes of Mr. Charles, on his left foot yet.

It was all in once and once in all (another chiasmus that just gives a certain historical quote, like Churchill or Orwell or Chell or Oddjob) that the tonal fortitude demonstrative of the earlier utterances puttered forth from Miss Carol was no longer fueled up. Guess she wasn’t a long-distance/endurance speaker.

As such, Mr. Charles made no move to notice, as what his comrade on the apartment hallway floor had just said was worth little—no—no note.

As Richard the Lionheart still trying to rush in an backwards sort of retreat through the former Gaul country to make it back to his wee isle, so too was Carol now stubbornly backtracking, not, never, wishing to admit to as

much, despite how evident it must be to all, if all cared to watch. She had risen, after all, now on two feet and no longer slouching that slouch that was slightly more slouchy than that which Mr. Charles maintained, as to due with proper rearing and manners, after all. Some would reach out a hand. Some would utter a further word to revive the entranced one at foot of the potential agent standing. Carol found her tongue and hand empty. Mr. Charles was just as gargoylian as the day they had met in the coffee shop and had not know who the one or the other were to have been in relation to the other or the one.

Movement, action, act and motion had ground, as the saying goes, to a most decided halt. *Halt. Alt.* Like a Nazi checkpoint (note: check if too loaded a reference) during post one war and pre the other in which a grip tightened and tightened and shit Europe is chocking on that red silk and charcoal stick-spiral tonic. And as the aire of that temporal area of blood and bone and goosestep, all stood still. Still.

Just as before, Carol knew not what to do. It was a standoff, *that standoff*, again, all over again as the saying goes. Pressure. Mounting. All and all in this visceral inability to perform any sort of physical, larger muscles or smaller ones, thereby blocking the pathways required to extend a hand proper or expel an utterance, proper. Yet this is understandable; one may understand Carol here, as navigation of these waters here is not frequently included in the

social façade handbook that each member of a culture becomes, either early still in womb fluid or in later years, infected with, most infected. What waters are these then but the waters of silence and stillness and a suspension that begs no asking of what it is. For while recognizable for what it is, such a moment, such a circumstance, is one most sapiens come ill equipped for, for all intents and purposes (as the saying goes) Carol might as well have been by his solitary self in that hallway being as his comrade yet on the floor was of little communicative use and capacity at present, it seemed.

Could not be further from the truth. While Mr. Charles had yet to answer and enter in proper discourse with that neighbor he had so liked standing above him, he thought about just that. That he *had* so liked. Sure, such sentiment would make all the sense that sense can make if it were attached to her cohabitant. And it was, though, still, the impregnation of the female neighbor, this Carol, of the same seething, the same whipped dog distrust causer, seemed unfit, was unfit. After all, she had not performed the act. The neighbor known as Arthur Cole had, had slung his appendages that very well could have been metallic alloys as only that would account, as far as Charles' mind was yet able to reach, for the destruction and pain wrought upon his mortal frame. And yet, the fault of the transgression of one bled, bled

out from the one and had already seeped into the construct of another, polluting, changing.

And yet, yet was not this irrationality the rational course, considering what he, Mr. Charles, was and is and will ever be? This is the caliber of thought that, like a latent virus, emerged and emerged within the otherwise non-responsive shell of Charles, mind running whilst body still still. Infected since a carrier came to him and passed on the epidemic, must be, must be, as such a disease of wondering, conflict the likes of the otherwise assured Mr. Charles *must* derive from an external well. Must.

And the likely vein from which this toxic ore was minded, as trauma is a fantastic tutor, would be Arthur Cole, yet, like the projection of that man's crimes unto his cohabitant, this was unsatisfactory to the highest degree. After all, Occam's Razor has been blunted by ages of use, so Mr. Charles wouldn't dare use it to carve out what he increasingly perceived as a cancerous tumor within his mental landscape, that ethereal place, the mentioning of which, coincidentally as far as coincidence may go, brought to mind the other non-corporeal country with which Charles, like any developed sapien of the contemporary iteration, was intimately acquainted with, being an intimate space. The dream, dreamscape dreamland whatever and what all one could label it. That is from where such a thing must come from, the place

of irrationalities that such a place must be, as Mr. Charles could not, would not, as the saying goes, accept that within the bounds of his proper mind such a corrosive beginning of thought, beginning as any diseases would have, undetected to the sufferer, over the course of a vast swathe of time, was conceived born and reared all.

Naturally, with all the interiority here and the veins of thoughts that follows, it is difficult to keep up with Mr. Charles, arguably even more so than his dreamscapes with the faux reborn Marvin Langley, a ghost of Christmas future, present, past, and all, all in one and one in all.

*A chiasmus adds weight to a thing.*

And that, that was the thing itself! That is how he must proceed and how he is to be done and liberated from this sequence of deviations, to do as the chiasmus does. Invert, turn back in on itself. As ethereal and misty as that notion may yet seem, patience is to be had, for the thought, however tenuous, must assuredly precede the act, the act that then brings to like the degree of logos in the original thought, being the test results are coming back regarding such analysis, as one may see the thought incarnate in seen action.

*No one belongs here more than you.*