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John Lazoo

By John Reyer Afamasaga

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eBook

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## CHAPTER 01

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### PART 1

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When they take you away,

they take you away

When I have nothing left

I have nothing to give

You will not need to read

When I read you

When I tell these things

You will not need to be told

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"James, James." Janine Elton checked to see if her seven-year-old man was still awake. James was comfortable in the warmth of the June night and moved his right leg to assume the recovery position correctly, his mother's poetry a fine replacement for the hot chocolate that she could not afford. Janine looked straight ahead into the rafters of her cottage with her hand-bound book across her left breast. James's movement in their double bed simulated a hand on her bosom. Janine's fears were few, but they were not new, nor were they far.

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Janine had been adopted by a wealthy Wisconsin family, the Eltons, after the baronial couple had found her as a three-year-old girl in a New York orphanage. She'd grown up as their housemaid. She'd fallen in love with her stepbrother of the same age.

The Eltons put her on a bus for New York at the age of 14 when she became pregnant. She gave birth to James Elton in a New York shelter for the homeless, and when James was 24 hours old Janine left New York for the heartland, hoping to change the course of occurrences and to give her son an earthy grounding away from the rot, dampness, and sleaze of the city.

Her teats, sore and tender from the hungry baby, immediately relaxed as she stepped down from the steel steps of the stuffy, crass, and crammed bus onto the dirt sidewalk of Pleasant Prairie. As far as Janine was concerned her new bundle of life, wrapped in white wool, had been delivered to her from God in the fresh country air, and not in a freezing New York City squatter hall, carpeted with wet mattresses, the windows without their glass panes.

Janine had not bothered to pack her meager belongings into the shabby quilt knapsack hanging from her back; the sack contained wet rags made from her blanket. The new mother used the rags to clean the effects of James's birth from herself, and used two single-bed fleece sheets torn in four as James's first diapers. Janine stood on the side of the road looking straight across it at the vastness of farmland inside newly erected wire fencing, daydreaming a scene in which she and her baby shared a cottage on a quarter acre which a kindhearted widower had offered her in return for housekeeping duties and bookkeeping work. Janine stood and stared. Baby James's weight on her right arm, supported by her left, was no burden. A smile could be seen in her eyes, telling of her contentment. Even without an abode, she knew she would be all right; she had already made the choice to give James Elton the best chance possible.

Janine started work for the first time in James's life when James turned six. Before then she'd made ends meet, but James at last attended school, so she could get a steady job. Each morning he rode on the back of Mr Ghattis's tractor to school while his mother went to the Juke Bike Factory, where she assembled brand-new, shiny bicycles. On his seventh birthday, in the fall, his mother presented him with his first set of wheels. Her pay deduction of \$2 per week and her staff discount bought him his new bike, and even then it did not come with its training wheels, as did those sold in the shops.

The cardboard box the bike had once hidden inside lay open on the ground. James was soon upright on the bike most of the time, swaying a bit, his little legs touching the ground on this side and then that side.

"Mom, I can do it! I don't need you to hold the seat, mother! I can do it! I can drive Mr Ghattis's tractor, and I can ride a bike! Mom, I can do it!"

The tractor's steering wheel was well supported by its chassis and four wheels, but holding the handlebars of his shiny new bike felt like holding onto the bathroom railings in the middle of one of his famous fevers, when he would see the people in his mother's poetry and souls he had not met, but whom he knew intimately and who knew him.

James lifted his left leg, the only leg that was supporting him and his mother's only new belonging, off the ground. The whole contraption and the boy toppled to the right. Janine, with her arms folded, naturally levered her right hand to her mouth to cover her smiling lips. James, after picking himself up and having checked to see if any of the shine on his new present had been scratched, looked back at his mother on the porch beneath the small arch that his right arm formed with the handle bar.

He pleaded earnestly, without crying, but with a screwed forehead, "Mom, remember you told me never to laugh at anyone in trouble. Mom, remember?"

The bike leaned against the house inside the porch where they ate. He ate his dinner with his eyes on the shine and the chrome of his birthday gift. Janine never for one second asked him to watch what he was doing; even when the gravy missed his hanging napkin she smiled as he smiled and they knew they were happy.

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Mr Ghattis, the kind-hearted widower Janine had daydreamed of meeting when she'd stepped down from the bus, was there to pick up James for a day in the fields. The tractor engine chugged outside their window as she waited for his word that he would keep his shirt on to cover his skin from the sun. His head down, looking to his left, he clenched his jaw so that both of his lips got lost inside his mouth, which needed only to say the two words, "Yes, mother." Janine waited. The engine missed a revolution, causing the chugging to end in a splutter. James still had nothing to say. Then his mother hugged him tight.

"Yes, Mother." His eyes cried for no reason as she let him go. He repeated his reply on his way out the door, "Yes, Mother."

His hands on the tractor's steering wheel made James feel like a man. The tall sheets of the gold, dry grass parted uniformly for him; he turned his head to smile at Mr Ghattis on the trailer. The sun sparkled in his hazel eyes to pronounce a magic moment in his life that he would hold onto till the end of it, and the next, and of all the sagas that would unfold neatly in his wake. He had been steering Mr Ghattis's tractor while sitting on the old man's lap since he'd been five years old. Now Mr Ghattis, the owner of the land that his mother's cottage stood on, sat in the trailer while the little seven-year-old man drove, plowed, and controlled the big red toiler of the land, like a farm hand of twenty harvests.

Mr Ghattis, having returned to the tractor-driver's seat, dropped James off at his home after a long, hard day's work. James extended his thin right arm out and up to shake Mr Ghattis's big, rough hand, and shielded his

eyes from the setting sun beyond the tractor with his thin left arm. The large, inflamed, but soft orange ball falling behind the long horizons of the plains cast a filter made in heaven over the cottage and James's arrival home. Behind a table for two on the porch of the cottage, his mother sat with her hair up, smelling of her own soap, and on the table in front of her was tender beef from the roaming cattle and cheese from the goats that keep the parameters of their quarter acre defined.

As the tractor revolutions quadrupled and the machine rolled away down the gravel track, the diesel particles that fumed and lined James's nostrils evaporated and gave way to the waft of fragrant aromas that descended from the slight, two-step elevation upon which Janine seemed to perch. The tractor vanished and he looked right to the fields, seeing the willow. *It doesn't seem to weep this evening*, he thought as he looked up to where his mother waited.

Seated, he ate and listened to her speak. "Now that you don't shower before dinner anymore, young man, I truly do hope that when you are on your own, that you do discover the simple pleasures of water on your skin ..."

"I like showering in the morning, Mom. It makes me ready for the kids and teachers at school."

Janine allowed James to be who he was. It wasn't because the blonde girl in woman's clothing feared her only man leaving her in case she installed demands upon him, it was because of how much Janine enjoyed watching her creation in all his natural manliness. Janine laughed continuously in her head at the iconic and simple manners that poured from the pint-sized package that would one day be another member of the male species. That night beef melted and goat cheese oozed to fill every corner of their mouths. Mother and son enjoyed dinner on their balcony, and then Janine's poetry in their only bed.

---

The last time James saw Janine face-to-face in the open air, under the ceiling of the sky, she was covered in soil, horror in her eyes, her mouth gaping as something inside her screamed for help, his favorite floral dress drenched in sweated tears. The ambulance medics were carrying Mr Ghattis away, his lower body wrapped in grey hospital blankets, wet and dyed burgundy by the old man's dark blood, as the police handcuffed a nine-year-old boy and dragged him by the back of his orange t-shirt to a waiting cop car.

Saturday morning, the next day, would be James's ninth birthday. Hidden somewhere in Mr Ghattis's barn was a large, rectangular cardboard box. The previous year he'd received a racing bike; this year he would receive the model that all the kids at school were talking about. A surprise is something unexpected and nothing nice about it, James came to realize. All the nice things that happened to James happened when he expected them to happen, like a new bike on his birthday, new clothes at Christmas, scrumptious dinners at sunset, falling asleep to verse in sweet tones, and steering the big red tractor in a straight line.

Country music was on the radio and the tractor was in the barn. Mr Ghattis would be hopping up onto the seat and inserting the key into the ignition, and his mother would be coming to the door with his orange t-shirt any second. The engine turned over once, twice, and now her footsteps on the uninsulated wooden floor.

The engine putted into its chug as his mother called out his name. "James!"

"Yes, Mother?"

"Here, promise me you won't take off your shirt. It's fall, and yes, the leaves have fallen, but the sun is still nasty."

He looked at the willow tree and then at the orange t-shirt. He looked at his mother and wondered when the tractor was going to rescue him.

Janine knew, but she pushed for his answer. She repeated herself, "James, it's the only demand I make of you. Please."

Then the wind blew a single leaf. He could make it out in his mind as it dropped to the ground from the weeping willow, as the gas in the tractor's tank found its way to the carburetor.

"I'm sorry, Mom. It'll come off."

Janine smiled and then added, "If you burn it will blacken your heart, James."

James laughed as he lifted his arms for his mother to place the orange garment over them and then down his body.

Mr Ghetis drove the tractor out of the barn, up the track, onto the road, down a bit, and then into a field. He stopped the machine for him and James to swap seats. After the fifth row James's armpits were wet. He stopped the tractor and let it idle as he removed his top and asked Mr Ghetis to tie the back of it on top of his head. Once the headwear was tight he resumed his duties.

Mr Ghetis reminded him, "Your mother doesn't like your bare back in the sun, young fella."

James turned and smiled, and the old man accepted the glance that said plenty. The sun beamed natural color down onto James's back as he drove the tractor in straight two-thousand-yard lines, his shirt removed against his mother's only standing rule. He had turned it into a turban, making him believe that he was on a camel's back in some vast and dry desert in the East. He could hear the music of the cobra and see a young fellow with dirty brown skin and an orange turban conducting magic through his flute that made the snake rise.

Mr Ghetis lay lazy and sleepy, his straw hat providing his eyes shade from the same rays that James adored. The constant rhythm of the tractor traveling on uneven soft soil made the passenger believe he was on the deck of a yacht somewhere in the Aegean with his beautiful, stunning wife. Mr Ghetis admired his wife's long, white legs, but he couldn't see her eyes behind the brown tortoise-shell sunglasses. Mr Ghetis smiled every time the captain turned around to see if he was all right.

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Janine stopped when she had punched the decimal point into the calculator. She looked out the window as she clamped and massaged her temples between her left thumb and little finger. With the handset nestled between her neck and chin, she dialed 911 with her right hand.

The operator's voice was bland, as are all of those operators' voices. "What has happened, madam? I need to know what has happened so I can dispatch the appropriate service."

Janine's voice was tense, but under control. "Like I said, I can't tell you for sure exactly what. Just send an ambulance."

Janine fumbled the handset while placing it correctly upon the telephone. She raced to the barn in a panic. She could not see where his or even her own bike was. She did know his birthday gift's hiding place. From the darkest corner of the barn she produced it and began to unwrap it herself. The string cut her fingers as she pulled hard and carelessly at anything prohibiting her access to the only transport she could find. She mounted the new bike and began to pedal, slowly at first till she gained momentum and her legs were free to pedal feverishly. Sweat stung her eyes even before she began panting for extra oxygen, tears of fear were killing the fears of pain that had suddenly clouded the once-fine day.

By the time she had the large red tractor in her sight, sirens from an ambulance and police car behind her were in her ears, and over the top of that a megaphone demanded, "Please pull over!" in a whining voice as the last

of the siren faded into oblivion down into the depths that worry had penetrated in the young mother's heart and soul.

The police car, traveling at twenty miles per second, sped up to keep up with the woman on the bike. The last of the blacktop road ended rudely for Janine, and the distance between her and James became soft and uneven soil freshly plowed by the one she needed to be with at that particular moment. She clenched her jaw shut as her calf muscles twitched to force their next cycle full. The engine of the police car revved loudly under its hood. She saw and then felt the heat from its passing body and then its exhaust fumes. The ambulance rumbled by, like a quake on the earth. She wobbled about on the bike, and it too left her behind, its dust, fresh by the tractor, filling the air. A mammoth, thick cloud of Wisconsin dirt suffocated her endeavor.

Her mouth was wide open with tears, dry right back to her throat. She could hear herself again above her own breathing and the sobbing and clattering of her teeth, but still she was hapless from being helpless for an answer, even if she'd had wings. Janine watched the patrol car, followed by the ambulance, all eight of their tires damaging James's straight tractor tracks. In the distance she could make out only the tractor, with the ambulance covering all else that her vision had blurred.

---

James's heart physically hurt, as if someone had punched it, pronouncing it dead, making its only function a pump for blood, and it thumped as it did so. The tractor had stalled to a stop sixty feet away, leaving an arc in the once parallel symmetry that he had created. James had had to abandon the red beast when Mr Ghetts had drifted into a deep sleep and fallen between the tractor and the plow behind it. If Mr Ghetts had fallen forward he would have been truly one with the plowed earth by now, but he had fallen sideways and only his legs below mid-thigh had suffered the treatment meant for the soil.

He could hear the sirens and could see someone on a bike with his left eye. The blood being sponged by the dirt covered the regions beside the shredded flesh, the white of bone, muscle, and fat, mixed in places with just fragments on their own in clumps and chips, some flown far, others sprinkled near.

Mr Ghetts smiled, "I'll be all right."

Stunned, the stricken boy stood over the fading man. Then Mr Ghetts was unconscious. James's legs acted like the spaghetti that lay below the old man's perfectly preserved torso. He fell across the body of his male ideal, marking the spot where he and his mother parted.

---

Sitting in a grey Cadillac Coupe de Ville parked across the road from the Bank of Wisconsin, James licked the shiny edge of a tobacco paper while his eyes surveyed the mundane movement of suits and office ladies in the rearview mirror. In the car stationed at the lights, next to the getaway vehicle he would drive in a few minutes, was a beautiful redhead with her jock of a boyfriend. The prom queen batted her eyelids and panned both eyes left in James's direction, till the sudden screech of tires brought on by her dickhead boyfriend the driver ended the quick and quiet liaison between his girl and James.

Nine days before, James Elton had been let out of Reform School, where he had served a seven-year sentence of hard labor for the attempted murder of Mr Ghetts. No one had visited James inside after Janine had died. For four and half years James had spoken only to wardens and bullies, refusing to make any connections with anyone but the nice lady in the kitchen, who made sure he was well fed.

James's first job on the outside was as a driver for the bank robbery in progress. The nice lady in kitchen had given him a phone number. That phone number was her ex-husband's; he'd required a wheel man for his new venture.

In the mirror, James saw that all was normal. Three guys with three suitcases exited the bank, each fifteen seconds apart. Guy One walked east and took the first right turn, Guy Two walked west and took the first left

turn, and Guy Three walked south and took the first right turn. At 3:15 p.m., one minute and thirty seconds later, James was to speed off through the next red lights, creating chaos and diverting all attention to the grey Coupe de Ville, causing the cops to chase the getaway car with no loot and without a robber on board – just one dumb 16-year-old getaway driver and \$300 in his left sock.

---

James Elton sat with his hands behind his back on a hard wooden chair that could barely hold his slight frame, a 200-watt light bulb half a foot above his crown, close enough to make him feel as if he had already inherited a bald spot from a father he did not know.

At first he sat comfortably in the interview room facing the three plainclothes officers on the opposite side of the table, knowing they had nothing on him. Guy Three had explained it so well to James as he'd sat in the same position seven days before. "Look, son – they got nothing on you! When they pull you over, you weren't in the bank, right? Are you with me, James?"

James's nodding caused the weak chair he sat on to rock, almost causing it to collapse, so he ceased the nodding and continued to listen.

"Right? You don't even know my name. You are just joy-riding in your uncle Guy Three's Caddy and getting well paid for it, okay?"

It sounded solid and robust to James at the time, especially when Guy Three took the first \$100 bill and stretched it above his head against the light as if he were checking the watermark, then the next \$100 bill, and when he'd taken all three bills and slapped them across James's forehead in the same way a sassy lady would with her long velvet gloves, making the silent lad blink and smile instantly, James was already hoping that the Caddy would have an automatic transmission. The young James Elton took the notes from against his brow and folded them into a thin wad, which he tucked into the inside of his left sock. On the table in front of the police lay the three hundred dollars, looking like three bits of paper, crumpled.

---

The small of his back was starting to fit into the fat concave in the bottom bunk of the small, long cell. The kind gentleman in the top bunk had let the 16-year-old move into the bed that the veteran had indented over a period of 17 years after meeting James Elton for the first time twelve weeks before.

Food, Bruce Lee movies, music, exercise equipment, interesting stories, genuine people, organized killers, men prettier than women – it was starting to feel right; it was beginning to look good. It was about to become normal, and eventually become an habitual field that those dropped into look for even on ejection from it.

James looked straight ahead in the dining room he shared with people who all appeared the same, were treated the same, and behaved to a varying but manageable degree of sameness. James surveyed the inmates and the hands in which they held their plastic forks, their eyes that reacted first to any disturbance and to who spoke to whom and for what reasons.

On the few occasions when James had had to defend himself against the bullies at Reform School he had noticed that, as in any form of human interaction, the animals who could control their emotions would be the animals who walked away with the least damage, either physically or, most importantly, mentally. Up to this point, James's only knowledge of physical combat was, *If someone was going to hit you, they were going to use their best arm or leg, and if they were in the process of attack, they were not ready to defend at that moment, and SURPRISE, hit before you are hit.* Still, in most instances James could talk his way out of situations, a gift he cherished. He therefore talked little to anyone unless doing so was of benefit to his well-being. James liked his new surroundings in his fourth month of rehabilitation.

---

He wooed



It made everyone coo

He smoothed

And everyone was fooled

But one, she was aloof

It is her that John Lazoo will want

---

James woke from a nap smiling, not about his surroundings but about one of Janine's poems about John Lazoo. He scanned the seats each time he woke, still the same stench, still the same expression from the five-year-old boy watching him from the seat behind the driver. James nodded at the giant African American bus driver whose nose filled the rearview mirror. Having been around men who talked disgusting things about boys and girls for five long years, James looked straight ahead in case someone could read the things that he had heard.

James Elton was free from prison, and at last he was escaping Wisconsin on a Greyhound bus. As the bus headed for New York City he wondered if the bus he rode on could be the same one his mother had journeyed on from New York when he was one day old. In his pocket were his papers. *Thank goodness I went to Reform School and prison*, he thought, *Without those damn documents, I'd have no fucking identification*. James rationalized the purpose of the past decade behind wire and bars, blocked in by concrete, in his head.

The only other document that James had was his mother's death certificate. The document no longer made the parentless man teary-eyed. It had been a slow and long grind for him. When he was first told of his mother's death, he mashed his head into his pillow to cry till the feather-filled cushion was flat wet. Then he moved on to doing 100 pushups. Every time it came to pass in his simple and empty mind, the 12-year-old would demand of himself to *drop and give me a hundred*. Then, when he'd refused to do favors for a new warden, the nasty official had confiscated all of his mother's belongings in her quilt knapsack and burned them in the courtyard in front of everyone during exercise time. As the sun set somewhere behind the grey overthrow that the innocent clouds spread, the orange flame, unlike the blue flame, kindly dried the reservoir of emotion inside James.

---

"Yes, I want to change my name."

"To what?"

James rehearsed the scene at the name-changing place in his head. "I want to change it to John Lazoo."

"And how do you spell that, sir?"

"With a 'z' for Zorro, of course."

James stepped down from the steel steps of the bus onto a grill that covered a manhole on the sidewalk. The sun rebounded nicely on all the elements of what seemed to James to be a typical New York street. Condensation formed on the bus terminal's dirty windows. Dew dared to drop from the signpost that had been turned and now faced inward, pointing to two men in platforms and afros, one blonde, the other dry black, and both in long coats like Janine's winter one, facing each other on the steps of an old church. Smoke and steam from cars, coffee, citizens, and generators completed the picture.

---

"Yes, I want to change my name."

"Here, sir. Take these and fill them out and then come back with your identification."

The young woman, who looked like someone's sister, pushed the small stack from in front of her to in front of him. From the time the woman had started to move, James knew he was in trouble. Her arms, head, and breasts all moved in different directions, grabbing paper, tearing sheets of paper, clipping paper together and crunching her stapler, while managing to keep her little waist and rounded hips perfectly still in the middle of the frame that the service desk provided.

James sat in the booth of the diner watching the afternoon, evening, and midnight roll past. Sitting and waiting were normal activities for him. The stack of paper from the name-changing place in front of him had ears at its top-right corner. On the hour every hour, James lifted the stack gently by the deformed edge and then let it drop to see if any of the pages had disappeared. Occasionally, he picked up the pile and grouped it when the stack had lost its right angles by ensuring all edges were flush against the Formica table top.

"Would you like another top-up, John?" the waitress asked.

"Yeah, Shelia."

Each time Shelia, the wicked-looking waitress, pressed her thighs against the cold metal edge of his table and asked if James wanted a refill it started to make more sense. The cook at Reform School used to do the same thing to him, even to the way she bent down to pour his coffee. When he saw Shelia's chest, it was the same as when he had been obliged to kiss the cook's chest for her thirtieth birthday in return for apple pie.

Shelia smiled, "Did anyone ever tell you, John, that it was rude to stare?"

The pictures and stories about women that James had seen and heard of inside did not compare with the feeling he was definitely getting from Shelia.

James smiled back, "No one ever told me it was rude, but I heard that if you look at the wrong person at the wrong time in the wrong way, you might get killed." He looked up into Shelia's eyes.

"I ain't going to kill you," she smirked. "Hell, I showed you them."

James looked out the window and then back at Shelia, who hadn't moved, and replied, "What you going to give me if I kiss them then, ah?"

Across the road people were lining up outside a nightclub. The two big guys at the door looked like lions with their paws together in front of their loins, rather than being by their sides like the Sphinx, a visual that James remembered from a picture book he had seen at school.

Shelia had walked away shaking her head and her hips and laughing in three-four time at his proposal. He thought of how he wanted her to come back to the table so she could call him John again. James pondered how it would sound when and if the conversation reached the point where he would be required to give his new name in its entirety.

Still watching the patrons line up and enter the club across the street, James was unaware of when Shelia slipped into the opposite side of the booth that had belonged to him for twelve hours. Noticing her at last, he gestured toward the line of people. "What're they doing over there?" he asked out of the side of his face turned towards the window.

"They're going clubbing, John. You like clubbing?"

"Never done it. It looks a bit like church to me."

"Would you like to do it? I got a great place uptown – good action, good clientele, guys, gals, we could hunt as a pair."

"Hunt what?"

---

On the way uptown, John Lazoo observed more people lined up outside doorways guarded by big men. Some of the doorways were truly grand and awesome, others dark and small with colored lighting, mostly red, that fizzed like soft-drink bubbles out onto the street atop the heads of those who waited to drown in the ambient rays. Remembering that he had forgotten his stack of papers on the table at the diner, John placed his right hand on the damp back seat of the taxi cab, as if to satisfy his conscience that he was remorseful at losing the important documents that he legally needed for his new identity.

"Here driver – just here." Shelia leaned forward, handing the driver some folding money while blowing her cigarette smoke across Lazoo's face and out his open window.

Outside the cab, the line close up felt to Lazoo more like a herd of cattle. The only difference was the sweet and sour fragrances that the wind caught on right and wrong streams, and the utterances, both random and meaningful, about *in* and *out*. John did not feel as if he were either in or out. His cowboy boots and Salvation-Army store clothing looked good on his lean frame, and his smile ironed out any creases that the surveying eye could see.

Over the top of the rallied meat, he heard Shelia demanding, "What do you mean, I can't get in? Look what I brought with me – look! Him, the one in the charcoal two-piece suit ..."

Standing alone in the middle of the entranceway, the portly man in a white fur coat with whom Shelia was arguing turned from her and looked Lazoo up and down. "The suit looks shabby, but he looks expensive. Who's he with?"

Lazoo looked down at his only pair of shoes as he listened for the next installment of this New York minute. He heard a scurry and a slip and then someone took his thin hand. Lazoo lifted his head slowly to see that his hand was in the cradle of two chubby white hands that belonged to a man, but the fingernails had been painted pink. Mr Pink, the man in the white fur coat, had nearly slipped over and done damage to his fine threads to be the first to greet and therefore own the new kid. Mr Pink took Lazoo's hand and together they walked up to the grand, awesome doorway.

Inside it was warm. Lazoo could taste the colored lights. He drank the sound from the speakers and was intoxicated by the vibrations that fled from body to body. Funk defied his country heel. The three models who led him to the floor – one black, one white, one colored mocha and then some chocolate – showed him sweets, sugars made from phat bass and guitar, with tongue-twisted finger-licks that affected the brain and stained the whitest of white. He saw people who looked like he did on the outside, but when he met them in the light of the carpeted rest rooms their faces seemed screwed and skewed at various angles. He could not hear them talk and could only understand their body language.

---

As the sun routinely navigated the skyscrapers to give life to other forms in the city that were less decadent and more sellable to those who traveled from suburbia to places like Wall Street, Lazoo sat straight in a velvet booth. Behind him was a reflection of the back of his head against the mirror walls; around him lay bodies, half naked, painted, and tattooed.

To his left the white, chubby paws of Mr Pink fingered \$20 bills, creased and oiled from the skin and dirt through which they had passed. "What you looking for, John Lazoo, in a place like New York City?" he

asked.

Lazoo sniffed at the oil and at the money, and let his free mind not think Mr Pink licked his thumb to give it friction against a greasy bill. "I want a place to stay," he said, almost listlessly, "some money, something to eat, some new clothes, a nice girl, and some money."

"Well, why didn't you do Mrs what's-her-face, then?"

"I ..."

"You reneged, John. Once you got upstairs you couldn't get it up. I took you on the recommendation that you make people hot – and by the way, you said money twice."

Lazoo had waited till everyone had left. Something told him that he was onto something good here, but he had to figure out how it all worked. Never in his life had he encountered such new-looking things. This was beyond his new bikes, even more than the vending machines that were installed in the courtyards.

Lazoo leaned forward and put his hands on the table and decided to take control. "So, Mr Pink," he said, "Tell me then, what needed to be done to the Mrs?"

One of the bodies moved in the pile that cascaded around the velvet booth. It was a blonde afro. Then the afro looked up. Two brown eyes framed in dark brown skin connected with Lazoo's.

Jimmy Afra, 'Afra' because of the blonde afro, was the DJ. Under him was a white leg and black leg; both legs belonged to models. "He's coming with me," he said. "He isn't a hustler."

Lazoo looked at the disco mirror-ball, the only other movement in the vacant club other than Jimmy's mouth. He thought hard, concentrating on the facts. Mr Pink let him into the club and Mr Pink had a lot of money in front of him,

Lazoo nodded at the blonde afro, now seated upright, lighting a black cigarette, and asked politely, "What's your name?"

"It's Jimmy Afra."

Mr Pink jerked a thumb at him. "A wannabe writer who plays records in my club – really just a nigger with a fast mouth. Nothing special, John Lazoo – nothing special." He injected this to ensure that there was still some current flowing from his corner of the booth to the middle of this fusion.

Lazoo thought about writing and coordinating all those characters, and then reading all those characters. then looked at the blue eyes belonging to the blonde model and the green eyes of the black model. Jimmy looked at them, too. Mr Pink rounded up all of the cash, bundled the whole lot, and put it into the bag. Lazoo kept his eyes on the blonde one, who took the cigarette from Jimmy's mouth.

Mr Pink decided to let everyone know it was home time. "You're coming with me."

Lazoo nodded his head slightly. "I'm going with him."

"Okay," Jimmy Afra smiled.

Lazoo said politely, "See you again."

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Outside the people walking to work swamped them without meaning to. Waves from the left and right swept over Jimmy, the two models, and another guy, who was quiet and thinking. Mr Pink hailed a cab as Lazoo took a cigarette from Jimmy. The cab pulled up to the curb. Mr Pink opened the back door, only to slam it again. Jimmy jumped in front of the cab's yellow hood. The other guy opened the back door and climbed in; the two models followed him into the back seat as Jimmy opened the front door and jumped in.

The window came down and out came his hand. Lazoo looked at it. It was there for the shaking. He grabbed it. It shook and moved like theirs did in the courtyard, but he held it tight in the conventional way. Jimmy laughed and called out, "Got to ease up in New York City, bro. On easy streets now," as the cab zoomed away.

Finally, Mr Pink advised him that this cab was clean. Inside it, they rode uptown. Lazoo was quiet. Mr Pink's hand kept continually moving till Lazoo made his position clear by saying, "Don't do that again or I'll break it."

Mr Pink was silent for maybe two seconds, then said loudly, "It works for me, John. What do you say, driver?"

The dark-skinned driver glanced at them in the back seat and then turned up his radio.

Lazoo saw someone at the lights and thought of Janine. He lowered the window, but the air was polluted with chemicals and fumes from cars just like the one he was in, no soap spores, so he closed it back up as Mr Pink let the driver know, "Just here. Here! Hey – here!"

Finally the driver listened. As he handed him some bills he muttered out the side of his mouth, "Fucking immigrants."

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Inside Mr Pink's apartment everything was cream and brown, warm and clean. Lazoo touched the decor when Mr Pink was in the other room, before he reappeared bearing coffee and pastries. He came close to Lazoo, but Lazoo stood his ground quietly.

Mr Pink turned his back and walked to the window. "You like my hands?" he asked.

Lazoo shrugged. "They're not mine."

"They're the thing I love about me the most, John."

"Well, keep them up in the air when you're near me and they'll be fine."

Mr Pink looked him up and down again, something that Lazoo was already used to. He then told him to follow him into a room. The room had a bed that looked inviting. He waited for Mr Pink to tell him that it was his for the day. Tired of waiting, he opened up the doors to what was another room. The room, slightly larger than the cell he'd lived in for the past five years, was filled with clothes. "I can have those?" he asked as he fanned the suits lined up in the room.

Mr Pink nodded. "There are conditions, though." He stood with his hands on his hips in the shag-piled room's doorway.

Lazoo pointed to dozens of shoes, all new, standing to attention beneath the suits. "And these?"

"As long as no other lad needs to dress up for me," Mr Pink murmured, trying not to sound forceful or aroused.

The next night, while entering the club in a black suit with a black shirt, black tie, and black shoes, the only other color being the brown leather soles on his new shoes, Lazoo thought he saw Shelia the waitress among those lined up. His only reaction was to look down to his left and away and hope that this was all still real. Inside the club, once the clock said twelve it was just as he remembered from the night before.

Jimmy Afra, with one of the bodies from the booth, called out, "Hey, bro!"

"How's it?" Lazoo called back without taking his eyes off the model that Jimmy's shoulder supported.

"You can have it, bro," he beamed, Lazoo still staring at the brunette on his chest. "No, bro. Not this one – any other, whatever one you want."

Trying not to look ignorant, Lazoo perked up at the possibility that someone might be letting him in on the details of this fabulously crazy new world that he had discovered. "Yeah, you're right," he smiled.

"You fucking know I'm right, bro. Meet me in half an hour up there." He pointed to a table on the balcony.

Twenty minutes later, Lazoo was sitting at the table overlooking the spread-out, glorified, and neon-lit in wildness. He watched it all, like an eagle on top of it all. Jimmy leaned against the bar. The guy who was with him that morning, wearing leather, walked up to him and they shook hands the way Jimmy preferred to shake hands. The white guy let Jimmy end the exchange by drawing him to his chest.

Lazoo turned the golden saucer so that the lettering on the cigar pack appeared as if it was readable to him. Mr Pink and his hands that need breaking in were all over Jimmy, and Jimmy finally reacted to the invasion by shivering. The guy in leather looked up to where Jimmy had started pointing. Lazoo fingered his right ear and looked in the direction of the waitress coming to his table.

The bouncing blonde afro stopped bobbing in the neon and the ETFunk, Jimmy being in a vest and jeans only, without shoes. Lazoo was concerned about the soles of Jimmy's feet on the clean-looking carpet. The guy in black leather had grease in his hair. The pair of them pulled out the two chrome seats from under the opposite side of Lazoo's table. Jimmy told Lazoo, "This is Michael Haze. Motherfucker can't take a joke."

Michael ordered champagne.

Lazoo took a rectangular gold box from the golden saucer and set free twenty hand-rolled cigars by stripping them of their cellophane bands, also made of gold. Jimmy turned to Michael and informed him, "This is Lazoo. This motherfucker don't know shit, but he does look good. And the motherfucker's white – that's pure white, Haze, not mixed up and shit like your people. Fuck knows where he got a fucked-up name like Lazoo, but he is ..."

Lazoo reached out and took one of the champagne flutes. He sniffed it to see what it smelled like, took a small sip, and then a decent one.

"See, Haze, see!" Jimmy sounded triumphant. "I bet you my left foot that that's the first time this motherfucker's lips ever touched champagne. Am I right, Lazoo? Am I right? Tell fucking Haze that's the first time you fucking picked up a fucking champagne flute."

"Last night was the first time. Tonight's first time with friends."

Michael put his glass up to the middle of the table. Lazoo decided to look at the flute in Michael's hand.

Jimmy prompted him with, "You're now meant to toast with that."

Michael took the flute back to in front of him, angled it at forty-five degrees against his mouth, and emptied the contents of the crystal vessel. He then cleaned the rim of his lips with his thumb and forefinger, slowly starting at the cleft of his top lip and down to the adjacent position on the bottom lip, without taking his eyes of Lazoo. Lazoo wasn't sure whether he should look Michael in the eye or look away, but instinct told him to look at the guy with a careful and solemn stare, which succeeded in putting him at ease and didn't anger him.

Lazoo looked at Jimmy. His mouth was too much, talking about his pure blood with a flapping pink tongue in a face the same color as the fur of a monkey. Lazoo sniffed as he took another drink. Michael nodded his head as he, too, took another drink.

Mr Pink's voice came over and above the music from behind. Lazoo had forgotten about the other problem in his new-found world, the faggots. The niggers he could handle, but the fucking faggots. The niggers and faggots roamed free, and the niggers were okay, only their tongues in their mouths, but these fucking faggots, their hands like maggots from flies wherever they landed.

Mr Pink put his hand on Lazoo's hand as he pulled out the only remaining seat at Lazoo's table and said, "I see you two have met."

Jimmy leaned forward, blowing his smoke up and away to his right, his head coming into Lazoo's focus as Lazoo looked forward from eying that his cigar was properly and completely lit. He extinguished the match gracefully in an up-and-down motion.

"Life is easy," Jimmy told him, "if you play by the rules, bro." Jimmy squinted for effect and to make a point. "Who made up the rules, you might ask?" Lazoo seemed to be getting restless with the whole charade, and showed it by pulling his hand out from under Mr Pink's hand and pouring himself another glass of champagne. "You don't need to know who made the rules," Jimmy continued. "Story goes, you only meet the rule maker if you break the rules or if you're good enough to make your own."

Mr Pink, feeling awkward and spare, chimed in, "You get first pick of all the clientele within these walls, and in return the club takes forty percent of the purse."

Lazoo finally found something about the conversation which warranted words. "I give away some of the money, ah?"

Doing his best impression of a smiling chimpanzee, Michael told him, "That's about it," while looking down onto the dance floor between the railings.

Lazoo looked up at where the smoke was being sucked skyward in a whirlpool and thought about how he was going to find out what it was that these people thought he was capable of doing for money.

Michael got up to leave, announcing, "I'm off to work."

Lazoo latched on immediately. "I'll come with you."

The freight elevator in the old building down the alleyway behind Mr Pink's club was yet another world that Lazoo was about to find, a little more like the one he had left. With its graffiti and with rats running along the perimeter of the cold space, and occasionally diagonally across their path, the damp air seemed to carry a knowing scent for Lazoo, who tried not to breathe it in. Eventually he accepted it and inhaled and then exhaled.

Michael raised his eyebrows at him. "You don't know what you're getting into?"

"No, I don't. That Mr Pink, he sent me upstairs with a woman," John muttered.

Michael started to stretch his fingers, then his neck and torso by moving his hips left then right, while walking with a fake limp he had endured from countless injuries he had nursed himself.

As they entered another elevator without a carpet, but with urine stains, plastic capsules, and empty plastic bags, on the floor, Michael turned and threw a left-right combination, followed by an uppercut. Lazoo dodged the jab, weaving right to avoid the right and stepping further right with his hands behind his back to denounce the flurry that few professional fighters could counter, let alone flee. Michael stood back and looked at Lazoo, who assumed his normal position of distress. This involved clenching his jaw and looking down and away to his left, switching off to all visual aspects of the scene and using his ears and internal eye to survey the danger in which he found himself.

Lazoo broke the silence, which seemed to Michael to last an hour. "Where are we going?" This changed the mood, as intended.

Michael reached out to flatten the left lapel of his jacket, which had lifted out of place during his audition. Lazoo showed nerves when Michael reached out and blinked.

Michael nodded, "I want to show you what real work is."

The elevator ride was over in the next second. Lazoo thought of how long the ride would have taken without the action; he wondered if there was scenery along the trip that he had forgotten about already, as the doors opened and the surreal came to rescue his mind from diving for some kind of reality.

Lazoo stepped out onto another surface, a bronze-colored synthetic turf that surrounded a four-lane running track of yellow asphalt with orange line markings. In the middle of the 400-meter running facility, sunken twenty yards below the assumed ground level, lay a ring without ropes framed by 200 seats. Each seat was equipped with a multi-media console. Seated in the center of each of the stand's sections was one person – something Lazoo only realized at a second glance – a woman, a man, a child, and another man.

As Michael led him down the steps to the edge of the fighting ring, he told him, now his new corner man, "One day I will set up on my own. I fight for a living."

Lazoo watched the rugged figure climb up onto the canvas. He looked at each of the spectators and wrestled with his mind to see if it was his own. The thumb and forefinger on his right hand in an eye each, he poked himself as hard as possible, the eyelids protecting them in their sockets. When he opened them again Michael was already in the ring doing pushups, his face at eye level with Lazoo standing outside the ring.

"This is my training," Michael said. "The only training I do is mental. I train not to hate. I kill only those who are ready to die. I know the good garbage, worthy of recycling. There's got to be someone to fight, someone left to kill you."

Lazoo watched Michael strip down to his leather warm-up pants and black-and-silver gym shoes, his torso cut but not sculptured with defined arms and chest, the top two compartments of a six-pack showing when required.

The only woman in the place sat directly behind where Lazoo stood. He felt a pain in his gut like he'd used to feel inside, and when he turned to look at the redhead seated behind him with her legs slightly apart, he could see she wore white lace against her purest hair with blonde tints. The pain evaporated into a gas he could taste



in his throat. The woman's breasts heaved the next time Lazoo looked back. He looked ahead, across the ring mat, and saw that the child was actually an old, old man. He looked back one more time. The redheaded lady still sat open, teasing her left chest with a long, red fingernail. He breathed out of his abdomen as he noticed Michael's opponent approach the main stage.

Lazoo looked for moral support first from the woman, whom he could feel in his lower body, then to the old, old man, who had begun laughing loudly. He walked briskly and then started to run the square outline of the ring in which Michael was kneeling with his hands clenched, his neck bobbing to the left and to the right. A boy with an orange t-shirt stood over the humble figure of Michael, hands still clenched, as he opened his eyes slowly to see his opponent. Lazoo, on the outside, had his hands behind his back.

The boy threw a right cross, which connected with Michael's jaw, the point of impact immediately marked by a nice, clean, two-inch cut. The boy looked down at Lazoo and smiled, then followed the right with a direct front kick upwards to Michael's groin. As Michael leaned forward in pain, the orange boy hit his right temple with his sharp left elbow, putting a dent into the side of his head, which bumped like a round ball within seconds as he fell forward, still with his hands praying. The boy's hazel eyes twinkled as the audience busily tapped on their keyboards, then he ran from the ring. The audience got up and left. Michael lay in the ring for hours as Lazoo watched him from a front row seat, rewinding and reviewing the fight on its console.

As Lazoo pressed the round plastic into its designed plastic casing to summon the elevator to come down to the unknown floor, he heard footsteps crunching the plastic turf. He readied himself with an explanation to greet Michael, who said, "Wasn't your fault, in fiction or in programmed reality – nothing to do with you."

"I didn't say I had anything to do with it," Lazoo shrugged it off. "Can't remember one thing."

They left the fiction fibered density and entered the street stink of New York City.

Up in the club the floor was packed with the sexes gyrating, their lips, hands and hips migrating from skin to skin, all limbs fond of one another. Lazoo's table had a reserved sign, a waitress always close by, and Mr Pink always looking his way. The buxom brunette waitress brought him more champagne and cigarettes before, and not after, she did to the VIPs who lined the floor of this new plateau.

He went to grab his flute and drink from it, but the moment was disturbed by a grating from those long red nails – nails he remembered from unknown floor.

"Yes," she murmured, "I am real."

"Your white lace is now a permanent fixture in my eyes – you know that, ah?" Lazoo thought for a moment, and then said, "Mr Pink must've sent you? Where's your money? Count it loud on the table." He leaned back in his seat as he dealt with the business first.

Upstairs, Lazoo sat back on the couch as the redhead stood before him. He freed himself from his belt and told his client, "Turn around and bend over."

She politely bent in two, lifted her short skirt so it sat on the highest part of her body, doubled over, reached around to her round ass using her left hand, and with one of her long, red nails pulled the string part of her lace arrangement so it lay low that it made a white line down the middle of her left globe. Lazoo looked down on it as he carefully rounded up his customer's red mane of thick hair with his left hand.

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Later that morning, Lazoo accepted his first payment from Mr Pink. He quickly did mathematics on the \$1,200 in fresh, crisp, untouched \$100 bills that he counted while looking at Pink, and then asked for Michael's whereabouts. Mr Pink stood, waiting for a smile, a thank you, or even just a moment. He eventually

turned and walked away.

## CHAPTER 02

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If it's the only way

then there is no other way

If it is the right way

there is a wrong way

If it were the only way

then there is only one way

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Lazoo woke smiling. As he did, he interrupted Janine's poem before it became heavy, just as he used to breathe deeply and fit his limbs closely to the soft bedding in his mother's bed and fall deep into the bed asleep. Now he stretched his eyes to open them further, and on realizing his whereabouts turned down the smile.

The room looked more sterile than pristine in the natural light of morning. Lazoo was scared to move in case he might be heard by the couple in the next room or the businessman in the other room. The woman, who called herself Mrs. X, said, "The room is yours, as long as you keep doing what it is that you do."

Lazoo replayed the line from Mrs. X, shifting pauses, adding and subtracting punctuation that he did not know about, and each time it meant the same thing. "Feels great. What if I'm wrong, or this is wrong, ah? he thought as he tiptoed to the bathroom, where he stood at the mirror, to question the feeling of doubt that he erased at will. He showered quickly, being careful not to disturb the clean bathroom, and then he wiped all evidence of ever having been in that room.

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### PART 1

In more lavish surroundings, complete with gardens, high concrete walls with security cameras protected a mansion with a 200-seat auditorium. It was named the compound. In his quarters, which were large enough to be the lobby of the Hilton, stirred excess, greed, emotional poverty, and evil. Hariss Clariss rolled over from one set of abdominal muscles onto another and then kissed them both good morning. A young, ripped man with his hands behind his head owned the hard tissue that Clariss licked and devoured. The youth kept his eyes on the wall TV that displayed a blonde, a brunette, and a black man in fucking awesome positions. He did not care that the boy never looked down on him as he ate the kid. Sometime later that morning Clariss washed his manicured fingers in a bowl of murky water that smelt blue of lavender, in the best seat of his Swank Swank New York Restaurant.

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Finally dressed, Lazoo checked the room from all angles, sitting in different seats to see what the designers saw. He opened and closed the doors to the other rooms, the place being too large for him to order their use in his mind. He became hungry as he reminded himself of the only food he had eaten in the previous 48 hours. He opened the door. He could hear voices in the hallway. He listened, but couldn't understand the language, as two women talked over each other, a housekeeping cart in between them. Eventually they wheeled the cart into a room. He could still hear them through the door to the room, which they'd forgotten to close. The hallway was clear, though, so he walked to the elevators.

He went down to the street to a deli, where he bought a bagel and strong black coffee with sugar. He took the breakfast, which cost less than the tip would have been for the same order using room service, back to the big

hotel room. The room was still empty, even more so with his clothes neatly folded over the chair and the bed perfectly flat, as made by trained hands that must have belonged to the two foreign women.

The bagel played tough, the coffee was probably one sugar heavier than the norm, and the cigarette tasted like the butts in the ash tray. Lazoo tried to settle with his eyes, the ash flying everywhere. The cold air from the open window and the cool air from the air conditioner made a whirlpool where the coffee table sat with the food, coffee, cigarettes, and ashtray.

It didn't work, so he got up and turned the air conditioner off. The remote beside the switch looked like a medical gadget that someone had left behind. The room was still cold from the open window, and seemed even more desolate without the hum of the air conditioner. He ate for energy so he could sort the mess wrapped in a gift he could not yet properly conceive. He couldn't even mark it finitely upon a map as a wise move or a wrong turn into a dead-end street lined with pathways to muddled maneuvers leading to killing fields, so he changed. Then he stared into the mirror to find the angle that he and whoever was to see him that day would find attractive, but not too much. By one o'clock he was standing at the window overlooking the park, where people walked, ran, and laughed with their pets and children. By four o'clock the long shadows were enough reason for him to close the window and draw the curtains shut for the night.

His first question as he boarded the limousine parked down the alleyway two minutes from his front door was, "So the room is mine?"

The thin woman sat with her legs together. Her answer was, "Yes." Her legs then parted as Lazoo moved forward until only half of his ass was on the seat. He found the button to the partition and said goodbye to the chauffeur as the car began to move. The woman wriggled her satin dress up to her waist, her efforts causing her to nest her sharp, powdered chin into her brown, wrinkled chest, making Lazoo smile more softly than before and look more intensely into her eyes. Her legs wide apart, the wrinkling became more wrinkled the lower his eyes went. He put his hand down there and pulled her silk lining to one side. She looked down there and then moved herself further forward till both of them saw what it was that needed attention.

Lazoo looked convincingly into her eyes, kind and horny all at once, then at her cleavage and then back into her eyes again. "Do it yourself," he said. "That way when you go home, it's there for you."

"But that is what I pay you for, John."

Mrs. X slid her hips further forward, followed by her backside, sliding along the black leather back seat of the spacious car, her pink now moist. She opened her mouth one more time and Lazoo placed his hand across it, suffocating his client of any more words and orders. He grabbed the lady's other hand, isolated her middle three fingers, stuck them in his own mouth till they were wet, and then guided them down in between her quivering thighs.

Her neck tried to twist her head free as he pushed the hand firmly into her. Then he felt the woman's middle finger find depth within herself as he lifted the hand across her mouth and nose just enough for her to suck in some air. Her lungs accepted the gift as her lower body put itself forward again, her hand beneath no longer fighting, but pushing back into herself. He could feel a creamy wetness about the middle fingers down there as she let her neck relax into the seat. The woman's ass was moving around slowly on the same spot on the bare seat.

Lazoo lifted his hand from her face, and when he did she bit it till he put it back. She ached in between her legs as he took her hand from there just before she came. The car stopped at some lights, causing her to move forward some more. All of her ass was off the seat, the two fingers were inside her, and Lazoo turned his head to let the chauffeur know to find a highway.

Her hips had begun acting up, and Lazoo was standing over the top of her. The accelerating limo hit the highway and the tires thudded across the lanes as he depressed and impressed her airways, the hand with her hand sped up, too, as she brought her legs up so high he could see her heels next to his face. The speedometer on the dash showed more speed at that point. The woman's body behaved young again, her eyes widened and continued to dilate as her teeth found their way through her smudged, painted lips to bite the top of his hand firmly. Her mouth fell open and her eyes rolled slightly left of center, then went right, and finally rolled to the back of her head.

She sat back with her skirt still high. Lazoo dodged the sight of her as he brought down the partition to advise the chauffeur of their destination. He smiled at her once the divider was back up and reached out to hold her hand, which she didn't give him. She pulled a wet cloth from the cabinet and wiped herself. Then, replacing the cloth with a fresh one, she cleaned her face and then reapplied her make up. Lazoo cleaned his fingers, too, and smiled at her as he did it. When she finished her makeup she crossed sides and sat next to him. He took her hand and held it till the car stopped outside the Swank Swank New York Restaurant.

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Clariss sat at his table and from time to time turned to see if the artfully garnished food on his Italian porcelain plates matched the jewels and handbags of his diners. Occasionally he lifted his glass to the men and women, people whom he knew, but who only knew him in return within the windows of his luxurious and plump eatery. Born in the Malaysian jungle, Clariss came to New York on a fishing boat as a boy, when he'd cooked and cleaned for pirates, fishermen, and smugglers.

He passed as an Italian, but his eyes and their tightness gave him away. He was well-educated and passively angry at the systems, the organizations, and the rule-makers and their rules that kept him at arm's length. Only in the dark, with the light low, would they meet and talk deals that were never signed nor sealed.

Clariss ate the hate, digested the fear, and vomited evil as others breathed air. Harry Clarenta, or Clarenta, as he asked his clients to call him, loathed the businessmen whom he serviced severely, and their wives who ordered him around. From one housekeeping job to the next, in two years he had traveled West to the Hollywood Hills, and then back East, where he'd found a home in the upstate New York mansion of a merchant banker and his wife who slept in separate rooms. At twenty-one, even though he had started school at nine, Clariss graduated with honors in economics and philosophy from a reputable state college. One year later his banker father and his wife died, leaving him with an estate and fortune.

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Over the previous six months, Lazoo had worked hard and long for money, money, and more money – money that he was at times worried about handling with his clean hands. At other times he ate endlessly what he exchanged for it and drank heartily what he was poured in return for it. He dressed comfortably in what was tailored for him, he made moves for it, and he thought hard about how he was going to make more of it.

As Lazoo and Mrs. X were shown to their plush booth by the lanky French maitre d', Lazoo and Clariss crossed paths for the first time, brushing elbows. Lazoo looked briefly and looked away. He knew what kind of clown Clariss was.

Clariss looked at Lazoo and could not resist, so he commented on how good the fabrics of their suits looked next to each other. The clown held up his elbow to where he and Lazoo first became the suited and suitor, saying, "Stevonsen on Stevonsen is like skin on skin, would you dare agree?"

Lazoo smiled politely with his eyes while turning his head slowly so he could turn in one movement to be facing in the opposite direction from a person whom he knew he should not meet. Although there was no verbal response, the eye contact from Lazoo was enough for Clariss, who thought for a moment and then continued to the back of the restaurant full of bubbly glasses and thick, deep, brown smoke that looked gray in orange candlelight.

Lazoo was silent as he thought about the ride to the restaurant. He took no risk and ordered extra candles; he also asked for fresh flowers, suavely commanding, "Three small bouquets to go with the extra candles, please."

Etiquette wanted to grow on him, just as charm, introduced early by Janine, had spread evenly throughout Lazoo's most reliable persona, himself, a shell that would somewhere in the future fill with content that was compatible, consistent, and concerned, but for now the development of his character was at the impressionable stage.

He leaned back in the plush booth, choosing to sit halfway down the padded pew, as not to overdo his exaggerated apology, an apology he was not quite sure was at all received in the way he intended it to be. As he waited for Mrs. X to return from the ladies room, he could not look away from the gentleman who smiled and kept on smiling at him from the opposite wall. He thought for a moment of how nice the gentleman in the grey business suit was and how organized his life was, and admired him for dining alone. He noted how the man's briefcase was acutely parallel to his black lace-up shoes, and the neat crease of his grey suit trousers perfectly aligned at an equal distance, spread evenly like a military array ready to attack, but his hands upon the table were relaxed as if told by his head to act that way. The man's shoulders, normally square, were slightly drooped, as the shoulder blades of his suit jacket suggested. He and the man shared something, and Lazoo lifted his champagne flute to confirm that they were in each other's eyesight, and that it was okay.

Finally, Mrs. X returned to the picture. As she slid herself into the booth, she kissed him just as he was lifted his glass to the man one last time. Once Mrs. X was seated he was required to focus on her and only her. While looking deep into her eyes he felt someone coming towards them from where Mr Businessman had been seated. The figure finally stood at the edge of their table. Lazoo saw an out-of-place object pointing at Mrs. X and then him.

Clariss counted money from the four cash register trays stacked on top of each other. He licked his thumbs with glee, as if he hoped some of the legal tender would rub off of the notes, infiltrate his thick skin, and be absorbed into his bloodstream. Then some of that magical formula would flow through his veins to his heart and be distributed and recycled via the arteries and veins till one day his veins ran green with money.

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Lazoo pulled out his own pack of smokes when the plainclothes policeman offered him a cigarette. He once again sat on a chair with minimal support, unaware of the hugeness of the big picture within which he was framed. He was a bit player to Hariss Clariss, whom the police had been investigating at that time for five years.

The cop in the navy-blue suit pretended to be tired. "So you say that you are not an employee of Mr Clariss, James?" He was attempting to be patient.

Lazoo squared his shoulders, then he dropped them, dragged his cigarette and spoke, "No, I'm not. The guy I hit with the chair pulled out a gun in the restaurant, and then he walked to the back of the restaurant. I followed him. He went to the office and pointed the pistol at the guy counting money. I then picked up the chair and hit him across the back and not down on his head. That's it. That's all I did."

The police questioned him, made him coffee, charged him, printed and photographed him, made him wait in a cell for three hours, and then let him go.

Lazoo walked through the lobby of the still-swank hotel, still dressed and smelling of French perfume, escargot in reduced white wine cream sauce, ink from the ink pad with which the police had fingerprinted him, and the disinfectant with which the police cell was painted. He nodded at the nice girl with her hair up standing still behind the desk, who nodded back, as he strolled for the elevator doors. He tipped the bellboy operating the elevator to the penthouse floor, who said, "Thank you, Mr Lazoo," and when he turned the key

to his room atop the grand hotel, with its friendly staff, he puffed his cheeks and exhaled into the still-pristine premises.

He turned on the shower built for two, closed the glass door, and sat on the toilet lid to watch the steam fill the glass stall before he could recollect and then fathom the events of the night before and into the morning. He stood up, walked over to the stall, opened the door again, and turned on the other shower head so the two gold attachments guided water evenly to the middle, where the sprinkled water accumulated for a moment and then rotated universally into the gold filter. The water falling from the shower head to the ground, rotating and going down the drain, all happened within the time it had taken him to swing the wooden chair through the air and lay it hard across the back of Mr Businessman.

The water on his skin felt good. He knew it didn't clean him completely, but while he was in the stall it was all that was happening; nothing else happened in that space, just water on his skin, water that was hot, water that was cold, water that could be put to the back of the scene, that unselfishly allowed for the sun outside to shine, water that warmed him after the water outside hit him in the face from different angles driven by gale-force winds.

Lazoo called room service and ordered a steak sandwich with a Caesar salad, banana, and lemon. He cut the banana into the classic salad, then rolled the lemon, leaning on it, squeezed its juice, fingered the pulp on top of it all, and then sprinkled sugar over the mess. He ate it all within the time it took the jogger down in the park to run from the left of the area upon which he chose to focus to its right margin, space mostly sparsely inhabited by people. He then undressed, eyed the digital clock on the bed's side-table, untucked the tightly inserted sheets at the foot of the king-size mattress, picked a spare pillow from the pool of fluffed-up Siberian goose down comforters, opened the bed as if he were going to see someone he wanted in the sheets, slid inside, pulled up the covers, and slept.

The next morning an envelope lay at odd angles under door of Lazoo's room. He picked it up and threw it into the middle of the room. He walked around it once, then picked it up and inserted it far beneath the mattress of his unmade bed.

The housemaids were especially kind to him. They even read mail for him and called him nice names that weren't in half tones, or the falsetto falseness of the coldness of forced passion he could share with the caller. He always would remember the letter read to him by the 60-year-old maid, who claimed she only came to work to look after the young Lazoo.

Two weeks had passed since Lazoo had been arrested for assaulting a man with a chair. He had slowly built up his roster at Pink's club to half of what it had been before he had met Mrs. X. Each time he returned to the hotel room that he still did not believe was his he sighed upon re-entering it and finding it still really was. He had not dared to ask anyone to validate his presence in the room, and had left a second wardrobe at Mr Pink's apartment in the event that he would suddenly be found out at the upmarket hotel, where he continued to live in a room given to him by a person named Mrs. X, whom he had not seen since Mr Businessman in the grey suit had waved a gun at her and called her "bitch."

It was four o'clock. The shadows from the trees in the park and the skyscrapers across the river were long enough for Lazoo to close the curtains. The maid had promised she would be back at the end of her shift. This meant that anything from roast beef to pan-fried fish with fresh vegetables was possible. He had selected his movie for the night from the menu, and had the wall thermostat controlling the temperature of the room under control. The white carpet felt like sand at sunset on the beaches in postcard pictures when he walked across it to open the door. The old maid was bent over a room-service cart with two stainless steel covers. She unbuttoned her thick coat, made for the weather outside, as Lazoo pulled the cart into the room along with cold air from the shafts and other rooms less warm than his white room.

The maid folded her coat over the chair in which she sat down as he removed one of the covers to reveal to the room and his nostrils hot, steaming, thick, pumpkin soup with cream. He removed the other cover to expose melting garlic butter aboard soft, white, long Italian bread. As he served even helpings of the orange organic vegetable sauce into two white, perfectly weighted, impeccably crafted porcelain bowls and then ripped the bread apart, causing yellow juice to gather and then drip into the soup, he looked down and away and asked the maid, "Will you read me something later?"

Two weeks to the day following the delivery of the envelope to his room the day after his arrest, he finally opened it. As the maid's closely trimmed nails fumbled to find a place to open the envelope, without notice he gently found a way to take it back from her. He remembered that he had been waiting to find an opportunity to use the knifelike object that Mrs. X had told him was a letter opener, and with a well-practiced knowing smile he showed the maid how to open a letter. Then he handed it to her to read its contents for him, contents which confirmed that the white room was in 'deed' Mr John Lazoo's.

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## PART 2

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The conscience is the mind's mind

When the conscience gives in,

The mind gives up...

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Lazoo slept soundly through the alarm clock, through the nice bits and well into the heavy parts of Janine's bedtime story. The housemaid woke him while opening the door, against which she had to push hard to get by Michael, who was crashed out against it. She had to step in between fingers, heads, and Jimmy's hair head that carpeted the stained flooring. When she found the edge of the bed she stood over Lazoo with her hands on her hips.

Sensing someone, he pulled the covers over his head and moaned, "Can you come back in two hours, please?"

The middle-aged maid returned later with food that she and Lazoo ate on the unmade bed, looking at all the work that the young maid on the next shift would have to do to clean up.

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In the light of day Jimmy and Michael looked horrible, so horrible that Lazoo looked the other way, feeling bad and down. He wanted to promise himself that he would not come back to the diner where he had spent his first day in NYC sitting contemplating a new life, but he kept coming back each day for the late breakfast, which he never paid for. It was always on the house. After a while he came to like listening to other people's shit, good and bad. Jimmy and Michael started to like talking to him.

Shelia the waitress was gone. The new management was headed by Simon Campbell, a weird manager who was always watching and listening without coming forward with anything of value. In his early thirties, with a beer belly inside his tight, *SIL HOUSE* t-shirt, his nervous mannerisms and incoherent conversation put everyone else on edge.

Each morning after work in the club, an alley, the back seat of a cab, or a motel on the outskirts of nowhere, Lazoo returned to his room to watch a movie. He thought of the movies when dealing with his clients. He imagined that it was just another scene and they, too, were only actors. The movies were Lazoo's world. His teachers were regular guys whom the world admired, but he understood them to the marrow. Whatever the plight they portrayed, in whatever circumstances they found themselves, Lazoo could see the pool of energy, or the gift of grief, from which his mentors drew to illustrate everyday and out-of-body experiences at various stages, under harsh or soft lighting, for the sake of entertainment and education. His briefing and training on the inside was out the window by then. He watched to learn and eventually learned to watch.



Lazoo floated through the foyer of the hotel and glided down the avenues past shops and street corners to the Sil House cafe. On his way, he remembered, "Jimmy's last line would've made sense if it considered the first, third, and sixth lines of his poem," saying this as he looked forward to bacon and pancakes. He rehearsed, almost trance-like, "Jimmy, you monkey, your lines one, three, six, and nine hold the poem together." He passed a hot dog cart where people stood lined up. The two guys stared at him. "Jimmy," he said, "you bush baby, the others can be almost about any other shit. If you can match line nine to one, three, and six, you got the whole thing like a piece of mudcake that even I'd fucking eat, even if it meant stealing it off your plate while you weren't fucking looking."

Inside the café, Jimmy looked at Michael and Michael didn't respond. Lazoo kept eating, hoping that Jimmy would buy his advice. Jimmy appeared frustrated and curious, but glazed it all with a deep appreciation for his friend's advice on how he could fix the masterpiece he had been constructing for months, asking, "How do I know you know what you're talking about?"

Lazoo swallowed the free food. "You going to try it?"

"Fuck knows. For all I know you can't read a fucking dollar."

Lazoo left the café immediately after Jimmy started crossing red lines through portions of his work. As he was leaving, Jimmy handed Michael a sheet that Michael handed on to him. He spot-checked it the right way up and then screwed it into a ball that he threw at Jimmy's head. The ball of paper bounced off the white fro and into the air. Michael reached to grab it, blinking as Lazoo swiped it out of the palm of his hand before the paper touched his skin. Jimmy held his hand out as Lazoo looped the ball in the air. Jimmy caught it with two hands and unfolded the ball, flattening it out on the table as the back of Lazoo left Sil House.

Lazoo breathed through the foyer, up the elevator, and into his white room. He went to the window and looked down on the green grass, the golden sun lighting the park. He saw a different area of the park, a piece of park that had real sunshine shining down on it. The sun seemed like it would never leave that spot. He saw himself doing something in that area; the activity he was not sure of. The nature of the activity would be humorous to one viewer, yet distressing to another, and maybe it would make another yawn. He waited for the movie menu to change to the current listings and watched the long shadows creep darkness over the park that gave life to the lights and made a skyline of the buildings which had made the shadows previously.

The credits rolled back up the screen into the reel from where they came, the director ensuring that all the names and their work remained in the can and on the screen. Lazoo thought of the lines and the plot. The main character was a good one in that he was central, the anchor and reference point to all that was said out loud and unspoken inside, which came from him. On that note he shut his eyes sometime during the night. Janine's poems took over and he awoke, wild and willful.

He dressed and addressed the changes from being around others. The music from the TV was black, as far as he was concerned. He could think to its rhythm without having to be into it. He didn't bob his head like a buoy in water or have to click his fingers like a washed-up Las Vegas performer; he just sensed the bass and kick and naturally picked up on the snare as the place to join the soul train. He liked the vocoder robot voice as he tried to make himself believe that a scientist created the technology to enhance that human voice. He sprayed eau de toilette and walked to the window, something about that space he had squared off in his head. Another player would have made a lens with his thumbs and forefingers. Lazoo looked and captured the scene inside his mind.

Out the door and into the hallway, he pressed the button to call the elevator up to his floor. Inside he said hello to the bellboy, then went through the foyer and out onto the avenues. Lazoo stepped to funk, emotional and technical, a thing that he had begun to believe. He reached the doorway to Sil House, and there at the table

were the morons. He sniffed and straightened himself, saw an idiot behind the counter and a clown somewhere he could smell – all extras, as he remembered the reason why he came to this town.

Jimmy's mouth was about to open. Michael sat without words, and Simon leaned lethargically. He sneered and then he swallowed and sat down among them without touching any one of them. They waited, and when he felt no obligation to save the scene, Simon arrived with food.

Simon's smile and the way the music beat the smell of bacon to the table almost made Lazoo lose his appetite, but he focused. The syrup dripped down the pancakes and flooded the base of the plate with brown and orange.

Michael had something to say, but Jimmy spoke first. "Motherfucker's a rich fucking faggot."

Lazoo said, "Mmm ..."

"Likes guys like you," Jimmy went on, "white willful wankers."

Lazoo said, "Ah?"

"He'll be here any second now," Jimmy explained further. "Rich is this motherfucker, Lazoo."

Simon looked at the CD player. Lazoo looked at Simon. The magazine in the machine reshuffled and the selector selected a new track. "Ooh, ooh, ooh / Every once in a while there is some asshole ..." Lazoo liked the snare's ring.

Jimmy studied his face. Michael looked out the window; he could see something. Lazoo sensed that something as the front of a long, black limo that wiped the street as it passed. Lazoo wanted it to come back tomorrow when he would be feeling better. It stopped and reversed. The front wheels turned to forty-five degrees for one, two, and then they straightened as the side of the vehicle blocked the view six inches from the curb.

From inside the limo, Clariss viewed them waiting. The chauffeur, untrained in service, didn't move, so he opened the door himself and planted one foot on the sidewalk. Lazoo saw the shoe beneath the open door. He cleared his throat to himself as the music continued. Michael, Jimmy, and Simon watched him till he said, "Ease up. That's why you fucks are extras."

They concealed the looks on their faces as both of Clariss's feet moved over the pavement and he eased up to the window. Lazoo pulled the coffee cup towards him and drank from it as the towering figure outside the window smiled, his eyes squinting and gleaming a sheen right across the already crystal-clear glass. Lazoo lighted a cigarette as Clariss walked for the door. He saw Clariss's back leave the outside as the front of him came through into the space of which he had been in control till then.

Clariss sat at the table closest to the door and Simon was at his side immediately. Lazoo looked down and to his left, clenched his jaw, and decided it was time for him to leave. As he passed Clariss, the restaurateur touched his elbow for attention and said, "I have a thank-you, but it requires more time than the fleeting experience in which you hastily exist."

Lazoo looked at him blankly. "I had that fleeting experience and it made me feel ill," he said. "So long in a day and one half moon when you see me again, try to make thank-you harmless and seamless in the way we speak candidly, ah?"

Their heads bowed at their table as Clariss sat back and issued his order. Simon ran to fill it as Clariss shouted

out the swinging door onto the street after Lazoo, "Take the car, son!"

Lazoo stepped further out into the middle of the street, over the center line, as he shook his head to decline the offer. The limo was left standing still as Lazoo headed for his white room.

He kept his cool through the lobby and all the way to his door. Once inside the door he exhaled and then flopped to the floor. When he awoke he could feel the carpet on his face. He put his face back down to where the pattern came from. The carpet looked close and the thick fibers looked like molecule particle strands under a microscope and the wall seemed miles away. He noticed that the fibers diminished in size gradually and evenly, cut down perfectly in a gradient so gentle that eventually they vanished as the eye said when. He wanted to go to the window and look down at the park, but he couldn't right at that moment. The thought of what was happening was sickening, so he lay back down till all light was gone and he could imagine darkness suiting his placement.

Finally, his arms pushed him from the ground and his legs took him to the nearest seat. The bed looked used, its use for sleep had even become labored, too. He decided to go to the window and looked down at the park. The sun had forsaken and forgotten the promising patch; some figures moved hurriedly and some strolled, but all were moving, walking, and treading on top of where the sun made people sit. He made something to eat and chewed it as he studied the area and practiced the piece thoroughly till he understood its meaning.

He sat down on the grass, the dew soaking through the denim. When he located the window of his white room, he knew how insignificant he must seem to anyone down in the park living life, accidentally being caught in the action. His backside was now wet right through, so he decided it wouldn't matter if the back of his sweatshirt were also to dampen thoroughly. The trade-off would be the full moon that he would see above him if he were to lay down flat on his back, the charismatic, silver moon that filled the black screen of the sky, nature's most illuminating of characters.

The stars twinkled, their appearance like their supporting role in this scene. Once identities in their own right, the way they shined on and then off was a true reflection of how they exist and then burn out, but the moon was always there. John understood the meaning of the documentary on TV the previous evening. The dew from the grass had so drenched his clothing that his body had cured the coldness with its warmth. He had not realized that the moon never really got the chance to settle into a good day's rest, as the sun always stole the show as it rose, victoriously, just as it set in a majestic fashion each day, both in reality and in the minds of its many fans and worshippers around the watching planet.

The grass dried soon and his clothes were dry. The character came through the door quietly yet confidently, but still slowly. The last bits were drying at the speed at which the clouds passed over his head, some spots more rewarding than others, once wet, then warm, then dry, and suddenly hot. Lazoo said aloud, "That homeless man over there under that tree, he hasn't eaten for three whole days. I have here in my collection an array of sandwiches and fruit. I was wondering if you would like to contribute to my basket of food for the needy?"

## CHAPTER 03

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What captures your eye?

And captivates your mind?

And catapults your heart, above its flat line, beyond the possibilities you have felt?

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### PART 1

Spring break was in full swing. New York City's Central Park was the place where Genisis Jones wished to be with her friends from college, her friends from the past, and her friends from the future. They spoke volumes of compassion, argued loudly about Freud, and psychoanalyzed why they cared, why the world spins on its planned axis, and why time is cyclic, remembering spring breaks from before.

This was before Lazoo noticed that sun shone through her eyes only to rebound off her shiny hair once the rays had touched all the corners of Central Park and had reflected back to where she sat. He walked up to her and said, "That homeless man over there under that tree ... I have ... I was wondering ... for the needy?" He informed the students with his gaze in line with her blue eyes that looked grey and like they'd cry, yet she was smiling brightly up at him.

A woman shielded her eyes from the normal sun as she looked up at the average figure that stood in the middle of their discussion about emissions from machines and their effects on the park and its trees. The average guy spoke from his heart and led Genisis to believe him at once. Genisis gave the average guy with the nice smile her lunch, thinking that he should eat the food himself instead of giving it to the man he pointed to in the distance. She also thought that before he sat down to eat he should clean the dry grass that was clinging to his back.

Genisis wanted to follow the average guy, but she waited for her best friend Danielle to finish her thought so that she could agree with her. She kept an eye on the average guy as he moved from group to group. Then the average guy started taking money from people in return for the lunches he had collected from her and her friends and the other groups in the park.

Caught in the transaction, Lazoo was careful of how he should turn to speak with someone who might be just living life to the fullest, or could perhaps be someone passing through this scene into some place where their lives had been living for months, maybe years, in their parents' dreams. He was also thoughtful that he had not yet contemplated a co-star to share his cut with, so he looked up high as he decided to permit someone else to lead for one moment. After all, she might have even been good enough for him to follow and therefore support.

"I thought you said the homeless person was a man?" Her voice matched the image still inside his head. Still, the approach was forthright and combative, meaning that to sustain any life he now chose to give the voice, he either had to attack it or humor it, depending on how deep her cleavage was and how fast her convertible could speed. Before he could do either she spoke again, "I didn't realize that the homeless man had a desk to eat his lunch at." He had no room or space in which to insert an assertive line. "If I knew that you were feeding women," she went on, "I'd have asked you to feed me."

It was the blonde babe with the bright blue eyes from the privileged gathering on the mount that Lazoo saw when he slowly turned to meet his captor. She looked over her shoulder as she walked away, her smile sitting sweetly above that blade. Her hair then closed the smile from him as she turned her head away. He was too scared to ask her name; she had to tell him. He walked in the opposite direction and figured the stuff he had to in one hell of a hurry, as his heart raced ahead of him around the park that covers the city and back into his

back, which she looked at as she sat back down with her friends.

The morons, the idiots, the clowns, and the extras had over time given him ample clues. He knew that they hadn't meant to, it was just their predictable clumsiness which made for what was already a minus-B-grade movie, which he had a long time ago decided to kill for his own pleasure and to create his own play, in which the *mice* could fight to give life to their fake and floundering endeavors to do *whatever*. He couldn't even be bothered trying to work out what the whatever could be. There in the park, though, he felt a real scene, a real feeling that he had to deal with for once.

Lazoo strolled through the hotel foyer one more time. The elevator doors opened on his floor. He stepped out between the sliding, hissing doors, leaving dried grass like angel dust in his wake. He stood at the window looking down on the park. The area where he had slept, awakened, and seen and met Genesis seemed brightly lit in contrast with the rest, even beneath the midday sun shining down directly on all the rest of nature and the inhabitants that dwelled, quelled, and moved amongst and atop the large, medium, and minute erections made and planted by humans or otherwise gifted by Mother Earth.

Later, on the street, Lazoo rounded a corner and two morons crossed his path. They laughed, then they ran out of material. A bus zoomed by, the driver shooting air as the passengers laughed and then felt like idiots.

Inside the Sil House café he saw Jimmy, Michael, Simon, and someone new. He noted the additional extra for the day. *When will he make his move?* Lazoo thought as he entered the smoky room just before Clariss. Soon the banter bored him; the long black coffee lined and fouled the roof of his mouth. His captivated mind constantly repelled the rampant flow of bad ideas from Haze and Afra. His eye saw but disapproved of their appearance, while his other eye remained blinded by one sight. He readied himself for the entrance of Clariss as he found the wryest of smiles to greet the person he had come to wish he had let be, and let be killed.

Afra's speech could only be matched by his hand gestures, which his mind was unable to control, like the waste spilled on the ream of paper he stacked in front of Clariss. Clariss, proud now that someone had penned him and his love of his mother onto parchment that could contain the heavy and dark content that filled the story of how he begot who he was. Ripped from a womb, rising from the Malaysian jungles to the streets of New York, stirring fear and administering angst where required, he had normalized an existence he had designed all on his own.

Lazoo let it carry on as long as they played their greedy, foolish selves. He leaned back, lit a smoke, and pointed to his cup, which Simon needed to refill. There was a fool on a stool who reached out to take the cup to hand to Simon.

"Yes," Clariss was saying, "Scandinavian she was, but I quite like the idea that her eyes are brown instead of the blue."

Jimmy came on like a kiss-ass. "I even thought of green, Mr Clariss," he said. "I knew that you would like the fact that she was different. The blonde hair and blue eyes is too predictable."

The fool on the stool agreed. Jimmy's eyes went larger and Clariss looked out the window for three, four, five and commanded, "Read me again the part where I lay on top of the carved stone for two days and two nights while she bleeds to death from giving birth to me."

Michael looked down into his coffee and the fool on the stool annoyed everyone with his hand gestures, asking if anyone would like a top-up. Clariss wished Jimmy would hurry up, as it was Lazoo's turn to look out the window.

"The new one's arms and legs punched and kicked the environment," Jimmy read.

Clariss held one hand up in the air as Lazoo still looked out the window. "Jimmy, praise be to Divinity," Clariss intoned, "but I do believe that Simon sounds like he attended Harvard and not Sesame Street. May I suggest that we take your words to another time and place when Big Bird's wings served their purpose?"

Lazoo kept on looking out the window. Clariss was indeed a fitting rival, he thought, as his lines melted into the atmosphere. Simon then came to the edge of the table.

The fool on the stool said, "Right on."

Michael stretched his neck and Lazoo thought about nothing else. Simon cleared his throat as Jimmy assured him he was okay with all his fingers on both his hands.

"The new one's arms and legs punched and kicked the environment," Simon read. "An aura lights and forms a layer of life around the baby on top of the altar like rock. Mosquitoes and insects swarm the body that lies on the dirt below the baby on top of the rock. All the blood that this ecosystem requires to survive eventually stops flowing from her naked and torn body as the baby continues to thrive and cry till a guerrilla militia find him and wrap him in camouflage ..."

Lazoo now listened to Michael's idea of a good time. Clariss watched the way the guy behaved, and when he excused himself to the visit the men's room he asked Michael if his idea could be made.

Michael half-shrugged, "Yeah. I suppose."

Inside and in the mirror, murmurs were all that he noticed. The voices were no longer loud, but one was trying hard to cut through. He revisited the sunspot where in his head she still stood alone and on her own, looking back at him as she walked away from him, as the limo pulled up to the place where he'd been waiting for an hour. Out jumped Michael and Jimmy, and then Clariss's head poked itself out. When he saw him he held the top of the door and launched himself onto the concrete in front of where Lazoo stood his ground.

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Feelings of wanting to die or to be killed had come to this. Upstairs in the vacant office building Michael had promised four high-rollers that they would get to fight in the first of what would become a money-making bonanza for all those involved. The entry fee was in the thousands, grams of speed or the coke of your choice were available with the chance to fight hand-to-hand with John Zoo, who'd been brought up inside and roamed free like an animal.

Lazoo squared his shoulders. The cramped elevator reminded him of different spaces. His back was to the back of the cage, Jimmy was to his left, Clariss to his right, and Michael in front. The floor was still under construction. The elevator left it behind as it flew to the roof of the new skyscraper. Lazoo, under siege from the three inside this space, felt his vision blur as he fought to contain the body hits that came without a fist clenched. He had a moment, so he looked at the woman again in the sunlight. This time she sat down, pulled in her legs, and pulled back her hair to look up at him. The sudden jarring of cables halted the elevator. Everyone swayed and then grabbed at holes in the side of the cage. Lazoo stood as he was. Michael's back, moving out and forward, brought butterflies and spiders that crawled in among his normally reliable kneecaps.

The high-rollers looked more like lowlifes as Lazoo took four containers from his pocket. He moved to the front of the first one. He held out his palm with the goods. A customer placed money in his palm and took the drugs. He went on to the next till all four were accounted for. Michael watched from the center of the room, and when Lazoo had completed the business he called him over. They talked as Lazoo gave him the cash. Michael's invisibility came from his *quiet*, something that Clariss wanted to liven up, but decided to let settle.

"All left handed," Lazoo reported.

Michael nodded. "Fuck knows?"

"They going to kill me, or do they know?"

"Can't kill everybody ..."

"So they get to tell others?"

Clariss stepped up to them and announced, "We live in an age of Technicolor and the Surround Sound talkies and you two want to make intimate, distant silent movies! Common! In the name of Divinity, common!"

Lazoo kept his head down as Michael tied his hands. Clariss said no more as the fighters in the background stripped down into their gear.

Michael scanned the room to survey the damage. Lazoo stood in the far right corner with his head down, his back neatly packed into each wall's end, causing his shoulders to cave in on his chest, further accentuating the already ripped pecs that met in a line marked by his chin, which nestled between his collar bones and the bronze belt buckle above his pelvic line.

Lazoo focused on his pay. The four bodies that crawled, collapsed, then sprawled on their stomachs moaned, then groaned, then spat blood on each other. All four must have wanted this, just like wealthy clients enjoying their just desserts after their dinner. As John Lazoo looked at them he wanted to spit on them, but he wouldn't waste his saliva.

Clariss and Jimmy watched Lazoo. The silence being a ruling factor, Clariss felt the blood rise. His groin filled with the warm blood, which next filled out the lap area of his thighs. Then the warm broth began to boil up through the belly till it tapered off and simmered lightly, the bubbles diminishing in size, leaving the hefty street baron warm – just from looking at Lazoo.

Lazoo remembered the movies he'd watched in prison. He remembered a master of martial arts defying gravity with the use of opposing forces of weight to produce an energy he could harness in order to direct any mass in the direction that it had to be moved, regardless of weight or size. Speed was the only other factor, one which Lazoo luckily had and chose to sharpen through continuous manipulation of his reflexes and clever anticipation of the possibilities open to an opponent under various circumstances. This simple method or understanding could be termed the Order of Time. All that had occurred within the 63 seconds of the fight could have been predicted or known, depending on from which point in time he entered the scene.

Michael strapped the Velcro tightly to his wristband. He had ready the salt to disable one or all of the four street thugs, now deadweight on the concrete floor of the new high-rise. The glassless gaps of its windows let in the cool July-night breeze to dry the light sweat that formed a film on Lazoo's brow.

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Lazoo kept himself from going to the window to look down on his favorite place in the world. The music, black silver horns, smoothed the rhythm of his heart, but nothing could co-ordinate the behavior of his knees, which seemed not to want to support him as a unit. A black silk tie brought together the stiff collar of a matte-black Charley Stevensen shirt, covered by a black Armani tapered perfectly down to shiny, black, handmade snakeskin cowboy boots. The mirror told lies if you wanted it to. The musical notes from the tall speakers carried Lazoo to whimsical worlds in which he could live or to where he could run when the present bored him or scared him, or when it was too good to be true.

His step pulled back the yards of carpet, the marble in the foyer fell into that unit of measurement, which his metric stride also wound back. The staff behind the counter smiled. The ladies in their gowns shuffled their fronts as they bent their knees. As Lazoo stepped his heel connected to the ground as his toes faced upward to

the music in his head. Her eyes guided him through the doors to the street, its hues warm.

The limo was due in the spot he pointed to; he looked up at the security camera as he rapped his wrist twice. The headlights of the limo slid up, the chauffeur let down the partition so he could make out Clariss. Lazoo could now see the combination to the safe where the money was. Michael was a character who would require little or no attention and be an ideal stand-in. Jimmy was good enough to take notes of his ideas. Sil House, with a makeover, could be the office for his own crew. Lazoo rapped his wrist one more time as the limo approached – one, two, three – and there it was, the handle, the chauffeur as accurate as he was punctual.

Lazoo gave the limo chauffeur a CD. Clariss nodded to the dark, muscular man, who only understood body language, to insert it into the vehicle's sound system. Jimmy and Michael sat with their backs faced to the front, making their experience of the ride through the New York night a backward one. Lazoo sat on the same seat as Clariss, his bruised knuckles on top of each knee, knees which had only just stopped shaking. Clariss ensured his view of Lazoo was a permanent one in the rearview mirror, viewable through the open partition separating the guests from the chauffeur. 'The Look of Love', as noted by Burt Bacharach, balanced the silence-to-nonsense ratio in each person's head as Clariss set the scene to win Lazoo's appreciation and, he hoped, his gratitude for Clariss's company and all its benefits.

The kick and then the snare, the kick and then the snare – Jimmy's nostrils then flared; Michael's eyes passed up the opportunity. The camera skipped the body and captured Clariss. His smile was wide. Lazoo was silent.

The chauffeur leaned into the corner he was taking at a moderate, mild, and smooth speed, just like the rhythm of Hall and Oates. Along the sidewalk stepped a pair of legs – step, step – ah-ha? The hem of her skirt was gold, high, high up on her fucking smooth thigh – still the kick and then that fucking phased fucking snare – step, step as she stepped – the bass with the kick and that fucking snare together, her body had its share, ample and firming as she led this – step step – beside the wheels of the rolling limo, fucking long in this scene. The lights were cascading, rearranging red, orange, green, orange, green, red, and then green, green, green.

Lazoo looked about as Clariss lifted one hand in the name of Divinity.

Stopped at an intersection, Clariss let down all the windows of his limousine. The classic eighties bass-line pounded into reality an ambiance to which the night-clubbers, hustlers, models, hookers, gangsters, and tomorrow's day clerks added their sparkling smiles, movie poses, and catwalk struts, making it a crowd that was *in* for this moment in time. Every man was an actor and every girl was pretty.

One pretty girl put her head through the window and met with Lazoo's eyes. Lazoo cradled the made-up face and placed his champagne flute to her lips, tilting the glass to administer only enough champagne to wet the pale lips belonging to a beautifully sculptured cleavage. Even Clariss ate this surreal scene up for one millionth of a second.

Lazoo heard the riff off in the distance as the chauffeur pulled the limo to the curb. The crowd waited as Mr Pink waved his hands, their backs on either side of his plump face making them blur. Clariss checked his fingers and their rings as the doorman came to the limo door. The chauffeur handed Lazoo a card. Lazoo put it away. Clariss caught the switch, but he remained calm.

The DJ on the top step took his cue from Mr Pink's hand on his hand, shaking as he lifted the needle. From inside the limo Lazoo could feel the silent grooves of the vinyl, which the sharp diamond stylus filled to fulfill its destiny. Clariss studied his cuticles. Lazoo slid left on the seat just as Jimmy attempted to leave the cabin for the fever outside.

An off-duty reporter saw Lazoo's hands reach for the top of the door. He smiled at the doorman who smiled at the crowd. Lazoo caught the orange face as he viewed the red carpet and the distance to the first and top steps.



Jimmy was now standing next to him.

The limo dropped him off for the night. He made his decision as he took the card from his pocket. He angled it between his fingers ready to fling it into a trash can, then took it between his thumb and forefinger, and as a backup put it into his wallet's secret compartment. He then walked backward a few paces and turned in for the night.

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Lazoo awoke smiling at the thought of the woman in the park and summoned himself to find his feet, which naturally took him to the window. The sun had not yet reached the special area as he walked through the park on his way to meet a client. He walked on air, the value of two sturdy legs to carry one to and from a place in time made him smile as he remembered the wobbly feeling that came from being scared the night before. It spurred him on to greet and delight his first client for the day.

Lazoo's client list was long and lean. In one click it had thinned out to be neat. He no longer swapped saliva, and only once in a full moon did he go down to be eye-to-eye with wet flesh. He plucked new language acquisitions from clients and TV documentaries. Context was not yet an issue, as he was still ignorant, but at least he was aware of tone and delivery. He used his confidence to bridge concepts and his flow to compound his terms so as to merge with their conditions. He relied on his presence to carry away each listener's sensibilities and to diminish relativity to anything conceivable, creating a dimension where chemistry matters, the literal was forgotten, and his illiteracy was forgiven, if at all uncovered.

Lazoo could see the flat area he elevated in his head, *the mount*, as he called it. He could see it from a mile away as he walked back through the park. Some of his spark had been taken, left behind and forgotten at the cafe where he'd had breakfast with a divorcée who wanted to take everything from her ex-husband of 50 years. The area was once again alight with a glow, more golden than the molten vapors that make the sun's beams. The woman, who he had thought about more often than not for 1,440 minutes, was there. Right there again, seated with her legs neatly twisted from her hips down so that they lay like perfect confectionary, her painted nails air-brushing her legs, while dismissing the summer insects as she supported herself with her other arm.

Genesis's best friend laughed loudly at her joke, of which he could only make out the punch line, which was, "And I said, 'If I knew that you were feeding women, I'd have asked you to feed me.'"

He looked down on the area as the punch line pummeled his brain and his pride. He sidestepped the area that he had designed with care and that something powerful in the universe had furnished with beauty in one human woman of an animal. He could make out what he wanted to be, her best male friend, the gay guy she loved to dance with. He recognized that Genesis kept looking around the park. Three hours later she stopped looking. She and her friends packed their books, radio, and leftover lunches. He finished unbuttoning his shirt, threw it on the ground, and sighed, "Oh well, shit happens," at the anchorman on the TV.

If everything is relative and there is a reaction for every action, and if things different or alike that happened yesterday can happen today with the same or different meaning and have an altogether opposing or identical feeling attached to them, there must be a team somewhere that keeps an eye on things that happen, and who ensure that appropriate measures are taken in accordance with the primary act, keeping in mind the end result for both givers and takers, antagonists and protagonists, alike and unlike.

Lazoo told himself this in not so many words, thinking, *There must be a mirror somewhere, or a writer who writes this shit*. It annoyed him to think this as he sat looking at a twenty-something widow who required escorting for one night. There was no empathy, nothing like what he felt about three street fighters spewing blood on the concrete.

Lazoo walked down the stairs of the Swank Swank New York Restaurant, holding up the hand of his brown-haired customer. He held it high so that it would form a hilltop between him and his last client for the night. Clariss's limo was parked with its door open, making it the only getaway vehicle available to Lazoo. As if planned, he boarded the open cabin and asked the chauffeur to deliver his customer to her doorstep two minutes from there.

The chauffeur turned to his right as Lazoo ordered him in the opposite direction from the Sil House café, where the scariest clown and his extras waited for him. The chauffeur advised him that Clariss had requested his company, that Jimmy was ready to rewrite the story of Hariss Clariss, and that Michael had booked another fight for him. In the end, Lazoo pointed to the woman third in line, with the hips and legs. The chauffeur pulled up to her. Lazoo could see her crotch, the hair down there also light, the flesh pink as it parted, and when she bent forward to talk to the chauffeur through the passenger's window he could see her chest – no tattoos. Lazoo nodded at the chauffeur, who proceeded to do the business on his behalf.

The blonde woman who sat across from Lazoo looked likeable. She had to be mid-twenties to mid-thirties. She weighed something between 140 and 155 pounds. The chauffeur walked around and around the vehicle, as if he needed to get into the back and tell Lazoo something vitally important. Lazoo put his hand up to let the woman know that all was fine and that this would be one of those easy jobs – no touching, maybe no speaking, and definitely no saliva. To ease the pain of silence the woman looked out the window to watch time pass by.

"You're new at this, ah?" said Lazoo.

"Yes, I'm an actress," said the hooker.

"I heard you loud and clear."

Lazoo talked it out without notation and in no man's key baritone, with tone-deaf anti-precision, just loud enough to annoy the chauffeur trying to sleep at the wheel. Lazoo looked straight ahead at the hooker, who counted the minutes as she calculated her pay. The sun was somewhere in the scene. Its rays were starting to stream through the open sunroof.

## CHAPTER 04

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I held a mirror in front of you

To help you see the beautiful truth

Our love was deep, our love was pure

For the first time in our lives we felt so sure

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Janine had not read James Elton the story of Oedipus Rex, in which the King of Thebes was warned that a son yet to be born would kill him. Shakespeare's Hamlet was a poster on Broadway and Freud's analysis of a boy's need for his mother's breast were pages of self-humanization to ensure there existed a divide wide enough and deep enough that even birds with the widest of wingspans would not make the flight to the place we humans now perch upon and bark louder than the dogs of Shakespeare.

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### PART 1

Lazoo knew that if he lay there long enough she would come. Just like if he worked behind the counter of a newsstand, she would come every day to pick up her copy of the *New York Times* and her magazine with pictures of nail polish for strong-colored nails. If he sold shoes in a shoe store, he would handle her feet and squeeze her calf muscle as he suggested to her that the silver-strapped ones with no toe would make her feet breathe so he could kiss them when he took them off her again. This, though, was where he worked, in the park under the now-blistering sun.

Nothing else existed in his NYC, only her now, and if he never saw her again New York would never be the same. He loved the birthplace of John Lazoo, even though Janine would have preferred he be born where he could see the willow and hold the Wisconsin dirt in his hand and let it sift through his fingers, but New York was where he wanted himself to be. Lazoo closed his eyes on everything and forced himself to focus on the most noted of verses, "Love". He then let his shoulders rest, relax, and say no to any angst or fear of loss.

"Are you okay?"

Lazoo opened his eyes fast, too fast. One eyelid didn't know it was time to open and needed extra help, causing him to lose form. With the same hand with which he helped this invalid eyelid he shielded both eyes from the sun, only to see the old lady who had been there since the limo had dropped him off.

"Give me your suit." Lazoo smiled back at the homeless man he had used as a decoy the first time he'd worked there.

"Do you know how to get to the subway?" The tourist made Lazoo laugh. Lazoo lay there well into the afternoon, his hands behind his head.

"Give me your suit."

This time Lazoo was ready. He sat up and removed the Armani jacket and handed it up to the man with four jackets of his own, every one bearing grime and two years of sweat. "Sell it," he advised, "and pocket the cash."

He closed his eyes once he was satisfied the moving prop had gone away, nowhere to be seen, where he couldn't deter her. He no longer had to pretend he was asleep, as he felt himself dozing off. As his conscious mind said goodbye to what he heard, and said, "Hum" to the unknown, a lyric on top of music floated about

his head; his body fell behind him deep into where he lay, a beginning of how he was floored came to get him and found him fetching for his sense of sight as Dusty Springfield sang, "The look / of love / is in / your eyes ..."

Lazoo rolled over onto his side, using an arm for support, the melody so deeply a part of his seas of thought that the words floated like bubbles that disappeared as other bubbles floated to the smooth surface as the lyric kept coming. The music had words, and they were coming from her mouth as she sat alone with her radio. He had, too!

"I have the music to that song," he said, "Y'know?"

She sat at a distance from him, far enough so that she could not smell the odors from his work of the previous night. He sat where he had lain down that morning to see if she would come to him. He surveyed the gap to be one body length of his and two body lengths of hers. The distance between them, vast in terms of life, was normal and abnormal with all its difficulties. Bridges would have to be built, he knew, he had to dig moats for his insecurities. The ground they sat upon moved. It did not shake, for once in his adult life. The seismic activity swirled and whirled and then swayed the both of them.

Eventually they talked. Then they stood up and walked, he in front of her for only a couple of steps, till he held out his hand for her to catch. Through the park, one-on-one, they poked at each other and then at others less fortunate, those without what they thought to themselves they may have found.

Through the lobby, he avoided the attention she brought to him and pressed the button to bring the elevator down to the ground. He nodded at the bellboy and then they giggled. He said, "Good afternoon," to the bellboy and then they giggled again. He showed her the door to the white room and then they laughed. "This," he announced, "is the door."

Her legs looked brown in the white room. Her arms were strong-looking and her smile had already watermarked the mirror in front of which he shaved. She sat in the middle of the made bed, her radio, upon which her porcelain fingernails still tapped the rhythm of their song, to her left.

"He was there, laying on the grass in his suit, waiting for me," she smiled as he walked back into the room, his bathrobe tied tightly. Only from his calf muscle could she tell that there was potential elsewhere.

"Would you like a drink?" he asked. He looked down, waiting to see if the mix still had fizz that he remembered and felt from the first time he smelt her. "Wine?" He depressed the button for room service and said, "Could you please bring me up a ...". He held his other hand over the receiver. "What sort of wine, Genisis?" Remembering the best he could among the anxieties of organizing dialogue with meaning for a reason, he repeated the word to the housemaid whose flirting was going to make him forget it: "Chardonnay."

Then they said, in unison, "Well ..."

They both wanted to stay right where they were well into the evening. Then he walked her back through the park to where she lived. On the tenth step he stopped and said, "I've got to go to work."

She gently let go of his hand and looked at the space beneath the reinforced aluminum door to her apartment, a home which she had wanted to show him. He looked all around her beautiful, soft face except at her eyes, and then he found the ground and smiled at the distance between their toes. It had narrowed. He moved his gaze slowly to the top of her blond head and felt comfortable at the height of his emotions.

"Would you like to see me again?" she asked.

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He danced through his work that night. An overweight bean-counter had ordered Michael to humiliate him.

"Lazoo," the fat accountant grunted, "is that what they call you?" The accountant still had his glasses on.

"Yep. *Lah* as in Lava, with a *zee*, for Zorro."

Lazoo punctuated the *zee* with a cracking right. The right lens of the puffing white bag's eyewear cracked, and red blood splattered onto Lazoo's white teeth as Michael gave the nod. The man's left lens would have to be replaced with a permanent eye patch. Clariss knew he had Lazoo. Michael handed Lazoo his pay and stepped back.

"Talk to me, Jimmy," Lazoo said. "Your big eyes are fucking with my small brain. Talk to me!"

The spotlights shining through the mesh fence cage cast a design on Lazoo's back, a reptilian pattern that Jimmy didn't want to shine down on his afro at all. Lazoo, uncoiling his bloodied straps, smiled at all three of them

Lazoo tidied himself up, as the limo would be arriving in twenty minutes.

He found, then studied, the little radio that she had left behind on the side of the bed. He pressed play and it still had the song. It has no bass, only frequencies from the middle of the spectrum. Lazoo thought of the calm way he'd felt earlier that day with Genisis, then smiled at they way they'd laughed as he'd continued to ready himself. The club had bass and the lights had his head spinning. His left nostril felt heavy from the wall he had built inside it, meaning the right one needed some, too. Mr Pink wanted to see him, and Clariss gave him a nod down to the ground. Lazoo held his arms out when he danced. Nothing really moved, but it all flowed.

Mr Pink lapped it up and shouted in his ear, "You still available, John? I have clients!"

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Lazoo opened his eyes wide to see if he could feel anyone close to him. The bodies lay on top of the bed, but only he was inside and under the covers. He reached for the radio and switched it on. A knock at the door brought Jimmy's fro into orbit. He turned the radio off as Michael wiped sleep from his mouth and sat up straight on the couch.

Lazoo's index finger made a cross on his lips as he gave an order to all the bodies in the room now waking from their drunken, drugged states and conditions: "Shhhh."

In the hallway, Genisis knocked for the third time, feeling stupid, and thought, "If anyone knew how much that radio meant to me they would excuse my girl-like behavior!" She aired her tightly clenched fist for a fourth time, only to open it up and use it on herself to smooth out her front. She then did an about-face and headed back to the elevator to return to from where she had come.

Michael handed out uppers to every hand held out to him.

Jimmy laughed, "Lazoo, you're a fucking freak, man!" as he licked his frosted mirror and brushed his teeth with his tongue. "A fucking freak!" Jimmy then pushed up the bottoms of his deformed afro.

Lazoo wasn't smiling or laughing about the sadist he'd played the night before. The thought of it now made him sad. He stared back at Jimmy and then at the radio, then got up. Still controlling the volume in the room, he treaded lightly among the bodies on his floor. In the bathroom mirror he looked and remembered the knock at the door.

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She studied harder, but all she wanted to learn about was him. As she dialed the number on the card, she dragged the phone wire to the corner of the room and hid from the photos of her parents on the wall. A hotel operator answered and Genisis said, "The white room. please."

Lazoo picked up the phone on the last ring, just when she thought that hanging up would be best. "Hello?" he answered.

Clearing her throat, she said, "Is that John?"

Lazoo felt his nerves. He felt things rearrange his insides and sweat break out hot on his skin. Then, when her voice faded on his name, the cool of her calm floated his head and he replied, "Yep. I mean, yes. Is that you Genisis?" He was buying time like no other human could bargain for.

"It's Genisis. I came around to see you this morning." She could not lie.

Lazoo placed the handset carefully on its cradle and stood to study the man-made device that had made his heart race. He thought of the brain on Alexander Bell and how his invention had carried her voice to him. He traced the cord to the wall, then walked to the window, located the nearest telephone pole, admired it for being so reliable, and was humbled by how the cables could relay his thoughts to her and how they could transmit her warmth to his white room.

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She opened her door. The nice smile she gave the deliveryman was outdone only by the flowers he held out to her with his right arm. The card read, "Sorry I can't make dinner tomorrow night. I have to work, but while I work, I will devise a diversion so I can see you Friday night. John."

Genisis held the card and smelled the flowers. Genisis smelled the flowers and held the card. Then Genisis read the card and closed her eyes.

Wednesday, Thursday – all of that night and then all of the next day, Lazoo's mind went wild every time he thought of her. After all of those nights in all of those sleeps, Lazoo's heart went marshmallow-soft and then sweet every time he squeezed the spare pillow tight.

Traffic lights cascaded for him as busses and slow-jammed cars and cabs and all other traffic rolled by. The workers, worn from their offices, moved on their last legs to the subway and for the hills to have a weekend. Friday night was there with her people who'd just got paid. Lazoo stood on the pavement looking for a ride to take Genisis and him to the setting of their first date.

The third yellow cab stopped in as many minutes. Leaning into the back seat of the cab, Lazoo sneered, "Whose porridge is that?"

The cabbie blasted back, "You want the fucking cab, or what?"

Lazoo slammed the door, kicked the rear tire and hailed the next yellow cab, which was cleaner. Its driver was dressed in an authentic Hawaiian shirt. Gesturing toward the shirt, Lazoo asked, "What's that made from?" as he beamed his bright smile in both of the cabbie's mirrors.

"Cotton, but it's the design. They're hand painted." The cabbie's accent was rich, his voice warm.

"I can smell the flowers, driver," Lazoo told him. "You know that?" He looked at the cabbie's back, careful not to over inflect his line.

The cabbie laughed into his rear-view mirror, "That's the air freshener, my friend."

Lazoo undid another button to his shirt and looked into the mirror on dashboard. "No," he said, "I mean the flowers look real!"

The drive up to Harlem was slow at the best of times. It almost felt as if the cabbie was going too slow, but Lazoo had timed it to perfection. Lazoo wanted to know more about this warm man behind the wheel. "How do you say your name?"

"James." The driver looked at his laminated identification on the dashboard to see if it was legible, and then looked through the bottom mirror at Lazoo, who was looking at the back of his long, thick, wet-looking black hair.

"Right. James, do they make food in Harlem like they make your shirt?" Lazoo sat up straight in the back seat of the cleanest cab he could find in New York.

"I have the place for you, my brother. It's on Cross Street. It has a restaurant and a nightclub upstairs. The ladies are beautiful in their hula skirts ..."

Before the driver could complete this sentence, Lazoo shifted his gaze to a homeless man wanting him to lower his window further. He asked the driver, "What's the

atmos ... phere there like?"

As the cab made its way to the curb, Lazoo felt sensations beginning in his thighs; then they rose to his groin and produced repercussion upon repercussion till his body was thick, wild, and warm from the sight of Genesis, first in the wide angle of the windshield, then in the side angle of the passenger window, and finally when the cabbie had stopped the cab and the top half of her body was in his window, only a foot from his reach. He sat back hard in the seat, opened the door for her, and slid himself across the seat to clean completely anyone before him from where she would sit.

She sat leaning to the east, her long legs displayed to the west for his glance only. He sat, knowing she was his earth. Her right breast pillowed his left arm that wanted to hold her to him. The driver looked at them together, both of his mirrors capturing them completely.

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Inside the restaurant, Genesis wiped the vinyl tablecloth backwards, using her thick red nails, bowing her head, holding in a smile, and said, "Cute," admitting it to herself. Lazoo sweat quickly, fast, and hot

Before a word was said, the MC cut in with, "Welcome, ladies and gentlemen! I'm da host for tonight's ..."

Lazoo felt at ease and pushed the stout Polynesian man's presence to the background, whispering, "Sounds like he's got the whole buffet in his mouth, ah?"

Genesis found a legitimate reason to laugh out loud, putting those red nails across her red lips. They matched. The checkered blue tablecloth faded with its mismatch of cutlery, and the orange light from the candle, that had also burnt for the previous night's guests, illuminated his face. The Hawaiian sunset behind him made him more dizzying than the cocktails on the menu.

The tall waiter, who looked like the brother of James the cab driver and the son of the MC, smiled a clean set of even white teeth. Lazoo smiled back at him and said, "This is Genesis. And your name is?"

"Please to meet you, Genesis. My name is James and I'll be your waiter tonight. And your name, sir?"

Lazoo sipped from his water glass for as long as he could, and when Genesis looked up from her menu and the waiter placed his pen flat on his notepad, Lazoo said, "Tell him, Genesis."

Genesis giggled, licked her top lip, and said, "His name is John, of course."

The waiter brought them drinks and she hid behind her piña colada. When Lazoo looked around that cocktail, she shifted her pure face to stay behind it. When James brought them their seafood cocktails, he waited patiently till John conceded that he had lost their game of hide and seek behind the flavored alcohol. They brought their heads up together to face being found out. She ate neatly. The small fork fit perfectly into her mouth, and when she pulled it slowly from the right corners of her lips, only then could he bite his shrimp. The main course was next. Lazoo made an executive decision and announced, "I'm sick of ordering from menus. Let's do the buffet."

At that stage she just followed.

He loved eating seafood and she liked seafood for its nutrition. He moved along the table from the raw fish to the deep fried fish, she skipped the oily stuff and went to the end of the table. His eyes could not co-ordinate her movements down there and the beer-battered filet on the end of an oversized fork, wobbling till he put both the utensil and its catch back into the stainless steel platter. Back at their table, she sat till he was seated. The hula girls congregated at the front of the stage.

Genesis, excited at the prospect of entertainment, said, "Look John, they're going to do a hula dance."

She was slightly taller than the shining, tanned dancers, some blonde, some black, but all long-haired with glowing smiles, who lined the front of the stage. Their midriff areas caved in and then came out just enough to keep their hula skirts from sliding to the floor before the night was over.

Genesis went up to dance with them. Her skin was light, with a matte complexion, and the lei sat nicely to cover her excitement as the island drums raged. He noticed that her hips moved more freely than did those of the girls who had been taught the moves, and when her hands shooed her curves to the right and then to the left, they opened to show them their destination and then closed, pinky to thumb, like she was grasping something of his. He clapped and then realized his smile was much too broad. By the time she was back at their table she had three leis and he had only one.

"Here," she told him, "have this one. Then we'll both have two." She lifted the sweet-smelling chain of flowers from her neck and from under her thick, long, blond hair. He put himself forward to meet her in the middle of the table, where his chin could feel the heat of the candle, now a stub in the orange bowl candle holder, as she adorned him with her first gift.

"Where did you learn to dance?" He asked this as he sat back, folding his arms for no reason at all. The song in the background, 'Holiday', gave him the cue for his next line, but he could still hear her clearly and had no doubt that her truth would register.

"I love Latin dancing. I go to classes. And do you dance?"

He thought for effect, then eased into it as if it were the end of a poem, "I move. Sometimes slow, not too fast, but I move."

She giggled like a lady, then half-whispered, "We'll have to see those moves later, huh?"

He had anticipated her sentence would be shorter and that disrupted their tempo, but she was giving and was also beginning to learn his rhythm.



"Let's go on a vacation to Hawaii," he said. "Yeah! Let's go on a vacation together!"

The piña colada making its way up the straw reversed and went back down into the long-stemmed glass goblet from which she was drinking. Then there was silence.

The silence continued. She just looked at him and he could not leave the range of her blue eyes. When she drank he supplied her with more than the cocktail could to sweeten her mouth. When she glanced around to smile at those at surrounding tables who looked to them for inspiration, he was there on her return to transfix his entire being through his hazel eyes that pierced her heart at that instant. When James stood in between them to take their order for dessert he shook his head to the left then to the right, and had to stop from repeating the movement as the equilibrium could not balance the one-sided weight of his head. She pointed to the last line on the laminated card, and straightened her back, bringing her real body to the table, and he obliged by taking her hand.

The mudcake with cream on the side brought them to the surface for the air they now believed they could live without. He took it upon himself to keep their moments special and introduced contrived normality to proceedings, asking, "What do you study, Genesis?" – remembering that when asking someone something he was supposed lift his voice after they had heard what it is that he wanted, maybe needed, or had to take from them.

She smiled modestly. "I'm aiming to complete a doctorate in psychology."

He looked at the mudcake, planning where he was going to cut it, and tiptoed lightly. "Wow!" Believing that he would trip himself up if he were to try to be discerning, he squinted and threw in a quick one. "So, completing a doctrit will make you a doctor?"

She felt warm. "That's what I'll be called, but the understanding I'll have will be the reward."

"Wow!"

"And you, John?"

He completed the cut on his cake, his anxiety, weighted heavily on the fork and the dense cake, could not cushion his downward force, and the clang of steel on porcelain rang in his ears. "I'm an ideas guy. I'm part of a team, or crew as we're called."

She moved closer. "What sort of ideas? For film, TV, or stage? What sort of team? An ad agency?"

He knew he had to find a zone and get their quick. "We delve deep into human difficulty, immerse ourselves in their suffering, and come back-to-back to tell the world the way to cut tracks, paths, and linear perceptions to amalgamation. I have to go to the bathroom now ..."

Lazoo couldn't lie to her. He walked in a straight line to the men's room, almost tripping over the backs of chairs occupied by disorganized people, people with no compassion, people like Jimmy, cold people like Michael and nasty people like Clariss. She stirred her cocktail. The outburst and the rapid explanation, which he'd expelled as if it were a curse, confused her. She decided against doing study on their first date.

He stood at the bar waiting for their drinks, and she smiled from across the room. A shot glass of bourbon, another shot glass of tequila that she could not see behind his black-silk-covered back. The both of them went down and up from their resting place, raising a warm smolder that glowed in his face and out from his smile, and when he turned to face in the direction of their table he showed her one bottle of beer and her margarita.

He changed the subject and she allowed it. He hit his lines hard, telling her, "I believe that if you tell someone a secret and they keep a secret, then you and the person who know the secret are a secret ..."

"What's the secret then, John?" She smiled at him, still comfortable that he fitted within one of her professor's long and complex classes.

He put the beer bottle down and looked down into the wick of the candle, which was still burning, but swimming in the wax. He lifted his arm and James was there. "New candle please, James."

Her eyes followed James's stride and came back to Lazoo. "What's the secret, John?"

He put both arms on the table as if to keep close the last light from the spent candle and stretched his neck forward and up. "I can't swim."

As he paid the check, he found a way to put his arm around her. His right arm held out the bills and his left arm coerced a willing body to come as close as the restaurant rules allowed. A brother and sister with their parents in the line behind them smiled down at the ground, to each other, and then up at their mom and dad, and so on down the chain.

The cashier could not find change. Standing in a line facing the satisfied customers were James, the MC, and two of the hula girls. Lazoo's hand felt her hip of hips and it made it bring her to him. Then his hand moved inconspicuously up to find the opposite cushion to the one his left arm had rested on in the cab. The distance from the top of her g-string to the wire of her bra was too great, and the cashier returned with the news that they had run out of change when it arrived at its destination. He became animated with his right hand and pointed out his directions, his left arm, aware of how far it had traveled, stayed put. He stood awkwardly still so nothing would change, and she, empathetic of his amorous endeavor, also stood statue-like.

Lazoo told the cashier, "Tip the people that made our night complete."

Genesis giggled. The little brother and sister giggled, too, as they swung each other's hands back and forth.

The burgundy carpet on the stairs to the nightclub from where the sounds of Tropicana were coming matched her sheer and tight blouse and her beige skirt, which was sheer also and short enough to show him what she wanted, seamless with what he was thinking as he climbed behind her to let other patrons descending the staircase pass them.

The dancing had made her sweat, but she didn't care to powder the natural glow. The selection of moves made him sweat, specifically for the occasion and selectively for her flow, which he followed. James was in the DJ booth now with a bandanna on his head, another bandanna around his bicep, and when he performed his break-dance routine for the circle of friends in the house he also had a bandanna tied to his thigh. The balcony blew in saxophone; it blew in Harlem's charm – black, beautiful with hurt blues, highlights, and panthers that still stalked the footpaths at a quarter to midnight. Genesis looked out and caught it too. Lazoo looked down on it and inhaled it deep into his gut, savoring the movement of their emotion, his stride, and the street below's smooth hustle.

Lazoo touched her elbow and asked, "Another drink?"

Genesis let her hair fall over the balcony railing. She knew that if she fell she would fall forever, and if there were ground that she should land on, he'd be there to catch her.

He leaned on the bar, his back feeling the spilled alcohol, but her arched body, with her head over the rail, stole all his senses. His elbow on the bar felt a beer bottle. The driver of the cab that had taken them to the

Hawaiian restaurant was there. "Hey, my friend," he called out over the music, "you like the place, I see!"

Lazoo stretched his neck and turned his head left. He wasn't sure if the beer was for him, so he turned to face the mirror behind the bar, looked for the waitress, smiled at the cabbie, and found the right angle to see Genesis's reflection.

He stood looking at her profile, her body angled forward, her elbow on the railing, which was the only perpendicular object to obscure her advance. He put his head forward into her hair, and through the sweet-smelling strands he told her small truths that made her mind blind and her eyes focus, defocus, dilate, integrate with the mirror-ball facets, find the horizon on the mural, and turn to him. Her tongue was there but not there, his lips loosened without lying and she responded honestly.

The silent cab drive back through the streets heavy with heat, highs of all sorts, and consortiums of like minds was one second in a day. At the river's edge he found a concrete seat to support their weight.

The swish of the undecided tide, in between the moon's moods, brought black crabs to the shore, the claws on some of them larger than the thick encasing from the three-quarter moon's misted shine. The sound of his igniting matchstick was almost dubious amongst the crabs' clamoring for higher ground, the moderate waves pushing them in and then pulling them back. The aroma of fresh sulphur, then the virgin burn of tobacco, smelled stale all the same to Genesis, who said, "I hope you're not going to blow that in my ear, John."

The smile hid little, and her hand reaching out for his other hand found no affirmation. He turned and walked to a spot marked in his head. She sat on the wall and watched more crabs come in, only to be sucked back into the water she could begin to smell. "I have a secret, John!" she said. She broke no sound barriers. As she pulled him back in he was already walking back into her. He stood behind her and she moved down a step. He sat down on her warm seat and she moved to flatten her new position, saying, "I'm allergic to cigarette smoke."

He looked above her head at a vacant park bench and counted the slats he could see. Her hair was spread across her back and he looked to see how he would arrange it if he were her florist. "Genesis," he said, "you know that's no secret. You know that? Ah?" He grabbed the edges of her hair and felt the silk stems drop onto her as he brought his hands down. When his hands ran out hair, he traced the outline of his most treasured vase.

"Why isn't it a secret, John?" She let her head drop forward, knowing the next wave of his affection would pull her head, mind, and body back up to another high.

"Because," he stammered as he put fingers into their places, feeling soft himself.

"Because why, John?" She lifted her left ear.

"Just because, babe – just because ..."

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## PART 2

He left the cigarette pack on the table and lunged forward to lever the backpack onto his wide back, the effort bringing deeper cuts to the muscles in his tanned arms.

She hurried her breakfast as she checked her inventory for their camping trip.

He worried as he took the keys to the Range Rover from a smiling attendant. He worried when he closed the door of the four-wheel-drive SUV, and he kept worrying till he found the symbol that reversed the silver

wagon out of the parking space.

The cashier at the toll gate waved them through and out and away from the last borough. A guy with a dirty cap watched them approach in the widest windshield and glide by, catching his chiseled jaw and cheek, her mane and manicured nails wiping her breasts clean of any shaven wool. He had his eyes on the road, and when he wanted to he looked down at the creases her thighs made in tight, just-washed denim jeans. She had her eyes on his arms, and when he turned the wheel she looked in the direction they were heading. Prince Rogers Nelson sang over the radio, "... I don't care what we do / just take me with you," the music and words making the straight road ahead and the green hills in between look like a pathway to a house where chocolate blocks faked walls and cotton candy grew wild.

The silver dot making its way down into the valley atop gravel from elsewhere disturbed the natives, but then let them know that they had come for peace and tranquility. Her legs stiffened as she straightened them, finding ground on uneven flooring laid over hundreds of centuries of process upon process, with only one policy in mind, survival. He slammed the metallic door and it made a thud that blended with the hoops, lahs, squarks, and toots that welcomed them to the wild.

The salt and pepper shakers stood in front of the olive oil bottle, situated to the east of the spices and west of the real coffee and raw sugar. The chestnut logs were joined deeply enough to hang clothes hangers, from which he hung three changes of clothes. After he unpacked the kitchen, the bar, his clothing, and toiletries, Lazoo found an axe on the porch and set a goal of cutting enough firewood to fuel the large, open fireplace, the oven, and any campfire foray down to the pond by the river inlet for three days. Genesis had brought a toothbrush, a hair brush, a pair of shorts, one skirt, her underwear, three t-shirts, the clothes on her body, a credit card, and one eyeliner pencil.

The timing was coming to him as he found the middle of the short logs the cabin cleaning staff had left neatly piled under the porch of the new cabin. Genesis looked through the four-pane window and saw him swinging the axe swiftly, each clean cut that ended in a thump on the metal-plated stump made her move closer to the bench into which she was leaning. His shirt came off when the sun rose above the ridge they'd traveled down. Knowing she was sitting with a book on her lap behind him made him slow down so he could concentrate on his swing, ensuring that it was perfect and economical, enabling him to entertain her for a reasonable period of time.

She understood his enthusiasm and his eagerness, and it didn't intrude on her desire to relax. She let him impress her for their first complete day together. He boxed the kindling and made piles according to the sticks' weight. The large ones went from the porch into the fireplace, medium ones fitted like food into the bottom of the cast-iron burner, and the smallest of the piles were left ready to transport down to the river.

Lazoo was telling her a story. "He looked like Elvis," he said. "His father was an Algonquin Indian, and his mother came to America on the first sailing ship the Algonquin had ever seen. She, she looked like you, Genesis."

The dinner of scrambled pumpkin and sausage meat with brown bread sat. The beer he drank made him courageous. She tasted, then gulped the wine. She wanted more, and when she accepted that, she placed the book on her lap to the side.

"She lived with her father and stepmother," he went on. "They were sad, always sad. She missed her mother, and her stepmother always beat her."

"What are their names?"

The fire inflamed her question as it lit her listening eyes.

"His name is The Wind's Words. Her name is Flower."

She giggled for the first time since they had left the city and he leaned forward, putting a hand on each of his legs folded at the knees.

"Each night," he continued, "he came down from the hills and climbed the big maple tree outside Flower's house on their farm. Words watched Flower eat her food, always quiet and always sad, and when Flower sat on the steps at night Words whispered her stories of what her mother looked like. Words whispered to Flower how her father had wooed her beautiful mother; he whispered to her how they fell in love. He whispered to Flower how much she looked like her mother. And each night Words promised Flower some day a handsome boy would come down from the hill and woo her and take her on the same ship that her mother had sailed on."

The wine bottle tipped on its side. He could see her in the curve to its neck. She lay in front of the fire motionless but heaving, the sweat around his pelvis drenched the rug through as he became conscious and aware of himself; then he rolled over to touch her again, this time to sync their racing pulses.

They appreciated their silence. The breakfast she created made him hum to himself. She brought the coffee plunger to his side and placed poached eggs, water still sliding to the whites' edges, on lightly toasted whole wheat bread in front of him. As she walked away from him he could see all of her legs; the tiny length of the only skirt she had packed did not hinder his view of them, but accentuated every movement with its gentle sway, which followed her hips and legs. When she turned and he let himself be caught, her t-shirt gave no resistance to his adoration of what was on her outside. They hurried quietly through the cleaning of the dishes and the straightening up of the previous night's sprawled-out mess in front of the rock fireplace, and when their bodies accidentally collided without caution, they kept quiet and carried on with their tasks, eager to be in the wild and among the noise of the woods.

The uphill climb was long, but the well-paved tracks kept shrubs and branches from scratching. Lazoo's calf muscles tensed and relaxed as he carried the backpack. Genesis followed and began to pick up his scent from the cologne. The questions began to mount. She had one for every minute of his day she had now lived in. The answers were ready, but they had not been tested, and when she walked to his side and they held hands they prolonged what she wanted and was inevitable.

They reached the top of one mountain in time for lunch. She laid down the picnic blanket. He studied the landscape spread out in front of them. The contours looked like they did on the maps, the depth of valleys as dark and shaded as on the library's copy of the area. The farthest point of the range was shaped like the beak of a falcon, maybe like the one perched on the only dry and leafless branch of a red maple, whose size suggested that he had lived there for some time. Genesis pointed all this out to John as they ate their sandwiches. The maple was rooted deep in a gully. Genesis asked him, "Would you like to know where its roots lie, John?"

The pack being lighter on his back with the food now inside them, the plastic bags tied and put back in the pack with only the thick blanket and water, the descent through vines leading to the deepest part of the valley made it hard to slow down and impossible to stop.

The maple was 16 feet around at its base, their combined reach covering about half the way around it. She hugged the maple before he did; it made him want to assist her. He wished his arms were long enough so together they complete the circumference, but he resigned himself to letting the tree know they both cared, a feeling he only got when he got up close to the giant. With his face flat against the bark, looking along the length of his right arm, he could see her face doing the same. He found her fingers with his fingers and closed his eyes. Squeezing her eyes shut, she knew the body behind her was physical and not Word's body having come down from the tree where he whispered Flower's name. He only just managed to reach her nails, but he cradled their tips with a grasp that made her sigh against the wood and relax into his open arms.

The multitude below the highest canopy stepped back as he initiated the gentle fall, holding her till she wanted to stand for herself and then letting her fall forward till her arms were holding her body only inches from the pillar this part of the woods relied on for shelter. A squirrel was definitely nearby, and maybe a green-eyed gray wolf, and if all of them wished together, a cougar may have witnessed love grow on the oldest of lives in this world.

She turned and he was there, innocent of any part, and she thanked him with wide eyes. They continued to weep across his bare chest, her salt and the oil from his skin smelling like rain coming and the sun that dries the wetness once it passes. When she was convinced that she had given her all, he let her go. She walked off while he dressed and gathered her clothes and mounted their pack on his back.

When he caught up with her she was still wiping away tears. As she walked he handed her her clothes. For each article of her clothing he handed her he kissed her cheek, each kiss more than the last, and when she pulled down her t-shirt she stopped and kissed him back longer and deeper than he had ever been kissed by a woman in his life.

The fire, started with his lighter, brought her to ask, "Where are your cigarettes, John?"

He looked into the stack of finely sliced dry cuts and answered, "I don't think I wanna smoke, babe." As he let the answer go he thought of when and where he had decided he could add the word 'babe' onto the end of everything he said to Genesis.

Genesis hugged her knees, content with her smile, as she watched her man build the energy to cook their dinner by the river, and said, "You know that you don't have to give up because of me?"

"I think I know that, Genesis." Being with her gave him the desire to question nuances and mild disturbances from any membrane; he thought, he walked, he dreamt, and he imagined.

"You think you want to give up, or do you want to give up? Is that your thought?" Genesis knew he loved her and let go of herself.

"I did love smoking till that night." He realized a new start; he could speak only what he could feel at any given moment in her presence.

"You mean on our first date?" She told herself to trust him and not abstain from what the future could be.

"Yeah. I felt bad when you told me not blow the smoke in your ear, as if I should." He added the firewood to the healthy start he had nurtured. "But then I smelled your hair, Genesis, and seriously, I couldn't blow smoke on it, honestly!"

He felt the answer he put forward and it worked for him because he loved her hair and he loved her. She didn't giggle this time. She threw the wine glass he had packed for her at the rock that he had dressed with a tablecloth. She then swigged long and hard from her dark bottle and laughed echoes that accompanied the whooping owls long after she could contain herself. He watched the glass smash and her transform, and he pondered a smile and then thought a quick "Wow" would do. Then he settled on a simple, "Fucking hell," and added a "babe," to let her know he was him.

She still gasped for her breath as he put a plate of sausage and brown bread with tomatoes in her lap.

Her back held scratches from pebbles. He licked their dirt clean off of her. He rolled her over to look at her in the light from the fire. He noticed her eyelids' rapid response to what she knew was heat. He looked down to bring her attention to what he could see and she lifted her head to see him enter her, this time more sincerely.

This made her drop her head back, leveraging her breasts to him, and as he slid his arm under her to bring them closer, Genesis thought no more as his mouth lapped them both, and gave attention to each one till their feelings and the love below came together in harmony, naturally.

The eggs looked like eggs, but on the discovery that he had fried them in water she again laughed. As she showed him the depth of water required he promised that he would become the chef to cook for her well, saying, "I'll get to the place, babe, where you'll eat my food when you dream in your sleep."

She laughed louder and he caught on as he lifted her legs to his shoulders and blocked the smell of burnt eggs beside her on the table-rock.

He lifted the sheet and thought about the money he had wasted as he looked at what he believed was inadequate. He nestled into her and decided that they would be in this position for the rest of their last day in the tame wilderness. He thought of how he was going to be like her, and his head, which had found its own life, lived large against her as she napped.

The eggs the next time were fluffy, their shine tempered with a sprinkling of pepper. The whole wheat bread lay alive, its protruding fibers brown, the melted butter that rested in between did not congeal. Still glistening, it reflected sparkles from her approval. The orange juice was acidic in premonition, but uplifting on consumption, and the thick coffee made her believe his power to promise.

### PART 3

The easy way

The simple way

The way you walk today

The way you arrive and say

The one way

—

*Feeaz the disc jockey spoke rapidly into his microphone: "The boroughs are bright, the children walk their way to knowledge, mom and dad, your world is here. This morning is the sunniest, and the city of New York welcomes our visitors. High and low temperatures for this day are ..."*

*Genesis's favorite DJ announced Al Jarreau's 'Morn'n' and her heart soured with, "With love that's rare and real," as she placed her pillow under Lazoo on her way out the door to learn.*

*He'd found everything, and he'd put all of it back where he'd found it. He carried the coffee with him carefully throughout her apartment. He snorted with both nostrils as he studied her home and remembered their weekend away. The phone rang and he obeyed the mind that told him to answer it and say, "Genesis? Hello?"*

*"John, I'm glad you found the phone!" Her smile too sprightly to conceal, she started to hop on one foot in the corridor of her college.*

*"Yeah, found it, found coffee – just like I found you babe, in the park." He felt comfortable in the middle of her living room, photos of her family watching him.*

*"Huh? I found you, you foolish man, lying on the ground in your suit!"*

*She wanted to go home right then, but he gave her an excuse to stay at school, telling her, "I'm off to work. Come to my place, ah babe? Tonight?"*

*They replaced their handsets simultaneously, hers on the wall and his on the table. She walked down the corridor and he walked backward out of the living room into the kitchen. He rinsed and dried the cup and went to work.*

*The Keith Richards guitar countered everything, along with the barroom piano, the gray-haired drummer, silent Wyman, the sax, and Mick Jagger singing, "Just waiting on a friend ..."*

*Lazoo had changed into Levis and a plain white t-shirt. His boy boots kicked an imaginary tumbleweed. The park gave him the dry grass. The woman cycling towards him passed and left soap spores that made him wonder. Michael, with one foot against the Sil House café door, looked as if he'd been fighting and drinking all night. The white line in the middle of the street ran along the length of the limo that was arriving. Inside, under the arc of Sil House, Jimmy's afro agreed with Mick Jagger.*

*Simon served plates of breakfast. Facing Jimmy's nodding afro, Lazoo smiled at the table and at a couple passing by in the window. The sax repeating a riff into the last bridge made Clariss click his oiled and well-maintained nails. He added his weight to the end of each click, which made Lazoo warm to him and his new crew. Michael leaned on his elbows, cradling his coffee as he smirked his offering. Brown arms, tanned arms, tattooed arms, and ones with gold and silver crossed the table giving and taking food. Simon and the fool on the stool against the bar lifted their cups of coffee towards the feeding of their faces.*

*Lazoo finished their sentences, brushed their feelings from his hands, and stood so he could remove his person from that place. Genesis would be waiting for him if he were to step out the door now, but if he were to languish in their anguish of him and his clockwork brain, she would feel that he was late even if the hand he held out for her to catch was presented at one second before the time he felt he remembered.*

*Lazoo felt the tickle, the guitar, and then the sound of David Bowie singing, "Golden years / wah, wah, wah ..." as he spotted her for the first time in the way the sun turns. She saw him, and heard the music and Bowie singing, "Run for shadows ..." She filed away his approach, the way he jaywalked, looking left then right, as she was reared to do, but he chose the gaps between the tail ends of the yellow cabs and the big, closing-in headlights of the buses, as Bowie sang, "Run for shadows / in these golden years ..."*

*When he'd collected her hand, making her leap aboard his carousel on its merry-go-round, the corner down the street, their stride in time, in place, and in the swing of their new life, she'd pulled him into an alley, lifted her skirt, and pulled down her loose and eager panties. Down the alleyway they ran laughing, away from the lady seated where they'd stood for two minutes.*

*The woman, who was sitting like a whore there in an alley, hurled her abuse at them with a man's voice, shouting, "You fucking perverts!" as Bowie sang on, "Golden years / wah, wah, wah ..."*

*Running faster, they could see the street, the words behind them closing in on the tails of her dress, which was still unbuttoned to its waist.*

---

*Inside his white room Lazoo forgot the difference between thinking and speaking. Genesis accidentally pressed the remote's off button, which she held as she burst bubbles from her nose and then her mouth. "I like documentaries," she said.*

*He agreed with her, "Actually, I need documentaries."*



*They sat looking at the table with a wine bottle, a beer bottle, and a pack of his cigarettes on it. She asked him, "So, how was your day?" She began again to start to contain herself, still thinking and trying to see where the punch line sat in his last addition to their equation.*

*He decided not to think. "Twas good," he responded, "Rather great, actually."*

*He stood up to get a cloth. Her most recent fit had made her kick the wine bottle, which had hit the beer bottle, which had spilled beer all over his newly opened pack of smokes.*

---

*He walked the length of the room as she slept in his bed. After walking back and forth along the length of the white room, he opened doors to the adjoining rooms and walked their lengths. He sat crossed-legged on the center of the dining table, which had carved seating for twenty affluent guests. He thought of all the rooms and all the strings attached to him. He thought of how the different chords leading to many hands were being pulled, played, and stretched, all of them being struck, stroked, and strained simultaneously without any thought given to the score that had now composed itself, its melody, sweet, simple, and playful, laying on his spare pillow.*

---

*"How do you afford this place, John?"*

*Genesis mimicked Lazoo, down and away to her left, her jaw crunching on cereal.*

*"I can't, actually. It was given to me," he said as he leaned back into the chair, accepting any reaction she felt appropriate.*

*"We can share, you know?" She was never in doubt her offer would be appreciated and then accepted. "What will you do with this place, then?"*

*He stayed the same, as sane as when his brain stopped to rest, "I'll give it back."*

---

*Dinner with Clariss was easy from Lazoo's end of the table.*

*"Yeah," he said, "I met her in the park. She's a smart woman. She is good, very very good – a smart woman and a very good woman." He repeated everything he wanted to believe, and in reasserting their verbal existence, their image would forever find their place.*

*"A woman?" Clariss asked after swallowing some wine. "Is that right, John?"*

*"Yes Hariss, a woman – with hair, eyes, body, patience, and long nails. Yes, she is a woman!"*

*"Does she know about your line of work, John?"*

*Lazoo stabbed the meat slowly,*

*"I haven't done work since I met her, Hariss." He tapped the air, one-two, with his knife during the word "work." They finished dinner, drank cognac, and smoked Cuban cigars till he found the right moment.*

*"Remember how we met, Hariss?" Lazoo knew the tunes this guy liked.*

*"How can I forget? You saved my life, John."*

*Lazoo looked at the cigar, and then put it forward towards the man, becoming excited. "That client I had that night – I want her name and number, please."*

*Clariss smiled and sipped, drew from his cigar, and jolted himself forward. Then, with his idea of a giggle, he told him, "You cannot give back real estate, John. The deed is in your name!"*

*The waiter brought a cheese board. As Lazoo cut some gruyere, he saw parts of Clariss' brain on it, and when he lay a piece of it on crisp cracker, he smelled it and wondered how the clown's body parts would preserve in cat's urine or turpentine, which would inflame their evaporation when he destroyed their existence and any trace of ever being. Lazoo wiped fear at the heart of his dreaming and smiled at Clariss.*

---

*"No thanks, Hariss," he said. "I'll walk."*

*He shook Clariss's left hand. It took a knowing smile from Clariss for Lazoo to know when it was time to release his hand.*

*He walked, and as he stepped down from the pavement to the street, the limo's window was there again, with Clariss talking to him out of it. "I want to shake your right hand, John. You have been good to me. We are going to make you rich, famous, and also a drug for every mind that thinks of you."*

*Lazoo looked at both of his hands, palms up, then backed up.*

*"Here, shake my right hand John. That'll stop their shaking."*

*Lazoo put his arm into the open window toward the knowing voice. The driver of the unmarked car behind the limo saw his arm move but his body stand frozen.*

---

*Lazoo hurried straight for the ringing telephone as he fumbled with his keys. The last ring left the room, its lone tone pronouncing the white room's emptiness. In three days' time he would be walking into her on his way to the bathroom, brushing past her in the narrow hallway to the stairs that would take him upstairs to their room. He thought he heard her, but he had only heard his own wishes.*

*He parted the cut edges of the envelope and slid a finger to each side of the concealed document to retrieve it. He saw his name, and he remembered the cab driver's name. His new name was much longer than his old name, yet Janine had told him his name was only one letter longer than John Lazoo's name. He looked for some meaning, any meaning at all, if there was any meaning to what had happened to him.*

*Genesis packed the redundant, stored the surplus, and turfed out the useless. In two days' time he would have his own spaces, places where he could pace and areas where, he hoped, he would think of her. Old photo albums and cards in their different-colored envelopes forced decisions and brought memories, all now greeted with a blurry smile. She took down one photo and put away two ornaments after she'd had a coffee and taken a pee.*

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### **PART 3 - TAIL 1**

*The long rows of small plants with their heavy, red, ripe fruit neatened and narrowed to where she crouched with her white bucket. Genesis's sleeves were rolled up, just as Lazoo had warned her that morning, and she smiled as she stained one sleeve when rolling it further. She waved to him and he started to walk down the row he was in. Somewhere further on he would take three steps to his right and then he could just keep walking straight to where she sat, cross-legged.*

*"Looks like you've found a seat, babe?"*

*"Have, too! Here, sit here you silly wandering man."*

*He sat knees up, arms loose, careful not to breathe unnecessarily on her. "I was smoking up by those berries, so these berries don't start smoking. You know that, ah, babe?"*

*She had become accustomed to his way with words, and smiled instead of cracking at the way he strung them together, homogeneous on reflection, but hilarious, clumsy, and even disastrous in certain environments and in elongated contexts. Still, she treasured them when she used them for her studies or when she thought of him, them, and herself.*

*He loved her neat ways, like the way she softly packed her bucket of fruit. He loved how she was neat about being neat, never hurried in arranging herself, never concerned whether it was going to work, because it always did, unless he was at fault. He loved the way all the food she ate was portioned and stored in order of when it would be used. She thought a lot about when thoughtfulness could be misconstrued as calculating, and was thankful she was with a man who thought to bring her breakfast in bed every weekend. They stood in line with their buckets of strawberries. They would sell one back to the orchard and they would play with the other.*

*The guy in the next row had strong arms like Lazoo's. The man who'd stood up and offered her his seat that morning stretched his neck as he did. Walking to class she had to make way for a woman with a shopping cart; as she stepped back she found herself pinned back into a hard pectoral that didn't flinch, the same as his had felt with her back against the giant red maple.*

*She left the auditorium quietly after a lecture, unnoticed, and brushed the lined lockers with nails as she walked. Two corridors from her class she found a staff bathroom. It was clean, and dark when she switched the light switch to off. Seated in the cubicle, her legs wanted to be apart so she let them.*

*Footsteps passed the outer door as she counted, "... forty three ..."*

*She put one leg up on the cubicle door and started counting again. This time she reached, "... eighty one ..." The other leg put itself up on the door. She counted to, "... one hundred and thirty ..."*

*Footsteps in the corridor found the room where she was laid up and splayed. The door opened and someone came to the next cubicle. The occupier of the next cubicle urinated and finished when Genesis had reached, "... five hundred and fifty five ..."*

*She sat in the same position till she had counted to, "... nine thousand and nine ..." She brought her legs down for varying intervals, only for them to want to go back up there.*

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*The intermission was a welcome relief for Lazoo. There was only so much scenery he could appreciate before the words across the bottom of the screen began to make him sweat. It was their second foreign film in 17 days. She didn't ask what he thought. She had asked if he would like to see a movie and he had said yes. They looked at each other and she thanked him for coming. He thought of the vases and the size of the paintings, their colors bright, luminous, dark, dull, and brown, and how he could tell her what he saw and she could see the same. He thought of how precise her elaborations on his simplistic interpretations were. He wanted the galleries and their sparseness and vastness with space to do cartwheels and twirls till discerning and stern, glaring people in suede and plaid clothes entered their space.*

*Their walk home was brisk, and spontaneity gave himself the reward he deserved. She wished one wish more than any other, and that was that he would relax into himself. This was an evolution she knew would be trying and demanding on the specimen she wanted to protect yet let grow so he would define for himself his value to her. She watched him dart ahead in the dark. She kept on walking as she neared the trees grouped at the corner of the park, and at the intersection she heard hooves. She smiled, knowing what he had done. He reached down his arm, she grabbed his arm and his shoulder and he hoisted her onto the back of the horse.*

*He immediately took the chestnut beast off the street, where its hooves would alert its owners, and began a princely canter over the grass, which Genesis asked him to stop.*

*"Ouch John! The back of the saddle's hurting my you-know-what!"*

*His legs were out and away from the unfit animal's rib cage. "Babe," he said, "don't hold me so tight. Lean back and I'll make her walk."*

*After the mare had taken a few more steps, Genesis asked to be let down. Lazoo pulled the reins together and jumped off himself.*

*"It's not going to take off, babe. It'll run out of gas by the time it wants to fart, Genesis." He pleaded with her till she grabbed the reins put her foot into the stirrup, then he helped her up with his hand. He closed his eyes for several seconds. As he opened them he said, "See, babe? I closed my eyes and didn't even hold the reins and it still didn't blow, did it?"*

*Genesis forgot how frightened she was as he ducked under the panting horse's head to grab the other end of the reins. Clenching her thighs tight, she slid forward ever so slowly on the saddle.*

*"Babe, loosen your legs from around the guts."*

*He let the reins drop, felt the mare's neck muscle and told her, "Good boy."*

*Genesis looked down at him leading her through the park and found him more than before. "I expected to see a cart behind the horse, John – with you in it."*

*He looked up at her and saw a moon to be full within days.*

*A flat, tinny-sounding voice came from a saddlebag, saying, "Any patrol car?"*

*Lazoo found the walkie-talkie in the saddlebag before the dispatcher could relay reason and turned all three knobs west till one of them clicked. Genesis looked straight ahead and thought of the fine and how it would look on her credit-card statement. The horse finally stopped and she dismounted with Lazoo's help. He whispered in her ear as he pointed to where he wanted her to wait. She watched from the lights as if she were about to cross the intersection, her hand pressing the bottom each time she reached fifteen.*

*She could hear him show off, just as he said it would play. "Look officer," he was saying, "if I hadn't found it and brought it back, you wouldn't have it here now, believe it or not."*

*She placed her arm across the traffic pole and wet herself.*

---

*Hand on her cheek, hand on heart, she said, "I swear, Hon, I will never forget last night."*

*Lazoo smiled and pointed to the pictures. "So that's your dad who eats too fast, okay?"*

*"I didn't say he ate too fast, I said he eats quickly."*

*He continued in the same frame. "That's your mother who disciplined you and who smokes, and that's why you hate the smoke that comes from my cigarette, right?"*

*She smiled and walked up next to him.*

*"He's the uncle who always pats you on the head?"*

*"Mmm ..."*

*"She's the auntie whose cat is dead because you were busy reading your uncle's Playboy magazines and left the front door wide open?"*

*"Yep."*

*"This is your cat, who looks a lot like your aunt's dead cat but only eats raw red meat?"*

*"Mmm ..."*

*"Here's a picture of you and Danielle after your sixth birthday. She had her birthday the weekend before and in the week between your birthdays you both got your ears pierced, correct?"*

*She sat down on the couch as he moved to the next picture and recited the dates, the behaviors, and the essence of each moment in her life that she had given him. She knew well what she had discovered in the park, and by all accounts thus far he was happy to buy her depiction of his plight, a shared portrait of his past according to her, as he would give snippets starting with, "Babe, imagine if you never knew your mum and it was only you and your dad and he had no money ..."*

*Her understanding made her the only character with the compassion and now insight for James-turned-Lazoo to come true.*

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*"Babe, you know today's the last day of the weekend, ah?"*

*"Yes, I do, and I know you have a plan."*

*He let himself breathe into his plan, careful not to punctuate on the beat but to pause in rhythm spaces, naturally using all of his new instruments, playing each one from his soul. "Right, here's the plan – cartwheels and twirls in the gallery?"*

*She put her finger to her mouth. "May I wear underwear, then?"*

*He knocked the table three times for her to straighten her posture and face her eyes forward, then said, "Be cool in four different cafes?"*

*She interrupted by right, "May I wear my new Charley Stevenson pants, then?"*

*This time he clapped three times before saying, "Or listen to this one, babe – ready? Shopping using paper money and then be cool in one cafe, where you can wear them wicked pants without any gate-keepers."*

---

*As he guided her through the door he found another reason to touch her, and when he saw the vases, he excited himself, taking all of it out on her. He kissed and held her tight before he let her run free in the expanse, filled with ideas unknown to the eye that hides itself from places where creativity rests as dreamed by the artist, a gallery, a museum, or his mind.*

*"Stand in front of it, babe."*

*"Here?"*

*"Just a bit to the left, Hon – there, perfect!"*

*The vase, metallic in blue on its own, its neck opened up enough for an armful of weepy-but-happy, thick-stemmed sunflowers. With her in front of it in the light from the ceiling-high window it didn't matter. He satisfied himself with the amazing-to-him idea that someone had thought to make a vessel so magnificent, sometimes elegant, other times blinding, that it should compete with the flowers it was meant to enhance, hold, and sustain. Its most classic of forms needed no imagination. The first creator of the vase must have had an hourglass in the window of his workshop, an hourglass that reminded him of what time he would put down his tools and go inside his cottage, to make love to the woman who cooked for him and for whom he created vases. He transposed her figure he saw in the hourglass through his fingers into his vase of her.*

*"Turn to the side now, babe."*

*The sculpture, not pretentious in any way, showed the artist's relentless efforts to find form. He must have been in love with the tree he carved. To kill it would have hurt, and the joy, with which he was rewarded when he felt its shape through touch and its positives amongst the negative space when he stood back to admire it, would have been complete. The artist had taken the tree's life and recreated its soul for its own indulgence, and not for the birds and bugs that gathered from it and sapped it. Its function was to prop her up in her pure self, and Lazoo snapped it with a click.*

*"Got it, babe. Let's go be cool in one cafe."*

---

*Genisis was talking. "So she looked like me, she rode a bike, she read you her poems, and she was born in the city."*

*He wound air back to himself with his index finger, willing the other things to come from her mouth. He winked permanently for three clicks of her right hand, which then brought him what he wanted.*

*"And she made soap," Genisis continued. She sat up straighter than ever and brushed her front clean.*

*He looked around the cafe as if to check for eavesdroppers, then whispered, "I smelled her in the park the other day."*

*She leaned forward and whispered back, "I hope you washed your nose before you came home."*

*He looked down and around the cafe again. This time he left the seat of his chair, leaned forward, and whispered into her ear, louder, "Nope. I waited till I put it in your ear, then I washed off the wax, the soap, and the cobwebs all at one time."*

*He watched the flatness with which she held her utensils, their ease of movement. The fork skimmed the surface of the plate without landing till it made a clean entry into the salmon. The knife followed at the same height, and when it rested on the perforation started by the fish's flesh it moved forward a click, then back half a click, and repeated the right-hand movement till the forked piece was truly cut from the mainland of the orange-red meat.*

*"And the tractor you drove when you were seven was red!"*

*He looked out the window and up amongst the buildings and found a gap, one of few and far between. "You been up there?"*

*She didn't have to look. "Been there twice."*

*He looked around the place again. "Wanna go with me?"*

*She kept cutting and transporting salmon into her mouth. Then, when she had finished a mouthful, answered, "Yeah. Why not?"*

*He sensed something. Maybe she was scared of heights; maybe she thought it was boring. "It's a full moon tomorrow night, Genisis, and guess what I'm gonna do, babe?"*

*She sipped her green tea and truly wanted to know what he was going to do next. "What?"*

*He dropped his shoulders and looked down, and then looked back at her again. "I'm going to give you the moon and stars tomorrow night, up there. Ah, babe?"*

---

*His office was just as she had imagined it. No pretty secretaries, as he had stressed, no photocopier or water fountain. Four managers sat at a table with a butler in an apron, lots of coffee, loud music, and too much smoke for her to go inside the glass door. The one with the white, round head had to be the writer, flicking the pen, sucking the pen in his African lips, and then using it at jungle pace. The one with the wristbands and tattoos, wearing a leather vest with no shirt had to be the angry one, the one with no words, just his fists, and speed that got noticed. The handsome older one looked like he liked woman; she would pocket most of his jewelry if he threw it on the table like he did a wad of cash. Then there was the odd one out, who all eyes and ears looked to and heard, and who was talking nonstop. The pen pointed at her and then it drummed triplets. The wristbands on each arm rolled in the clasp of the opposing hand. The glare from the rich gentleman became calm, and Lazoo smiled nervously. As he rose from his seat and collected his jacket, the afro bowed down to him three times and then three times to her on the other side of the window. The older one tipped his hat, one he had left hanging in his mansion.*

*Lazoo came out through the door. "Yeah – they're the boys, Genisis."*

*Her arm looped in his looped arm and his steps ranged within her stride.*

*"They look like you said," she wanted to let him know.*

*"How else do you believe you could see the people I work with, other than how I have described them, babe?"*

*She smiled, looked at his profile, and said gently, "You love to talk, don't you?" She held the looped arm with both of hers.*

*"You think so?"*

*She kept on holding his arm and decided on when she was going to alert him that she knew what a question was in asking, and was aware of receiving a question as an answer.*

---

*The man at fish market said that one wouldn't break into pieces that stick to the pan and smell burned. The white wine and its acid would have to go in after the little bubbles in the water told him they wanted to multiply into many big bubbles. He expected the fine wood chips that aromatized the kitchen while Genisis exercised in the lounge to act like a dust coat on the fishes' backs, the lemon juice would make the dust and fish cling.*

*When Genisis bit into it she said, "This is good, John!"*

*He thought of how the words came out in one breath, with no pause, and nodded, "Not bad."*

*"You've used lemon juice too. I can taste it."*

*He noticed that what she knew had to be confirmed by what her senses would like more of. "Too much of the powder flavor?" His knife pushed the question to the centre of the small dining table.*

*She managed half a mouthful of the wine and a smile. "No, the herb is surprisingly fitting for fish, as it's meant for red meat."*

*A complete sentence, the one he looked for from her, and always the truth. He got up, wiped his mouth with his napkin, poured her wine three-quarters of the way to the top of her glass, and kissed her neck.*

*They lay in bed looking up at the ceiling, recapping their walk for the night. He was satisfied with his gift that she had gracefully accepted and now trivialized in a way that made him laugh.*

*"How about the people, like the man you gave your jacket to, John? What are they going to do without the moon?"*

*"Fuck knows. They can pick up the falling stars, babe, and use those."*

*"How about the tides and the animals that howl at the moon? What are they going to do, John?"*

*He sat up, his brain hit by her prying questions which opened up something else. "Interesting, babe! Well, the tides will stay high, and the dog that howls at the moon will no longer see his mother's face in the face of your moon, Genesis."*

*Silence came from his lips and the whirling of machinery in his skull wound down to a smooth hum when she announced, "I really loved my moon, John, from the seat by the river. You know that?"*

### *PART 3 - TAIL 2*

*Patience, patience, patience*

*Hurry, hurry, hurry*

*Wait, wait, wait, wait, wait*

*Just go and be run over*

*Just wait and be left over*

*Hurry to patience*

*It waits for you to be*

*The cafe was quiet without Lazoo. Without the anticipation of his arrival there would be no tension for them to mount, and when the adrenalin he unselfishly shared would not be theirs to inject, they would wait till his return.*

*"Jimmy," Clariss said, "I'd like you to write him in. If I were to miraculously leave this world with my spirit intact and go beyond, to where maybe my mother has all her limbs and blood supply, Lazoo would be the one to look after you."*



*Jimmy's hand went left to right, and when it had reached a margin it bounced back to start again and rewrite the ledger.*

*Clariss went on, saying, "Jimmy, patience. Listen to Lazoo, what he thinks, and write what he says backwards. There lies and twists the truth of our story."*

*Michael traced his tattoos with Jimmy's red pen, which lay unused. He wanted to yawn, but Clariss turned to him and eyed him, looking for any direct value to him and the organization.*

*It distressed Clariss that he paid wages for the dead, down weight that sat in his presence. "Michael," he announced, "you're going to have to earn your pay from now on! I want you to make me money with your fights. I want you start working on a fight for Lazoo that will make him real! I want you to clean yourself up, and I want you to understand that without Lazoo you're useless to me. And the flies you bring near me, like that patrol car there on the corner, come because of the shit you can't rid from your hide."*

*Michael played nothing. He could not stand the attack and left for the men's room, where he waited.*

*A social security card, birth certificate, and passport lay on Clariss's oak dressing table. He kept an original of Lazoo's passport photo framed in gold next to the mirror of himself in the back seat of the limo. In the photo Lazoo was neither smiling nor brooding, having just finished making a random passerby smile at a busy intersection. He slipped the three articles into the leather satchel and zipped it. The way Lazoo offered him his left hand delayed his presentation of this present to him. However long, whatever time it would take, he would eventually give Lazoo his identification. There was now only one citizen in New York born John James Lazoo.*

*"Is that fish I smell on your fingers, John?"*

*Clariss's cool, normally prevailing, gave way to the hot, healthy Lazoo, who had brought wild energy, passion, and his usual courtesies with him to breakfast. How he wished that Lazoo would curtsy for him and display his elegance for him on tiptoes as a dancer in his ballet. Lazoo ate on.*

*"An idiom, John. We men who like men like you use it in referring to the women of this world who take you away from us."*

*"I cook now, Hariss," he responded, unsure what to say in reply the idiot thing Clariss had just said. "Actually, it is fish I cook the most, and best, Hariss."*

*The coffee cups went into their saucers, Lazoo noticed, and donuts must have shaken sugar all over their show when Clariss handed over the black leather satchel.*

*"Don't worry about them, John. They follow their tales." Clariss sat back to watch him take up his new life.*

*The helicopter tipped on its side, which received flutters from Lazoo. Clariss smiled and leaned into the direction which gravity pointed him. "John, I have Jimmy working with a construction company drawing up the plans down there in that vacant lot," he shouted at his ear.*

*Lazoo held his identification closer to him and wondered if Genesis would receive the documents still in the satchel if they were to crash and burn.*

---

*Lazoo snapped, "Talk to me, Jimmy!" Michael looked at him. Lazoo dragged nicotine in deep and blew it in Michael's face, saying, "Well, you gonna fucking train me or what?"*

*Jimmy took out his red pen and stabbed the pad.*

*"Careful Jimmy," Lazoo said, "that's Clariss's real estate. Red is rude on furniture. You know that, Jimmy?"*

*Michael stood up and made an exit, making tracks to the only place he could find friendship. Jimmy wrote off his resentment. Michael returned, flushed but ready, and Lazoo made Simon bring them coffee and turn the music up.*

*Pharrell Williams and his fucking two nerd pals sang, "... every once in a while there's that same asshole ..."*

**CHAPTER 05****Lazoo Goes To Work.**

*Black Mercedes limos, white Bentleys, and red Ferraris circled the sunken ring. Twelve spotlights scanned and ran the perimeter of the inner-city Jungle Stadium. Card girls from the covers of magazines served monkey brains in their cranial cups, complete with hair. Lazoo and Michael traveled the elevator to the unknown floor. Clariss watched and paced while his young-men maids carried his trail, careful not to let the tiger fur touch the stainless-steel ground.*

*Lazoo delivered. Three knockouts, each of them within three minutes. After each fighter conceded, collapsed, or wandered aimlessly, Lazoo had an ending designed to ensure he remained the number-one draw-card. He spat on fighter one and poured kerosene over him as the ref counted him out. He kicked the head of the second fighter while he lay unconscious till an eye popped out onto the canvass, and he stabbed number three in the neck with a needle and then injected the already delirious fighter with a serum, causing to him loose all bodily control as he staggered among the ropes.*

*Next day inside Sil House the mood was quiet, less animated than the day before, when the artist and Jimmy had been busy visualizing Michael's fight plans. All the card girls were gone. Just Lazoo, Clariss, Michael, Jimmy, and Simon, plus the fool on the stool who served them breakfast.*

*Lazoo changed his mind about the food Simon and the fool served him three times, saying, "If I taste any spit in my food, I'll feed you my shit."*

*Clariss then surprised everyone when he announced to Simon and the crew that Lazoo was, as of then, the new manager of Sil House.*

*"I don't want the title super," Lazoo said. "I seen too many ugly fucking old men in movies to be called a super. However, I did once see this doco where they referred to the super as the property manager."*

*Jimmy sniffed and sharpened his eyes at Lazoo. Michael nodded, and Simon and the fool on the stool shook hands and said, "Right on."*

*Lazoo pointed up to the corners of the ceiling and they all looked up to the place where he thought, and then said nothing.*

---

*Lazoo walked home through the park, pleased with his new role and title of property manager for Sil House, Incorporated.*

*He sat in the same spot where he had first seen Genisis Jones. Jimmy had promised him the second fighter had not died. Michael's instructions had been carried out to perfection. He'd practiced the fight combinations at home in front of Genisis in their bedroom mirror. The whole thing was a play, and as the producer Clariss had plenty of money to make it extremely elaborate. Lazoo looked up at the white room where he had first spotted the sunny patch where he was then sitting and reflecting.*

---

*Lazoo walked slowly, almost solemnly, much like the first time he had entered the lobby of the hotel. Guilt lumbered his legs, and Genisis burdened his mind. The key to the white room was hot in his hand. The elevator, feeling his weight, still took Lazoo to the top floor. The room was still pristine. Lazoo collapsed on the neat bed, only to remember that he had come there for a shot of tequila. On the way to the bar he caught glimpses of many faces in the various mirrors that decorated the way he used to live. He threw back a couple and then put back the bottle, and soon he was out of there, back to where he belonged, on the tenth step to their apartment. He turned the lock and opened the door and into exhaled this space.*

*He watched the pages of words in front of him for hours, hoping that they coincided with what he visualized. The phone rang and rang. Genesis shut the door behind her and removed her hat, her scarf, and her coat. Still the phone rang. "John," she called out, "are you going to get that?"*

*Genesis's tone woke Lazoo from watching the words in front of him.*

*"Got it," he called back as he reached out and held the phone down, hoping it would suffocate under the pressure of his hand. He answered it as the caller clicked off.*

*Lazoo watched Genesis bend over to find the open bottle of wine in the old 1960s Frigidaire. Genesis watched without listening to a word. She watched a dimple turn into a smile, and the smile become a frown. Lazoo put the phone down, and with it a load. He looked at her first, to ensure that every part of her was accounted for, then walked up to her and grabbed her, ensuring that he completely held all that he saw.*

*He finished her glass of wine as he pulled her arm, causing her body to whiplash toward him. She was in front of him close up. He then flattened her graciously against the warm body of the fridge and unbuttoned her blouse. She assisted him by removing the lace from between her legs. Their upstairs bedroom was so far away, but he believed they should be up there at that point, so he beckoned her, kissing her neck and using her delicate ears to make her want to go.*

*Genesis lowered her right arm to collect her small pair of lace panties from the vinyl floor. After a second attempt, she heard Lazoo's mind saying, "Let the little things be."*

*She jumped on her man, knowing that her nakedness would warm his bare back.*

---

*Lazoo blew the smoke out the window into the chilled New York night. The smoke was endless and his love of Genesis seamless with the lust that he felt for the one woman who lay asleep on their bed. The words came easy. The environments were springing to on their own, and the emotions flowed from a fountain that must have cried since Mother Nature first felt pain. He watched as she turned, and only when she reached out for him did he come down from his work.*

---

*Jimmy looked at Lazoo in the midst of a wink that then mystified itself, causing the writer to poke his afro with his pen.*

*"That's what I said, Jimmy," Lazoo said. "Try it. If Clariss doesn't get that look in his eyes, then screw it up and rewrite it."*

---

*As Genesis stood in front of the mirror, Lazoo cradled her chin gently to lift it so she could see for herself the splendid array of diamonds that laced her beautiful neck. Lazoo stepped back so he could see only her for himself, see her back and her front at once with the aid of the full-length mirror.*

*As she reached for her Charley Stevonsen dress, Lazoo shook his head and said, "Not yet."*

*Genesis felt embarrassed but not harassed. She put her finger to her mouth as if to say, I wonder what this silly man is thinking about now? She giggled in her heels as the silk slid down her body. Lazoo put his hand out and Genesis handed over her meager underwear, a ritual that made both of them laugh out loud.*

---

*Lazoo had never seen Hariss close to a woman before then. His hand, heavy with jewels, looked straight on top of Genesis's hand that he had not yet put a rock on.*

*"A woman who is beat and demoralized," Clariss observed, "decides to sell her affection for a price. She needs the cash to afford therapy for the emotional abuse she has suffered. Is she a whore? Or is she a woman*

*who is self-sufficient, who refuses to be a victim anymore?" Clariss rounded off his sentence with a loop in the air, using his silverware.*

*Genesis answered him firmly, "It depends on her condition and when she decides to make the choice. It's of her own thinking that she decides who she is." She sipped some wine and then looked to her side. Michael looked clean, Afra's afro didn't look bushy, and Lazoo was easy.*

---

*Genesis rode with Clariss in the limo, while Lazoo, Michael, and Jimmy walked home through the park, smoking cigarettes while they drank tequila from the bottle under a tree, away from the working lampposts. Lazoo agreed with everything Jimmy had to say. He patted Michael, and then also Jimmy, on the back before he headed off in the opposite direction, hoping Genesis would not be too far away.*

---

*Lazoo pitched his idea over breakfast. "Yep," he said, "just like they have in banks, Hariss."*

*Clariss only half-smiled. "Look at you, Lazoo. I pick you up for your looks and talent and now you want to change my world."*

*His tongue flapped, and as it continued Lazoo considered whether its root was indeed as long as he had heard. He looked at the knife in his hand, turning it till the blade found the light. The light hit Clariss in the eyes, causing him to stop. Lazoo looked at the knife and the way he would have sharpened it.*

*As he looked out the window, waiting for another lousy moment from Clariss, he decided he didn't hear him the first time. "If the tenants could feel a lot safer, you could hike the price a bit. Would you agree?"*

*Dismissing him, Clariss looked out the window till Lazoo stood up and left without saying any more.*

---

*Genesis strained the vegetables for their dinner. "Let's go on a vacation," she said. "Somewhere warm – somewhere I can put my feet in the water and you can write your work, huh?"*

*"Hey babe – I'm getting good at this. Look, the fish is cooked even, ah?"*

*"Did you hear me, you silly man? I said let's go on a vacation, to a place we can see the stars – no street lights and skyscrapers, just the sea, the stars. and the moon. How does that sound?"*

*"How about some land, Hon? Didn't I tell you, babe, that I can't swim?" Lazoo tried to veer the conversation back onto his road till he could figure out which direction Genesis was coming from, then finally acknowledged Genesis with an answer. "Yeah, we could do that."*

*"You agree, John? That it would be a good idea to vacation in the sun? And, yes, you did tell me on our first date that you can't swim!"*

*"I agree that I'm becoming the best cooker of fish in New York, darling. Clariss expects me to be here, working. I'm the property manager for Sil House. I'm trying to get Clariss to put in cameras – just like they have in the banks."*

*Genesis put her hand up to her mouth to stop her teeth from showing as she laughed, "Why? So you can watch yourself over again?"*

*Lazoo grinned and then bit his lip, but still let out, "That's cruel babe, but there's a degree of truth in it. And I am worth the videotape, don't you agree? Let's eat!"*

---

*Lazoo ambled up to a morning meeting between just Clariss and himself. He prepared himself with answers to combat the king of the morons, the idiots, the clown, and all the extras. He yawned as he saw him coming. The closer he got the more he wanted another cigarette. As he arrived Clariss sat down and asked, out of the blue, "How's Genisis?"*

*Clariss looked different when he voiced her name. He always looked dapper, but when the words, "Genisis," "Miss Jones," or "That wonderful woman of yours" came from his lips, Clariss looked intimidating – educated, wealthy, and handsome – too handsome for Lazoo.*

*"She's fine," Lazoo let blow the bad breath and squared his shoulders as he moved on to his own agenda. "The surrounding buildings will make Sil House look cheap ..."*

*Before Lazoo could finish Clariss cut him down with, "Yes, John. Jimmy is putting the final touches to a marketing plan that pitches Sil House to a target market of artists, writers, actors, med students, and the like.*

*Lazoo drank his coffee and lit the cigarette he had thought about. Hariss advised him that he would be leaving early for a long day of meetings. As he arose from his chair Lazoo let him know, "She wants to go on a vacation. Yeah, Genisis wants to go to the Pacific for a vacation."*

*Clariss took it on board as he exited at the same time another extra entered. Jimmy, with his pad and pens, fell into the chair on the opposite side of the table. Lazoo, bored, waved at Simon to bring coffee. A tenant from the seventh floor, next to the room he had in mind for Jimmy, entered the café. She smiled at Lazoo and he smiled back. Jimmy, still studying him, started to make a few notes. Lazoo left for the bathroom.*

*On Lazoo's return Jimmy had his lines ready. "He didn't die, man," he said. "I tell you! He didn't fucking die! You must still have some of that white Wisconsin dirt stuck in your ears, Lazoo! Motherfucker's walking down the avenue with one of them tittie girls you turn your oily Elvis motherfucker hairdo head from, man. The man's alive in Manhattan."*

*Lazoo began with a smile, and then asked, "Did you sell it to him, or did he just like it from the outset, ah?"*

*"He liked that shit, man. You white people like the same shit. It was like he smelled your pooh on my booty paper, man, and said to himself, 'I like the ass this shit come from'."*

*Lazoo had to confirm for himself that Jimmy had actually presented Hariss with his vision of Sil House. Lazoo was then happy for the day.*

---

*He checked out the location for his next fight, which he hoped would be his last, as he pondered new ways to get the cameras he wanted. He expected the two extras who were there to feature large in the scene, their small brains and big balls a fine fit. He listened to them for a bit, then took a closer look around the joint*

*Michael asked, "What's that song you used to play, Jimmy? Hey hot-looking, or some shit?"*

*"Hey, Haze," Jimmy sneered, "don't speak about my music in that tone, you hear? You just show Potsie his moves and leave the creative shit to me, okay?"*

*Lazoo had by then completely tuned out the old gymnasium's smell; the pictures on the wall had browned nicely. A Muhammad Ali poster, Ali's mouthguard and trunks the only white, showed still white in the wooden-floor loft. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Michael enter the ring, followed by Jimmy. They still carried on, as Lazoo still stood in front of Ali. Their conversation came close enough for him to make out.*

*Michael was saying, "Come here! I fucking said come here, you fuck!"*

*Jimmy was already on the ropes. Michael wasn't circling anymore; he was there right in Jimmy's face. Jimmy felt hot breath from the diaphragm, warmed by his throat, when Michael grabbed him by the throat. Lazoo saw the action side-on.*

*Michael was vocal, but still not animated, growling, "You hearing this, Jimmy? I will fuck your shit up if you fuck with my shit, you hear? My nigger?"*

*Lazoo advanced to ringside, where he looked up and at them and said, "Ease up, you fucks. That's why you two are still fucking extras, you fucking morons."*

*Jimmy wanted to dismiss Lazoo and his arrogance. Michael just knew that he hated the guy, but that both of them needed him to stay alive. The two of them agreed in unison, "Yeah?"*

---

*Jimmy stood in the middle of the white room. His off-white afro looked like the sun that the room's décor would orbit if Michael handed him another hit. Lazoo sat on the bed that was always made for drinking tequila. Jimmy folded his arms, unfolded them, stretched them, put them behind his back, and listened. Michael nodded.*

*"If I had your talent, Jimmy," Lazoo said, "I would have a briefcase. If I could write my name, Jimmy, it would be in Times Square."*

*Jimmy unfolded his right arm and put it to his lips, saying, "Keep going, man."*

*Jimmy and Michael joined in, the three of them talking together as with one voice, "If I had your education, I would teach that through learning we see what can be taught, and if we had a pair of titties we would be just fine."*

---

*Genesis's eyes sparkled when they opened for the first time in the morning. Lazoo could cook now, and at every opportunity he used his new skill it to make her feel appreciated and special. The tray he held out in front of him made his abdominal muscles look defined. She lifted her hair from the left side of her face to show him her good side in the early light of the day. This did not matter to him as he looked down at her for approval, something that would serve him with his esteem for the day.*

*"Hey," Genesis said, "when were you going to tell me about our vacation?"*

*Lazoo's breath began to stink. He got up from the bed, rocking the coffee plunger. He used hand gestures, his hand on hers. From somewhere Clariss was looking at him with his eyes; Clariss was talking about her as he kissed the hand of a young servant.*

*"This evening. I was going to do it this evening."*

*Lazoo could not get to the phone; he couldn't even get up from the couch. Genesis picked it up on the third ring. He just watched her, messing with his mind and tampering with his brain as to which sensory receivers he should use.*

*There were his ears, to listen to what she was saying to the person on the phone, who he instantly knew was Clariss by the free-flowing conversation that came easily from her plump lips, lines of pink lipstick waxed into each grove.*

*Then there were his eyes, to exact her perfectly round butt in the wicked Charley Stevensen tight, black slacks that her hand, with its painted nails, was smoothing over. His eyes could also devour the stretch in between her legs, held tight by the expensive material that shone and then flattened in the different light that his mind*

*placed and displaced on her body, dressed but undressed, the deepness in her back or the neat slit in her front. Her blouse was tight and undone, with just one button holding it together. Her bra worked her breasts up so that they sat like two boulders of ice-cream on offer every time she put her head to the side to play with the strap of her silver high heels, which she bent her leg at the knee to do.*

*She thanked Clariss for the tickets for their upcoming vacation while facing a corner of the room from another corner, her hand in between her legs. Lazoo could imagine the front of her hand being molded in place; he could see her middle finger and the tip of the painted nail between the two black globes as she said, "Thanks for the ticket," into the phone.*

*When she turned to face him, and as she thanked Clariss, his eyes reddened and his fingers were already working there in front of her as she said goodbye. Her hand did not know what to do with the telephone handset. He could hear the click, the caller then being gone. As his hand went in deeper into her crotch, the hotness in her had to be wet and flowing; the material in the way had to be torn for it to complete its purpose. He found an opening where on her own she could over time have worn herself. His finger found its way to her, and she came to need support. Her head hung over his shoulder. She let go of the handset, which dropped away from them.*

*They sank in the same spot, he first in order to check with his face and mouth what his fingers were already working. His free hand grabbed for the one remaining button on her blouse and pulled down hard on it. The button's popping allowed her hands to bring out something for them to handle, as she liked to squeeze them, up and above the cups of her bra. She tweaked them till they totally felt the effect. He grabbed her hand and pulled her down on her side when they were both floored, which he knew was the right way to be eating her and her him. She lay comfortably on top of him and when she wanted just to enjoy she took him out of her mouth, put it against her cheek, and held it with her hand against her makeup, while the motion he made was enough for him to enjoy it as well. He opened his eyes on every second breath to see only some of the skin of both of her asscheeks surrounding his face. When he had eaten too much of her clit, he licked deep between her lips, pried open by the cheeks of her ass, and when he had tasted himself, he looked for the last of the three places, which he circled only with his tongue. She wanted his cock back in her mouth as she came down for a second or two.*

*Her studies had not defined the condition in which she found herself as she found her feet and walked away from the scene, her ass showing through a gaping hole in her favorite pair of Charley Stevonsen pants. As she put her heavy blond hair up in the bathroom mirror, she twisted her torso to have another look at the damage through which her butt stuck out. It made her heart dark, but it also made her gush, as the door opened and Lazoo was inside the room with her. She lifted her right knee onto the sink as he rubbed everywhere down there, melting all juice and manner of feelings into one. She was looking at the way he did this to her as he grabbed her hair in a pile, pulling it back to him, her view of him rising as her head did. He sees the head of his cock, then he pulled her hair tight, bringing her closer.*

*When Lazoo served dinner it was cold. "I'm sorry it's fucking cold, babe," he apologized as he wiped oil from his forehead.*

*"Not at all, John. Sit down. Let's eat before it does get cold."*

---

*The next day at Sil House the fool on the stool stopped airing his past when Lazoo walked in. Simon brought him some coffee.*

*Tasting it, Lazoo made a face and said, "It's fucking sour. Get one of those real machines."*

*Clariss calmed everyone with his palm and a wink, which was among a squint. Lazoo sat down and said, "No," to everything.*



*For example, Clariss announced, "The promoter is ready, John. I've laid out a lot of money – publicity, John ..."*

*"Fucking no. Fucking N-O."*

*Later that day the technicians arrived on time with their ladders, and Lazoo pointed to the places where his cameras were to be mounted. Then he waited for Jimmy to read the last of the applicants' names. He worked fast, as he knew how long it would be before he would become bored with his new role. He liked the sound of all the names that Jimmy read out.*

*Then they sat in front of him, Jimmy writing what he said and the applicants trying their best while remaining as calm as he let them.*

---

*Genesis left the auditorium for the serenity of the staff lavatory. In the mirror she could study herself for a minute or two, with the door, through which students were not permitted to pass, locked from the inside. Her blouse out, she touched her tummy as she sought to breathe out the animosity that would eventually cut a track to her mind, giving her a role in a black and masked pantomime in which her heart would break, smash, and shatter into pieces that could not be put back together. The pieces would not want to be part of the same heart that now beat up-tempo and which her hand had to handle. It didn't flutter, it didn't skip. It thumped and it thumped louder in her chest, as someone increased the weight of a clenched fist on the frosted glass window. Genesis opened it. A professor towered over her.*

*"I want to go home, please," she told him. "Would that be okay?"*

*"Yes, that would be okay. Are you all right, Miss Jones?"*

---

*Café after café, the coffee began to require a shot of whiskey, and the faces began to seem to smile back at Genesis. A wine waiter complimented her on her blouse.*

*She dismissed it by saying, "Just bring me a bottle of your best stupid wine."*

*The waiter smiled at her and said, "You're so gorgeous, if I may say so." The esses in his words sizzled from the tip of his tongue.*

*"Turn around and put your hands up in the air," Genesis told him. "I want to see your cute butt." She gave it a squeeze and felt the power of it. The businesswoman at next table smiled at her. She nodded her head, smoothed her front, and took a sip of her wine. "That's good," she told the waiter.*

---

*Genesis loved climbing the stairs to their home. She loved to open the door and call out his name. He was normally there, waiting, looking at words on sheets of paper. She particularly loved reaching the tenth step, where she sometimes stopped to watch his movements. She could make out their shadows, her inquisitive eyes at the same level as the space beneath the reinforced aluminum door.*

*The view that day was blocked by litter that her mind had not yet equated to anything of importance, meaning, or having to do with home, love, laughter, or John. Maybe the alcohol overpowered her eyesight. The litter was petals, red rose petals. She took another step. The draft in reverse blew a handful down the steps.*

**CHAPTER 06**

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## PART 1

Lazoo walked at one-quarter time of the flying bass line, the trumpet solo started at the pace his mother read. Evenly muted, the master's hand assisted to make a tone that countered any misconceptions one might have that an illiterate would want to and could understand the complex concepts that a hustler could fully and totally express in a medium limited to a small stage, four other players, and a wind instrument. He walked Miles, Lazoo did.

Genesis stepped through the petals, saying, "That one's for his eyes. That one's for his smile. This one's for his whole, whole body and the way it makes my body feel. These ones are for the silly things he says." Then she threw the whole lot in the air. They stayed in suspension, with no alteration to their formation, no sophistication in their arrangement. She walked in and amongst their system. She was the source of energy that they would orbit, if they were to link for life and depend upon each other and her for sustenance. One felt gravity, and she worried that her use would diminish if one of his symbols fell from their chain. She smiled at the petal and it winked at her, as it was the one for his smiling, wanting eyes.

She poured herself a glass of wine half full and swapped the taller bottle for a shorter beer bottle, leaving the lid on for him to jack with his lighter. The special ones still glowed from their reentry through the atmosphere as they lay on top of the red ground, hands full of petals deep, the ones she held in her hands sufficient to say what he always said. She sipped her wine and wondered why he was late that night. She believed it was for effect, but he would've walked in when his petals were alive in her air. She gulped and swished and the glass was full of empty.

The ones that blew down the stairs like Grandmaster Flash & the Furious Five: "Broken glass everywhere ..."

Or, as Lazoo would sing, "They crushed / They will welter / They will eventually brown and build crust / Become hard / Just keep stepping / Heel-toe / Heel-toe / Toe the line to heel to a hind ..."

The Furious Five stretched and only one master key could open the door. He turned the key to his home. The lock and key still combined combination to allow entry, but to where he did not recognize.

She leaned back on the kitchen sink in the entranceway to her apartment, her arms folded. At the end of one folded arm a wine glass swayed its chemical. He walked over to where his beer was waiting, grabbed it, walked to the table, and sat standing, using the table as a huge seat. He lifted the lid of his beer with his lighter. The lid popped and flew up and then down onto the rose bed, its fall cushioned by a specific petal. Then it slid through the rest of the red to make some noise, indescribable but audible through the new silence from both Lazoo and Genesis.

He smiled everything clean. The radiance wiped blood and stained ice that, when liquefied, its remnants were all the colors of rainbows but red and magenta, with pots of diamonds plus gold at their ends. She smiled back.

"Do you mean your smile, babe?" He asked her from the other end of the room.

"I mean everything I have for you, John."

He kicked a footload into the air, but the petals went nowhere but off of each side of his boot. He smiled at her and allowed her to continue.

"How would you have hit me, John?"

He looked down at the truth, then looked up to the centre of the living room ceiling and lifted his beer to his mouth. Fifteen, forty-five, and when it was at ninety degrees, he angled it further. He wanted to do a 180° turn or find in the scarce and perfect loop the beginning that would have started to lead him to this point in this line.

"With all the hate I have, Genesis."

The truth made him cough from the angle he had said the word hate, *as he brought his head and eyes level with a picture of her on the wall of her apartment.*

"Physically, John?"

*He noticed anxiety in her tone, and urgency for an answer and not metaphor. He could not answer her directly. "Ask Clariss. These are his flowers, Genesis."*

*She swept them all up and emptied them with her daily garbage down the chute.*

*He left her apartment and walked a while and ended up somewhere else, talking to himself: "Neon, neon, neon, near on empty, near to the thug side, near on a down ride, my country heel on these pavements. Broadway and its marquees. He smashed their bulbs in his head and ripped posters and fed himself fodder of shredded words, like a rat he hugged side walks till he had amassed the miles of ten thousand street hookers."*

---

*The length of the pillow was a long, white knoll. She knew his head would not be on the other side; it was much too big to lay hidden there. The curtains were draped as she preferred, and no cigarette pack sat on the windowsill. She felt the right to reclaim her favorite seat and ate her breakfast peacefully at a pace that allowed her to plan her day to perfection. The bus driver gave all passengers a free ride that day, and she found her favorite seat next to a lady who'd drowned herself in her favorite perfume.*

*Her professor, on song, delivered the perfect foil for any girl-like behavior that would cause distress to a graduate seeking honors in understanding the likeness of human emotion and intuition to animal instinct, and the distinction between animal scent and a man's footprint on her heart.*

*The extra time with the professor at the end of her class was well spent, she thought, as she climbed the steps to her home. The lectures were now like lessons, like Sunday School at Danielle's church. They reiterated rules and scared her into acting like she believed in a purpose and living as prescribed in order to attain higher status within a group. This group created this reasoning and its code for reasons that remained hidden or disguised in the hope that the greater good may never be achieved. Therefore, all who strived eventually died, either from exhaustion or from realizing that there was no reason, committing suicide rather than facing the embarrassment of having being fooled.*

---

*His stuff was gone. His passport photo, which she'd looked at when he wasn't around, was gone. The photo which made her laugh was somewhere else. She made dinner and read her book, the telephone always in the foreground as she ground down all feelings, and dispelled any silence with music and the pages of her book.*

*She took her smile for the day from the picture of her on her graduation day, as she wrapped her scarf tightly around her neck. Her toes found the line for the bus to be long. Her fingers, in woolen gloves, felt for them but couldn't transfer heat without doing themselves harm. She placed her books to one side and her coat and bag to the other side, thus ensuring her her space. Her hands, held in front where her books would be, clasped each other, praying for nothing, just keeping each other warm. The professor's movements got in her way as she looked straight ahead, the whiteboard and the key words in blue dry-wipe marker etched nothing in her head. The cold and coffee wanting to be let free would have to wait, as she sat rigidly straight.*

---

*The sidewalk was narrow, just room for one. She avoided the concrete slabs in between the cracks she'd once skipped for the sake of heels she had left back in New York City. Fathers and their sons worked together, the sons now standing over the men who began to hunch their backs as they shoveled snow from in front of Genisis Jones.*

*The neighbors waved the Jones girl home. House number 14 on her street had a modest light show and a handmade snowman she and her father would dress for the cold that was meant to be. Her mother opened the door to the crammed kitchen and showed her the dinner in preparation for Christmas Eve, with a turkey, plucked and brazen, and her method for keeping the big bird tender. The hallway wallpaper was light; the decorative flowering fitted around her hand, which she slid in front of her as she moved to the next picture. Her single bed would only allow her to turn; if she were to toss she would fall onto the worn but clean carpet that lay on the old floors.*

*The lavender bubbles covered her the way she wanted them to; she loved the look of leg from there. With the eggnog, they together thanked her head for using its noggin. She saw her heart as she brought in her chin to clear something that did not exist from around her neck and about her throat. The book in one hand turned itself through pages in an hour, bringing her to a place she loved.*

*A red scarf had been wrapped around the snowman's neck. The gloves were stretched stockings that used to bring dolls and hair brushes. The conversation was taken from primetime TV, soapy and ideal for the situation at hand with her dad. She applied her hat, which she pulled from her head with soaking wet mittens to the snowman's bald and icy head, her hair wispy without care for its condition. The cold bit her ears as she heard, "I love you, Genisis."*

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## PART 2

*Christmas day went away, then the next day stayed much longer than its 24 hours. The park she sat in made her a big girl. Her legs were too long for the rusty swing, her hips too wide for the wet slide, and her eyes too far off in the distance. The bare wooden fences tried hard to box them in.*

---

*Genisis breathed the bustle of New York City again as she waited for a bus.*

*A homeless person in a dialogue with himself said, "But I cant go that way. If I go that way, fuck, fuck, fuck. Then I go that way ..." He held his hands behind his back as he walked through her line for the bus. His head out in front at a level, he eyed where his body was taking him. His mouth spoke the words in every direction, his hunched back following his head, still held forward, as his shoulders bumped people and his elbows rubbed grease over their clean clothes.*

*Genisis looked straight ahead at the three steps up to the bus driver's side, her money ready to hand over. Was he being told?, she wondered, with hers lips sealing her lipstick. Or, Was he answering? Or, Maybe he had no answer to be confirmed? Her tongue evened the lipstick's gloss, the pupils of her eyes the only signs showing outwardly of what had to be controlled.*

*Her hand felt the weight of the book, as did her eyes. She had been unable to find the end of the same line for an afternoon, and now an evening. On reaching the next day, she'd turned on the TV. The late-night talk and all-night news proclaimed portions of what she had heard. The fronting-cast was background noise to what she already knew, and the advertising slogans insinuated the obvious of which only she was in doubt. She managed to sleep eventually, and when she awoke she was midway through her first exam. She sat, just sat there, till the telephone rang.*

---

*Around the same time that Genisis escaped to her parents' place for Christmas, Lazoo's people celebrated the season in New York, and the evening was a success. A retired pilot, dressed in his obsolete Pan-Am uniform,*

*talked for everyone. The caterers were marvelous, and the select few whom he had invited back were in the white room. The housemaids were still busy cleaning the dining room and the janitors were mopping blood from the balcony beneath where the pig had been roasted.*

*Jimmy was tired and left with an Asian model. Michael waited for her African American friend, and they left only when she had finished the last episode of her favorite cable sit-com. Clariss waited patiently; five women between the ages of 18 and 45 stood around waiting. Lazoo sat in his seat watching them wait. He started to click the top of his left fist with the index finger of his right hand, making a sound louder than 40-pound knuckles cracking.*

*In the bathroom he was happy with his hair, which was short and militant, as it had been when he'd first seen Genisis. He knew that the people in the white room were waiting for him. He turned out the light and said something to himself. On the way down in the elevator Clariss looked at him while he looked at Clariss's reflection in the door, which opened, finishing any sight of the boss. Still waiting on his return were the five ladies, now seated and talking among themselves.*

*"What's the number I told each one of you earlier in the evening?" he asked slowly as he sat back on the couch for himself. Geni, Jennifer, Jenny, Genna, and Gina all kept talking, and in perfectly timed intervals during their own conversations they filed their claims.*

*Their voices clattered together, saying, "Forty-three – 81 – 130 – 555 – 9,009 ..." None of them remembered their number; they just popped up with random figures from here, there, and everywhere.*

*"Ladies," Lazoo announced, "Mr Clariss has been very kind to us all and has his limousine downstairs to drive each of you to your homes."*

*They thanked him and filed out his door one behind the other. He sat back and thought about each one of the woman, hearing the correction, "Women, John." He was near the end of his energy as he rose to his feet and thought about his next day.*

---

*Clariss studied the report as they ate. He pointed at the mounting pile of plates on the table in the corner, which made the fool on the stool jump. He then pointed at the bar top, where a spill had found its way over the edge and dripped onto the normally shiny floor.*

*Simon rushed around the counter, but stopped when Lazoo said, "Not you, you fuck! That's why we have workers."*

*The customers pretended they didn't hear him and kept on eating. The waitress, who had been standing and playing with her hair, walked slowly to where the spill was dripping, bent her knees, and wiped the floor. Jimmy and Michael looked at each other. The waitress stood up and looked up at the camera in the corner. Lazoo told Simon to turn the music up louder.*

*Lazoo kept busy. Sil House had been renovated, and with its new workforce it was running like a machine, bringing in money. Not his money and not too much money, but the process was working just as he had imagined it would. In his second month as the boss of Sil House he had almost tripled its cashflow and had rented out all its rooms.*

*When he wasn't talking with builders and designers or hiring and firing employees, he, along with Jimmy and Michael and whoever else could stand his willful, wankerish ways, could be found in the Compound Auditorium rehearsing their play of the life of Hariss Clariss. What had started out as Jimmy's idea, with Lazoo playing Hariss Clariss, had turned into Lazoo's play, with Michael standing in his place center stage while Lazoo instructed, constructed, and destroyed what had been scripted till eventually one day it was too*

*whole and too good for anyone else to touch or even tinker with.*

---

*The seven body bags lay in a line. Lazoo studied them in the dark. Clariss could only feel scant movement within the dense darkness through the grainy image inside the small box. He thought of their weight, then he considered their dead weight. He then kicked one bag in the neck to confirm its polystyrene contents. The sound of the poly fiber snapping inside the black zipped bag made Clariss turn on all the lights in his auditorium.*

*Lazoo knelt on the ground and played with the bag. He could feel the fat clown's weight inside the elevator coming down. As its doors opened and he listened for the steps to come to him, he imagined Clariss and his neck like the dummy inside the bag.*

*"You work hard, John," he said, handing Lazoo a lit cigar. "The money is good from upper Manhattan – very good, indeed, but it could it be better under the watchful eye of someone who cares. Here ..."*

*Lazoo took the cigar and still looked down at the men from different countries who now knew no language.*

*"Are they real, John?" Clariss asked for something to say.*

*Lazoo moved the one with the snapped neck to the nearest railing, standing it up against the marble façade, showing Clariss what he thought. He took the cigar from his mouth and handed it to Clariss, then lined the remaining six upright next to the one with the dropped head.*

*Clariss finally left his auditorium as Lazoo continued to map the floor of what he found to be the most rewarding of all his roles thus far.*

---

*Lazoo couldn't avoid the ride uptown in the limo, which was there waiting for him. The chauffeur had his music on and the only other rides in front of the Hilton were cabs, all of them probably dirty.*

*The women walked in front of him and around him. He found a way to ensure that they all remained in front of him. He moved his seat to the wall, sat there for a while, and then moved himself to the couch with gold feet he had avoided till he needed them. Clariss watched him and wondered if this could tire him out. Lazoo saw Clariss out of the corner of his eye and wondered if he would fly with him to Washington, like the chauffeur did; he could read. Then he saw in his head a color scheme for the décor and thought of a new storyline for the auditorium.*

---

*The morning was long. The women, of different heights and dress sizes, all smelled and spoke the same. The highest earner looked, talked, and smoked the same brand of smokes as the girl with lowest takings. Lazoo then looked at the carpet, the walls, and the rooms – rehabilitation for the addicts. The top 30% of the crop, a retreat, a new wardrobe, medical insurance, and one-on-one sessions with the new boss. The low earners had one, one-on-one, and no second chance. One percent of the addicts in rehab would come back clean and be positive role models for the other girls. The other addicts would go back to using, or maybe find office jobs or a man and go straight. He would talk from time to time to the losers as he walked Broadway after dark. His summations, which accounted for facts, figures, and the bottom line, were well received. Jimmy ensured that the report was word-perfect and that the calculator was cleaned.*

*"I don't know about you Hariss," Lazoo said, "but I can lay new carpet, paint walls, and give the place a new name, but a washed-up whore is dry and good for nothing – not worth the space."*

*Clariss liked the way Lazoo came across this morning. "What do you suggest, John?" he asked.*

*Dragging his cigarette long and hard, then drinking his coffee, he made Clariss wait. Then, "See that couple, Clariss?" Lazoo pointed to old couple, tourists, looking at them.*

*Clariss acknowledged, "Yeah?"*

*"I'm gonna be like that – old and in love."*

*Clariss looked back to his plate of food and asked, "And the whorehouse, John?"*

*"Shhh, Clariss. They're not whores. That's why those women are dry and old now, because you call them whores and treat them that way, Clariss."*

---

*In the small monitor Clariss watched the hallways of Sil House, which were lined with women who rivaled the queens of his stage. Each one crouched, legs together to one side, as they slid glossy sheets of paper beneath each door that welcomed all tenants of Sil House to upper Manhattan's most exclusive salon of love. He closely watched the redhead who reported everything back to Lazoo. The young men and old men, the bearded and close-shaven, all of them bumping into Lazoo's women in the hallway, in the elevator, and in the doorway to and from the street. Simon hired more staff, and still they waited in line two deep for coffee and the chance to meet their landlord and his workers.*

---

*Lazoo looked around the auditorium. All 144 seats in the grandstand were filled, and the extra seating was being taken as he spoke unnoticed with the chauffeur, who was then walking away. Clariss, on his balcony, had accepted his plea that he would be in the next one, and beckoned him to come sit next to him with his feather boa, pieces of which floated down to the stage. Lazoo checked the lighting one last time.*

---

*The rewards were far greater than Lazoo had imagined, as he and Clariss looked down from the balcony on Jimmy's work being performed by men as men, men as women, and men as trees, animals, and fish. In the grandstand sat men and women from different eras. Humphrey Bogart, Caesar, Barbra Streisand, Alfred Hitchcock, Shakespeare, Marilyn Munroe, JFK, Freud, Billie Holiday, Miles Davis, Jesus, and Mozart, all men, all playing, all paid for. He stood and clapped for Jimmy. When he had clapped for 27 seconds, the distinguished disguised stood before him and clapped for Lazoo.*

---

*Lazoo felt weak as he realized what was happening. His excitement from the work's fulfillment and completion, and from the players bowing their heads to touch their knees, was made possible by their bodies being bent in two. He had leapt to his feet to acknowledge Jimmy. Now their smiles warped with their clapping hands. Clariss pushed him in the back, as he wanted to vomit. The chauffeur knew this and left the auditorium.*

---

*Lazoo did need the limo as he exited the compound. His puffed eyes could not differentiate the pretty woman in her blue suit from the orange face of the cameraman as he reached for the limo door. Sliding in over the toe of his shoe, he could not even feel the weight of the stretched car, which had by then only completely rolled over his probably broken toes.*

---

*The chauffeur drove him away from it all. Hyperventilating and then coughing, he reached for the cabinet and found water.*

---

*Clariss spoke into the car phone on his way to visit upper Manhattan's most exclusive salon of love, where Lazoo was already busy for the day.*

*Lazoo had finished his tasks for the morning, and all the girls but one were ready for a photo shoot for pictures to adorn the walls of the establishment, which was also beginning to run like a machine.*

---

Lazoo leaned on the tripod, his trigger finger liking the designer's thoughtfulness as it rubbed the spot he liked to push. His other hand dove into a jacket pocket, finding a cigarette. He'd already had five of the best on the sofa and he was running out of one-liners at which they'd politely laughed or replied courteously. He thought of all the possibilities. Could she have slept in? Could she have met someone who liked her? Could Clariss have made her go away? The redhead was not there when he needed her to be.

---

"Okay! Let's do it!" he proclaimed.

All in black, they lounged elegantly. He wiped their anger with a story of his mother and her hand-bound book. The blonde, brunette, and ash, his brown filter equalized and made gentle their eager complexions. The flash spent its worth illuminating his set, but before the camera could capture the scene.

"John Lazoo!" Clariss's disembodied voice boomed out. "You are an amazing reptile with a lizard's tenacity, Lazoo. A snake's venom, Lazoo!"

Lazoo stood back. The girls' heads came up from their necks. They straightened, and one by one they flicked their hair and dismounted the sofa, untangling their legs from their competitors'.

"Wait, girls," Lazoo called out. "Let's do it again. Back in position, please! I know it's been a long wait, but we're just about there."

As the girls did what they were asked, Lazoo stepped back toward the voice and called out, "Morning, Hariss. How's it today?"

Clariss came into the room and looked around it, nodding continuously. "Looks very good John – more than I expected from a hustler. Then again, I suppose, who better to build a high-class brothel than the highest of them all."

Lazoo looked through the camera. The presence of the scariest clown in town showed on the girl's faces, revealing a sadness underneath the anxiety and fear that he snapped as he shot the scene.

The girls went back down to their rooms. Lazoo opened the curtains and made two coffees. He straightened the flowers and worried about the valuable vase he had decided should sit on the expensive art-deco stand.

"I thought you were going to ask me to be in the shot with my girls, John?" Clariss said.

Lazoo lit a cigarette, blew the smoke upwards, and replied, "Your presence in the room was enough. It will forever show on your girls' faces." Then he shut up.

Clariss smiled for a long time and Lazoo looked down and to his left.

"Look, Clariss said, "the reality is that if you could relate to the girls they would do more for you."

"You mean, if the girls felt I had empathy for them, Clariss?"

"More than a word, John."

Lazoo felt it coming, but had no idea of its enormity and totality in the ways of control and in terms of methods, mad methods.

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*The doors to the mansion were pulled back by 13 men in togas. The one in the middle hooked his hat and coat. Clariss walked up the marble staircase to the floor by himself, as the 13 men crammed into the glass elevator that opened on the third level, where they draped themselves over the balconies and swung on swings above their master's head as he bathed in tepid red wine. A further six men dressed as Napoleonic soldiers served him supper as Cleopatra read him poetry. Clariss waved them all off to their quarters. Only after the last of them sounded a closed door behind him and Cleopatra's fragrance had subsided into the wood of the barrel in which his bath wine had fermented could he see Lazoo step down into the bath to be with him. Lazoo and his women, none of them he fancied or bedded, made him momentarily angry, only for his scowl to change to a smile at the sight of Lazoo moving closer to him, but not close enough to make him delirious – just close enough to make them smell akin.*

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### PART 3

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*Genesis picked up the ringing phone. A voice began talking to her, saying, "You will be a therapist, a needed therapist, for women who have no minds of their own or who have lost their soul to men who use women. Your knowledge will bring to them their worth and your reward will be the work itself ..."*

*Genesis had run out of the liquid foundation, so she caked it on from the remainders in the compact. On the second attempt she found the lip line. She ran out of her favorite, so she used eyeliner pencil to tidy the line of her lips. Red would be good, and she went with that. The higher the better, so she stepped into the strapless ones. The more the merrier, so she sprayed all over.*

*She climbed into the dark place and sat in the middle, her back to the chauffeur, who drove the limo carefully, merging into coming traffic.*

*"Here I am, Genesis," came the voice as a spotlight shined down on Clariss in the opposite seat, pungent in his corner. Her normally long nails were bitten down and showed the ends of her fingers, which had reacted to the voice with a fright reflex. "The work itself is the reward, Genesis," he said.*

*She nodded, her knees holding her hands, only just holding her together.*

*"Are you frightened, Genesis? No need to be frightened of me, Genesis."*

*Her head nodding, she said, "Yes, Mr Clariss. I can call you that." She straightened her red dress and managed to look at him with her two red eyes.*

*The ride passed the same spot again and again, and when Genesis could bear it no longer she let go and held her hand out. Clariss had a perfumed and powdered handkerchief out. Genesis tossed her hair back and pinned it, wiping her nose and eyes with the other side of the cloth.*

*"Does your biological father know you're in this state," Clariss asked, "and does the woman whose hips you bare, is she aware that you have flunked life and are on the verge of becoming someone like Lazoo?"*

*The name hurt her neck, as did the jerking way as she jolted her heavy head, complete with its thick lump of dull, blond hair atop. Her hands remained still between her knees, her head in the same position, her eyes looking straight ahead, smudged, bleeding mascara, as the limo entered the grounds of the compound. Clariss surveyed and amassed a list from which he could control the presently vulnerable, soon-to-be Madame Genesis Jones.*

---

*Four servants pulled back the doors to the mansion. One held out a white, fluffy robe with 'Genesis' embroidered on it. One took her heels. One wiped the remaining makeup from her face, and the fourth massaged her neck. All were men; all were handsome; none of them were threatening as they led her to the*

*floor reserved for occasions.*

*With no residue or bouquet from the red wine that Clariss had bathed in, the room was alight with the sparkles that white milk threw out and about. Genesis sat still, her eyes still staring, checking the movement of her neck from moment to moment. Clariss sat with his back to her at a table set for two. His voice rebounded off every wall, her ears their only target. "You will be above them, Genesis, but you will also be beneath them when they fall."*

*Genesis dressed comfortably and was left to roam the compound. Everywhere she looked she saw images of Lazoo and of herself.*

*"Is that me?" she asked, rewinding the grainy frame to herself standing in the window.*

*"Yes," Clariss replied, "that is who you were, my favored girl. How incestuous of us, Genesis. Oh, how the heathens must have rejoiced at the thought that my offspring, once upon a clear, full moon, held hands, and blew lust into each other's ears. Oh, how loudly they must have laughed, my Genesis."*

*Genesis watched some more, the sound encompassing an echo that was already caught up with itself as the next message came quickly on its way, consumed, unaware, and with Lazoo's picture on all three screens. Clariss dialed the brothel, where Lazoo sat inside an office with gray walls, one desk, two chairs, and two pictures.*

*"Is that me?" said Lazoo's steady tone into the phone.*

*The dialogue flowed into the small microphone of Clariss's antique telephone.*

*First a voice came through the handset of Lazoo's phone, saying, "You expect me to make love to it?"*

*A laugh followed.*

*"A laugh," said Lazoo's voice, "a laugh, the laugh was loud, but it was not proud. The oceans would have ..."*

*"... carried that laugh to any shore that man had discovered," said Genesis's voice, completing his thought, "and if sailing ships had not forged ..."*

*"... the way to a place," said Lazoo's and Genesis's voices together, "the moon's ever-changing moods would eventually feel fond and send tides to that place, the sound of that laugh."*

*"That," said Clariss, "is you, John, in times when obedience was of character and respect was of your nature, my once-favored one."*

*Lazoo felt ill. He hung up the phone, as the knock on the office door signaled his first one-on-one for the day.*

*"Look," he said, "the reality is you may need one yourself – a hand job, a fuck, or however you fucking frig yourself. Or, if you can find a man, or woman, who will love you for what you are, or one who gets off on his or her sexy lady being sexualized by other, lesser men or woman? What hurts you the most? You still feel like playing?"*

*The small office was clean and gray, the way he liked it. He thought that a place where plans were made should never outdo the plans themselves. The girls were not as hard as he had imagined. Most of them had grown up indoors, the only variations being the décor and the clientele's dress. Lazoo sat looking at the contrasting scenery in the picture on the gray wall opposite.*

*"From that wall to that wall," he said out loud, not bothered or perturbed by the girl who knocked three times and then entered.*

*She looked and talked like a brothel receptionist, which is what she was. "Michael and Jimmy are outside. They said that you were expecting them," she said.*

*"Bullshit I was expecting them." Then he shouted out through the open door, "This is why you two fucks are still extras! See you at Sil House tonight!"*

*As promised Lazoo was there. Jimmy drank coffee and relaxed. Lazoo was smiling at everyone.*

*"What?" Jimmy raised his shoulders and hands, palms up, thick lips turned upside down, and repeated, "What? Why you staring at me like those man whores up in your fucking father's house? Huh, Lazoo?"*

*Lazoo shrugged his shoulders and copied Jimmy's lips, saying, "It was good Jimmy, real good," the grin opening into laughter.*

*"Yeah," Jimmy continued, "fucking good till the afterparty, when Hitchcock and fucking Caesar started eating Colonel Fucking Sanders – it was good until then!"*

*Lazoo laughed and laughed, till the fool on the stool annoyed him. "What the fuck is that fool's name again?"*

*"That's Shugit, man," Jimmy told him, "our technical adviser for the shit you can't fake with your broken-ass poems, bro."*

*"Remind me again how the fuck he got in."*

*"Cause he's a med student, and all that shit."*

*Lazoo nodded, but all he could hear was the fuzz of tall stories coming from the stool. "You better fucking put a lid on that fucking shithead's mouth, Jimmy."*

*Lazoo left the view of the security cameras in the café. Michael leaned into Jimmy and let him know, "I think you got him, bro."*

---

*They filed into the white room's dining room, Jimmy with his pad and pens, Michael twisting his wrist bands, Simon with the liquor, and then Shugit, throwing his left foot forward, then his body, then his right leg. Lazoo served them dinner, cleared the table, and then took a call on the phone going red.*

*Clariss's voice said from inside the telephone, "Is that you, John? If it is I'd like to be an audience for you tonight – a naked rehearsal for the financier, so to speak."*

*Lazoo looked at his crew, all seated still, and said, "The entry fee, Mr Clariss, is ten packs of cigarettes."*

---

*The limo's chauffeur sat smiling as he waited for Clariss to finish in the liquor store. The figure of Clariss, in fur, with hat and gloves, left the corner store, its plate-glass door shutting on the rows of liquor brands, all lined on shelves that bent from the weight of the cheap drink. Watching him walk with Lazoo's order of cigarettes past two hookers and their fast-talking pimp in polyester and plastic made the chauffeur smirk. He laughed loudly inside, but all that was visible was a rapid eye movement that could have been mistaken for a split-second dizzy spell, if it was caught at all by some roving eye that dared to lose focus.*

*Lazoo contained the hilarity of it all to himself as he cut the lines in front of each of his crew. Jimmy rubbed his hands as Michael waited patiently, and when he was sure that they were ready to trip, he pointed their faces to the end closest to them. Jimmy, Michael, and Simon did their lines and shut their mouths. Shugit did his and asked for more. Lazoo pointed to a faint dusting left in front of him, to which Shugit then put his face close. Lazoo grabbed a clump of his hair in his hand and ripped his head back quickly and swiftly, smashing his once-smiling face into the marble slab that was the dining table.*

*His head lay still for one second, then it fell on an ear, his shoulders following form as they slumped. The doorbell chimed, announcing Clariss's arrival. When Lazoo returned he could see that he had successfully broken Shugit's nose. The face moaned, giving Lazoo no choice but to do it again. He lifted Shugit's head with two hands and faced it so Simon could see his assistant. Simon nodded quickly as Jimmy looked away. Clariss looked at Michael, and when Michael did nothing he tried talking, but before he could be heard, Lazoo again slammed Shugit's head into the table top. This time Lazoo was reasonably sure the man's cheekbone was completely smashed.*

*Silenced by this display, Clariss handed Lazoo the carton of smokes.*

*Amused by their reaction, Lazoo called it a day, saying, "Tomorrow evening – same place, same time, same attitude."*

*One by one they followed Clariss out the door. Lazoo managed a goodbye, "Have a pleasant evening, everyone."*

*The cab ride was fast, as fast as the race cars in his head. They sped from point to point of view, from idea to ideal, and when they crashed in a heap, no crash-test dummy escaped. He cleared the mailbox. The stairs were unused. The key reminded the lock, after negotiation, of who he was. He jacked the last remaining beer with his lighter, then stood in every room, sat in every seat, and smelled her pillow.*

*He partially erased some of the messages on the answer machine as he figured out which buttons would give his ears clues as to how Genesis could be in the same phone call as the sound of his recorded voice, or Clariss chastising him, or Jimmy bitching as he and Michael left the brothel*

*He slept till the afternoon, holding her pillow to himself. The messages from her mother begging her to call had become dull but engraved. When he awoke, he woke himself.*

*The walk through the calm park was easy. The spring sun setting made things cool. How often had he heard the words? A voice in his head said, "Cool, calm, and collected."*

*Lazoo only knew the meaning to two of the words. 'Collected' must have meant pay, reward, someone's head, someone's eyes, maybe even their fucking tongue.*

*Jimmy, Michael, Simon, and Shugit managed to feel outnumbered as Lazoo walked behind each one, pouring the tequila into the smallest of glasses and saying, "Now, gentlemen – don't think, don't fucking feel, just fucking be!"*

*He poured his own glass at the head of the table and interrupted himself. "Actually, take the fucking word fucking out of that morsel. Therefore, making it lean, complete, and true – just be!"*

*Lazoo thought to himself, as he wondered, that maybe he finally had the definition of the word ponder, but he was still dumb, speechless, and he resented those who spoke, and when his ears heard, they listened for flaws.*

*Jimmy started to write.*

*"Jimmy," Lazoo said, "the pen is brighter than a saber, but your mind pushes that pen to points that make a point of view. That pen could well be the weapon with which you will cut the cord from you mind's eye to endings and ideals that must conceal themselves till an idea is fully furnished with props, time, and idiocies – and in reverse sensibilities. Put the fucking pen down, Jimmy. Now!"*

---

*Inside the limo the chauffeur prayed as he drove Clariss to what he hoped would be something worth arriving at that night.*

*Don't get caught!*

*Do you wanna get caught?*

*Don't get caught!*

*Do you wanna get caught?*

*Sniff what they will sniff*

*Find what they will find*

*Deduct what they must add*

*Divide what they must multiply*

*Don't get caught!*

*When you know, tell us*

*Do you wanna get caught?*

---

*The doorbell chimed. Lazoo let him in. Lazoo pointed to where he had to sit and Clariss did so.*

*"Imagine the bag," Lazoo told him. "Inside it he fights for the last of his life, with his tongue cut and taken from him. His sounds are muted by the zipped bag, which is Teflon molded and has a titanium zipper. His voice was taken by our surgeon, whose white coat is still bleached white. We watch that bag contort. We see that his arms cannot extend their length, as they are tied in front of him, elbows bent upwards. His only limbs that can extend to satisfy their natural state are his legs, which now begin to cramp to match the feeling of his fingers, all cramped, like his neck and jaw." Lazoo's face showed nothing.*

*"They say," he continued, "that drowning becomes blissful, but in our death it becomes darker. He swims in his own fear, and his lungs fill with his own blood from his severed tongue. He crunches his own teeth by his own might. One or two extract from the root, but most of them become cut and crushed by the uncontrollable measures his mouth takes to scream for help, screams that it cannot manufacture without a tongue. He swallows his broken dental work, coughing from choking on his own ivory, only to vomit the same contents, his blood and broken teeth. And if we did our work properly we would have starved him for a week, meaning that he will cover himself only with that blood and bits of bone before the bowel emits its waste, if it hasn't already. He doesn't see the white light at the surface. His last vision is an inversion into his dark soul. His fears are at the forefront, as he fears the worst for his only real friend, his pet cat." He paused.*

*"Meanwhile, the sound from the grandstand will in itself be mortifying. We will call his cat's name, 'Here pussy! Come eat John Doe's lamb tongue for dinner!' It erupts! And as we do the same to his friend, they too can feel the confining lining of the black body bag, and as his friend before him fades from fighting, and still our surgeon is spotless."*

*The flashing of the red light on the phone before the ring caused Shugit, hard of hearing and seeing due to heavy bandaging around his head, to knock his glass of alcohol on its side, the drink dispersing in every direction.*

*"Clean it, Shithead," Lazoo shouted, his cut pecs straining. "Clean it now!" The pattern of his sternum was evident for Shugit to see as he picked up the phone.*

*Lazoo talked for an hour while his crew waited patiently, with Shugit starting to doze off. Lazoo offered a few pointers regarding the intricacies of the task at hand. Jimmy picked up on an opportunity and fearlessly put his neck on the line for his friends by saying, "Fuck, man! That's why we got Shugit. Motherfucker wants to commit a high-fucking-powered murder, complete with surgical tools, and he thinks he can break a nostril!"*

*Shugit's head waved about as Simon looked at Michael. Michael looked at Shugit. Shugit's head turned in the direction of Lazoo. Lazoo looked at Jimmy and said, "Fuck, yeah. Fuck, yeah. Let's fucking laugh," and they did, but before they became accustomed to the sound of many freewheeling voices up in his white room, Shugit's head flopped onto his shoulder.*

*Lazoo gave Michael the word. "Hit him."*

*Michael got up.*

*"No, just stay where you are and hit him from there."*

*Clariss sipped his cognac.*

*"Actually," Lazoo decided, "cut him upwards."*

*Michael pushed his seat back as Lazoo changed his mind. Jimmy looked down as Simon drew in the last of his lines.*

*"Come around to his right," Lazoo ordered. "Jimmy, call his name. Simon, you watching?"*

*After the uppercut, which followed a right cross, Lazoo patted Michael on the back and kicked the chair with Shugit on it. It fell to the ground. Lazoo thought about a kick to the head, but his toe was still sore from the limo running over it. Simon looked till Lazoo smiled back at him.*

*"The surgeon," Lazoo said, "must be at least six foot, and wide at the shoulders. His body will hide a lot of the work from the grandstand's view, and also, of course, from the balcony. The important things are how clean everything remains, keeping the pumps that squirt blood pressurized precisely and aimed in the right direction. Our surgeon must – and I fucking repeat! – must stay clean! The noise muffled by the bags and violent movement of the bodies in the bags will be enough to scare the audience. Lighting and messages are also props – plus sound." He thought for two seconds before going on.*

*"One more thing! Jimmy, the players we use for inside the bags must be swimmers. They have to have big lungs. The only time they get to breathe is when they have finished fighting. When they're dead they can unzip the bag from inside – just enough to get air – which the audience won't be able to see because of the light and attention elsewhere on the stage."*

---

*The events of the night drove the walk through the park and then the streets all the way to their apartment. Lazoo's stomach kept reminding him of the sourness of the activity as the furious five stretched. The key and lock agreed, and the musty, closed apartment lay bare and dark for him to enter. Inside the fridge the bacteria's vapor must have had some physical form, for his nostrils felt their presence, and if the stench was a cloud in formation, they could have seen a worn and tired boy in the fridge's light.*

*He was Clariss's captive, yet he believed that he owned what he perceived and portrayed in his behavior being beholden to no one. He took a bottle of wine. It was half empty. Maybe if Genesis had drunk from the bottle he could once again meet her there. He trudged through the place to the middle of the living room and stood where all the pictures and important parts of her life could view and take pity on John Lazoo. He stood at attention. Masses stood still as music played and a young boy learned how to salute. His left arm stood the bottle up to his lips and he drank the remaining wine. His head bowed when he brought the bottle down to his side, and there on that spot he stood, he slept, he dreamed, and he made crying sounds.*

*Inside his gray office, the real world came down on him as he sat in what he had personally designed. With two pictures, a light gray carpet, gray walls, a desk and chair, and a telephone, he had designed it for interrogation and conception. It was bland and boring, where life was born from inside his head or when two or more minds collided, clashed, or coincided.*

*The door opened and there she stood. She stepped into the room and sat in the one red chair that contrasted with everything else in the room. Genesis looked straight at him, then down at her heels, then back at him. Lazoo looked straight at her, never softening his eyes, but not hitting her, either. She stared as he packed up his stuff.*

**CHAPTER 07**

---

It maybe inside, outside

down there, up there,

Around there, somewhere here

Depends on what you want to

change.

---

The grass was still lush. Maybe that year it would dry brown. He was happy to walk on it as he stayed seconds behind her, just so he could watch her. Then he had to hold her hand, calling out, "Genisis! Wait up, babe!"

The sun was still mild, so she didn't need to block her face, just use some eyeliner. She walked with her head up, wondering whether or not to invite him to her new place.

"So," he said, "you like the new job?"

They both looked down at their next step and realized it was so easy, so natural, even when they walked through the puddles and uneven areas.

"It's not what I had imagined," she answered. "The girls don't feel they need someone in my position. I waited for a week, then realized I had to initiate the first session, and even then it was hard. No one was forthcoming. It's was like I needed them in order for them to know they needed me, if you know what I mean?"

Lazoo put his arm around her waist and pulled her as close as he could to him without both of them falling over onto the grass and looking like a new couple just met, so stupid only to last a weekend. They kept strolling.

"I do, actually, Genisis. I just thought of it like it them handing in their take or going for a medical – just part of the job. They's see you once a week, only them and yourself, spill their stuff, and you nod ya head and offer advice when it sounds good, you know?"

Genisis smiled at his version and put her hip into him, making him jump a puddle, skip a hole, and bounce back to hug her with both arms.

"Why didn't you tell me, John?" She had planned the question word for word for a long time, yet when it came time to deliver it she blurted it out, burning the moment, but it was him. He knew how it was meant to sound.

"Because I don't see it as a problem. Fuck, I can speak now. I see people in libraries, with all that knowledge, all those fucking words. I got a handful, but that handful, I see their meaning. Hell, I used to kill you with some of that pain."

She looked at his confidence and asked, "Can I still laugh at you, like I used to?"

"Fuck, yes, darling. Fuck, yes, beautiful."

And she did.

---



The walls were brilliant white, maybe a coat brighter than his white room. They both understood the paintings. The Manhattan skyline jumped from its hiding place, the sun resting somewhere far away. They waited for the moon.

Her shiny blonde hair was in front of him. She was still there, his hands around what she called "his tummy," and his own stomach which she loved against her back. His knees were in the back of her knees. Their bodies were snug, anything else in the world – somewhere else.

He looked for her radio as he prepared to cook for her again, and remembered seeing it back at their apartment with the photos and ornaments. She sat up when he entered with a tray with poached eggs on rye bread, sliced tomato, quartered bell peppers, orange juice, coffee, and a smile on it. As he sat sideways on the bed, she left it without saying a damn word. He sat, waiting for her return. The toilet seat fell down, the toilet flushed, and the shower came on. He watched her rush the juice and crunch the toast, wondering how long it was going to take for him to remember to place the seat down quietly, where she wanted it, after his turn. They stood on either side of the long, white counter in the center of the kitchen, its walls and floor tiled white. She said little and he left so she could feel comfortable in her new apartment.

He allowed himself the thought of her walking through the reception area and men mistaking her for something they could afford for twenty minutes, sixty minutes, a night, or a dinner as he crossed the white line. Seated, Jimmy's head stopped bouncing when he saw him step in. Out of the corner of his eye he could see Michael roll just his right wristband as the limo wiped from the right, stopping him from completing the crossing. He watched Simon tighten his apron strings and Shugit sit up straight by looking over the top of the limousine's shiny roof, from where he could catch an angle that reflected upwards. The window came down, the sun shone into the space from which Clariss's voice came, "Was the weekend a welcome relief, a too-short interlude, or a déjà vu of what will never be remembered, John?"

Lazoo leaned with his elbows on the roof, his eyes still psyching themselves and his voice aware of the construction work and traffic behind them. "It was relaxing, Hariss. Did nothing. Absolutely nothing. It was good, Mr Clariss."

"Remember, John," Clariss cautioned, "be nice. It's Jimmy's play."

The window went up. The driver of a black SUV noticed the limo's signal indicating its chauffeur's intentions and slowed down to let the limo have the right of way. Lazoo watched the limo drive off and wondered how much gas the two black cars consumed.

---

Genesis would have to interact with the clientele in some way. Maybe she would be forced to work the phone if it wasn't picked up at the desk, or maybe she would work the desk if the receptionist required a break.

Lazoo looked at the patrons of Sil House. He watched them order at the counter, then find an available table and sit down carefully, wary of creasing their suits. He watched them look at the cameras which he had suggested would make them feel secure in a neighborhood that he, with Clariss's money, had made valuable. Shugit's life story being told in full interested him, but the thoughts that had to be replaced were beginning to flood the frames.

---

Genesis said, "I'm going to have to teach you how to dial that phone, John."

Lazoo got comfortable, putting two pillows behind his back and one to the side, his cigarettes and coffee organized on the tableside cabinet. He caught his name and the gist of her offer.

"We can do the mind-morph."

Genesis giggled, knowing that there would be plenty of laughs later. "Do what, you silly man?"

"The mind-morph. I made it up and we use it in the play," Lazoo laughed, thinking about when he should light his first cigarette.

"Explain it to me, John."

"Can I smoke and explain?"

"As long as you don't blow it in my ear," she laughed.

As she did as she pleased, he lit a smoke.

"It's simple, babe. The guy in the play, he's dumb – can't speak. He meets a beautiful girl and falls in love with her. She feels sorry for him, but doesn't know that she's in love with him until dumbass goes and kills seven guys who speak seven different languages. By the way, he's dumb as in no tongue – no talk. He's actually quite smart."

Genesis smiled, and in a singsong manner said, "I know, John, and you're the guy. I wonder who the beautiful girl could be?"

Lazoo stubbed out the cigarette. Genesis wriggled and straightened her two pillows and hugged the one on top of her.

"Anyways – as I was saying babe, he's locked up, waiting for the court case – no one, no family, nothing! And his heart remembers how it felt with the beautiful girl. You with me, babe?"

"Mmm, I'm with you, John."

Her reply allows him to light another smoke. "Okay," he went on, "his heart remembers the feeling, pumping blood at the same speed to his brain as when he thought particular feelings about her when they were together, Okay?"

"Yes, John."

"Okay, he now also remembers in accordance with his lungs ..."

Genesis giggled, "Does he smoke? If he does, his lungs may be rotten, John."

Lazoo took a deep drag and said, "That's very funny, babe. Anyways, he remembers his heartbeat, his breathing, his feelings – and he associates them with a particular phrase, like 'I love you, Genesis,' or 'You're going to make it, John.' This he transmits to her, and she eventually is able to translate it when her body also finds the rhythm. Oh, by the way, babe, nicotine makes his receiver and transmitter stronger and clearer, respectively, I might add."

Genesis looked at the ceiling and closed her eyes,

"Just like I did at Christmastime."

She couldn't hear the words as she thought of the way he felt, but she rejoined the conversation. "That's very clever, John. You're a smart man."

He stubbed out another cigarette and waited for her, listening to her breathing. Then he annoyed himself when he caught himself counting the number of breaths she took every fifteen seconds.

"You go," Genisis suggested.

"How's bout we both go?"

They hopped out of bed, Lazoo to the right, Genisis to the left. Telephones lay on their sides on their tableside cabinets. Hers lay in front of his framed, enlarged passport photo, which she had brought out of the drawer. His lay in between his cigarette packet, a lighter, and receipts with her signature. The phones reverberated as two doors closed, two toilets flushed, 34 footsteps padded, sheets were pulled back, two bodies sank onto two mattresses, one throat cleared, a flame ignited, and one pair of lungs began sucking.

"You there, babe?"

"I'm definitely here, John."

Her sheets up to her neck, she lay on her side with only the pillow his head had rested on against her body. "Remember that night, John?"

He didn't even have to search. "Yeah. That was funny, ah?"

She could see the full moon. "Did you really steal that horse?"

Lazoo smiled at the same moon. "Can you see the moon, babe?" He thought about how she had stood at the lights playing her part. For ten minutes she had pretended to cross the street; three times the green man had allowed her to walk and three times she had said no. "What do you think, babe?" He realized that he had made her wait too long for a simple yes or no she may not have ever wanted to know. "I didn't steal the fucking unfit creature. I paid the cop a hundred dollars and promised him a close-up of your beautiful ..."

Genisis found new a new volume level to her laughter. Lazoo held the phone away and felt relieved. "You know I was joking about letting him see your ..."

Genisis sighed, "They want your soft touch, John, my ..."

Lazoo stubbed another one out and rolled onto his side. "How's work, babe?"

Genisis looked from the moon to the white walls. From where she lay one of the paintings seemed to be depicting torture. "I've learned a lot John, some real cases."

Lazoo looked at a reflection of the moon in one of the mirrors. It looked oblong and out of character. The moon everyone saw was round. The reflection he saw was still an ellipse, but its meaning for him now eclipsed its literal definition and its common uses for nature and humans. He could not comprehend the terms on their own. He grasped their meanings as explained by this beautiful creature created by two people in love. He began to understand the reasons why those girls served men for their money.

He had now decided to himself that Clariss was an intelligent man. Lazoo's street-smart ways would not be sufficient to free himself and to find a way to take Genisis first home, and then away from the world they had been lured into and where they were now trapped.

"I love you, Genisis."

Lazoo could no longer see the moon. It had left the mirrors, and when he went to the window, orange was the color of the new day.

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She punched numbers from the receipts. Mr Ghetts's signature was neat, like the sign on the Coca-Cola bottle she took a sip from as she punched more numbers.

"Tomorrow will be his ninth birthday. Bless his blessed soul for not wanting more than the same bike he was given last year. I hope he is wearing his orange shirt on his back and not on his head like a turban. If he is, Janine, it is your fault for telling him the story about the cobra. If he is, Janine, it is your fault for letting him do as he pleases. He looks like no other man, but many a man I have seen looks like he does.

"James, you're good boy, and your mother loves you dearly, James!"

He drove straight. When the uneven ground brought the right front wheel up onto firm grounding he found the strength in his small thin arms to steer the red tractor back on course, in and away, and then back into the groove in his body, and within the ready-laid tracks he was plowing. Mr Ghetts, he bet himself, was thinking of his vacation when his wife, who'd looked like Janine, had been alive.

"We had a yacht – a big yacht – as long as the barn and just about as wide, and on land it stood higher than the barn. She wore big, round, dark glasses, and when she took them off, her eyes were like your mother's eyes, James. 'I love you Janine!'"

Janine punched the equals key. "I love you too, James." Her heart skipped to keep from fluttering with the butterflies from her stomach. It ached as if stabbed. Her finger stabbed the equals button again as an expression of the pain and a reaction to the attack. The sum and total of the receipts were whatever now. The pain thinned to accentuate the entry point of a sharp, double-edged knife.

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Lazoo woke holding his heart, the ringing phone louder by the ring. He lifted the handset. "Yep. ... I'm sorry, Hariss. ... I worked late last night on some new ideas."

The limo waited. Inside were Jimmy, Michael, Shugit, Simon, and Clariss. Outside, leaning against it, Lazoo smoked and tried hard to be coherent, reverent, and cooperative as he told the chauffeur, "Drop them off and then come back and pick me up." He lowered his head into the open window and blew smoke at everyone, but talked only to Clariss to assure him that the secondhand smoke was not meant for the boss. "Look," he said, "I've just got a couple of big ideas I need time to make small and square so they can fit, and hopefully they will bring love, trust, honesty, and respect."

Clariss waved the smoke away as Michael started to make masturbation motions. Simon and Shugit kept straight faces and Jimmy played with his hair as he, too, managed to keep a straight face.

"This is Jimmy's play, John," Clariss told him. "You've worked hard on the ideas and production. Everything is ready, John!"

Then Lazoo also started making masturbation motions in the passenger window, where Clariss believed he was holding his cigarette far from him.

"Look John," Clariss went on, "I have a story, too, my son. I literally swam to America, and when I got here I was treated like a whore – just like you!"

Lazoo could see the chauffeur in the sideview mirror on the passenger-side door making masturbation motions. Everyone there's hands but Clariss's were jerking off the air that Clariss and Lazoo occupied. Lazoo then stopped the hand-making-a-ring motion and held only his middle finger for the chauffeur to see. Soon

Michael had his middle finger in the air too, just out of Clariss's view.

Nothing Clariss had said had softened or mellowed him, but he knew he would have to tread lightly and creep around, appease, and not impede the patience and tolerance that had been extended to him, way above and beyond the normal character of Hariss Clariss. "I want to go to Europe and I want to go with Genesis," he said.

There. He'd said it, and as he did he held up a palm for the chauffeur to stop all obscenities in the presence of the name he had just said and that Clariss was also going to say.

"Does Genesis know you have this urge to rescue her from what she wants, John?" he asked softly.

The limo emptied. It was just Lazoo leaning in the window and Clariss. The chauffeur had closed the partition, and when he pulled the control back to himself the street and its sounds made things colder and more confusing with the hustled hum. Shugit, Michael, Simon, and Jimmy stood behind the limo trying to snort lines off the cover of the trunk, collecting themselves as Lazoo reignited them with a middle finger, a jerkoff wrist jerk, and a wink as Clariss continued.

"John, this is an important evening for us in the balcony. Genesis will watch the mouths of actors delivering the essence of your ideas for her mind and her heart to taste and savor. And like her, others will walk into their tomorrows with those thoughts and feelings energizing their bodies and soothing their crooked joints and the pains in the backs of their minds. Those thoughts and feelings being derivatives of your tongue, John! Your tongue, John!"

Lazoo knew he had promised Clariss that he would be on stage for this one.

The Fourth of July, and Herald Square was full of the brave, the spirited, and the meek. Mild-natured tourists, in a place where they expect to be mugged, were taken by the atmosphere as it was replaced with warmth as a rendition of the anthem placed hands on hearts. Genesis stood in front of him as fireworks grew like beanstalks, then blossomed and bloomed next to the moon.

The camera, looking up at the bowing cast, caught Michael looking like Lazoo. The stand-in was a natural, with hair cropped close, closely shaven, tats covered, no sweat for the lost wristbands, no words as written by Jimmy. They bowed again as the swimmers came in behind in their striped trunks, and they bowed as the doors of the glass elevator opened and cameramen backed in speed as Clariss smiled for their cameras. Then they all bowed – the cast, the trees, the grandstand, and Shugit was clean.

## CHAPTER 08

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Monday July 7th 1997 - New York Times

Police this morning reported the morbid slaughter of seven men found dead in their exclusive Manhattan apartments with their tongues severed and replaced.

The allocation of considerable NYPD resources has led to a dramatically reduced list of possible suspects, according to Assistant District Attorney Jack Shack. Information from the tenants of the apartment building in which the bodies were found has helped police in tracking down the killer or killers.

Shack told a press conference that the nature of the crime has suggested to investigators that it was a crime of passion, adding that, "It appears to have been committed by someone who may well become a serial killer if the perpetrator or perpetrators are not identified and apprehended immediately"

Police would like to hear from anyone who has information on the whereabouts of Manhattan theatrical producer John James Lazoo.

## CHAPTER 09

"It's in your head, babe," Lazoo said. "The phone rings all around the world, babe. It's only when you answer the fucking thing that it makes a connection."

Genesis was too sleepy to laugh, she just grabbed his arm, wrapped it around herself, and fully closed her eyes.

At breakfast in his white room, they talked as he topped up her juice and sweetened his coffee before it dawned on him that the coffee had been sugared to perfection.

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The picture of the girls on the wall showed them lounging in focus, yet disturbed by a presence. She noticed the way the girls looked at the photo before they opened their mouths to speak, and then glanced at it on their way out the door. She looked at the scenery of Europe, wondered what would make Lazoo want to live in the wilderness, and pondered the merits of not having to wear makeup. The phone rang.

"I wasn't up to it," Lazoo said into the phone. "Sorry, Hariss. You saw the way the boys reacted to me the other night. You witnessed my arrogance yourself. I even blew smoke among them when they were sitting in an enclosed cavern, in the presence of yourself, Mr Clariss – an act of defiance – a boy trying to blow smoke in the mirrors that his father has crafted with his own image, sir."

The words stirred on the outside what had already brewed in Clariss for 24 hours. "I want a performance tonight, John," he said. "Never mind the present for the nation in which we dwell and pay taxes – a performance for your heritage is what I ask of you now, John."

Lazoo thought slowly, carefully blowing smoke to the side, and then said, "Mr Clariss, I'm sorry. I cannot do it anymore. I am really sorry, Hariss. Your kindness and your wisdom are things I'll always use to the best of my brains. And I'll walk all your ways till their paths take me to my own small kingdom. I am sorry, Sir."

Genesis felt the weight as they ate in her white room. Clariss counted seconds. Michael, in his dressing room, smiled at the passport photo stuck to the corner of the mirror.

Lazoo ate and then smiled, and at times reassured Genesis, "It's going to be all right, babe. Trust me!"

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### PART 1

All Gene Reyer's dreams had come true. The human condition, our flaws, our turmoil over our emotions, and our ambitions to profit from other people's illnesses had made many a predicament, causing us to commit crimes that required many innocent people to be defended.

"The cellular phone will become smaller," he tells himself unashamedly outloud on the busy New York Street into the Dictaphone. "It was much too heavy to nestle as one does with desk phones. The buildings will grow as required by the laws of economics and not by man's ego. The cabs will have to be decked out like Stevensen Tait's tank. But women, they should look, walk, talk, and smell just the way that one there does. Yeah, women – I like you the way you are today, yesterday, and tomorrow."

Unseen and from across the same street Gene Reyer is being watched if her were the accused, "Yeah," Lazoo said muttering beneath the growth he rubs impatiently as he waits for the scene to gain momentum. "Fucking blah-blah – fucking blah. Take the fucking newspaper, you fucking moron of an extra."

The man next to him stopped waving frantically and looked at Reyer, who looked at a homeless man holding out his dirty, fingerless glove to them both. Reyer took off his Charley Stevenson silk tie and placed it in the

dirty, held-out hand, saying, "Take it. Go sell it."

"Not bad," said Lazoo. "Not bad at all." He stood back against the wall. He placed a foot steadfast on the sidewalk in front of him as people passed by. He kept the other foot cocked against the wall, ready to walk fast and then run if the sirens stopped on the street in front of him. Across the street, Reyer was talking to himself, as only a confident man could, in the midst of people who had nothing to say to each other. The guy next to him waved down taxis for a living. The homeless man in a dirty Armani jacket took the silk tie and loosely noosed it around his neck as he handed the lawyer the special late edition of the New York Times.

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*Genesis ate breakfast alone, looking straight ahead. She had been made tranquil, chilled like Lazoo and pilled by the drug Juliet.*

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*As the fingerless glove pointed skyward, directing Reyer's head and eyes up into the air, Lazoo thought that if that guy was handsome, maybe that is what handsome is. Genesis would confirm it for him. In the meantime he used the word cool. He wondered if Reyer could keep his eyes on the witness box from the way the graying guy's head turned and twisted to seek skirt, perfume, heels, and ass.*

*Lazoo looked and saw above all else the paper boy, ten feet away, his passport photo upside down on the front page. The boy at the newsstand was screaming for all to hear, "Seven men's tongues cut and replaced! Read all about it!" A frontman for the biggest suit of them all, his little hand ready to pass the information to anyone with a spare dollar.*

*Reyer put down his briefcase and found dollar bills for the man waving down taxis. He punched numbers into a mobile telephone that was bigger than the one that a lady walking by held to her ear. A Ford truck, black as night, pulled up to the space, blocking his view of the defender. Two scratches on its bumper, which looked like arrows to the west but did not warrant a touch-up, and the lean of its suspension towards the driver's side marked that object for Lazoo.*

*His walk to the opposite side of town was normal. He kept his shoulders dropped, his chin, with three days growth, in towards his chest – not as hidden as Michael had taught, but enough so that his face was his and his only. His thoughts were with Genesis only, as he at last found the phrases he needed to confirm all that he had to write, re-write, edit, and present in two days time.*

*The slats on the park bench were not as comfortable as he had hoped, but they would become that way as his body needed them for that day, that night, the next day, and one more night. He imagined himself on both knees and then on one knee, pleading with Mr Clariss. Then he thought of how he would not blow smoke in his direction at breakfast as he begged him to protect him from the police.*

*He acted out the play for which he had given direction and ideas on the grass in front of the bench, his own grandstand. He recited the lines of all the characters, and on the final curtain he bowed to the balcony and prayed that Clariss would kill him before the police found him. He hoped that Clariss would look after Genesis, giving her his ashes and ensuring that no man would touch her. The moon was somewhere else; its light still shone on him as he sat up. If one of those black crabs would find its way up that wall and onto the grass, he would ensure that it would be informed of the dangers of the world it thought it wanted, then he would take it back down to where that water had spat it out, taking it from its natural habitat and giving it ideas it did not need.*

*He found his shadow on the grass and fought with it. He shadowed his own shadow as he hooked it, jabbed it, and eventually tired it out, winning on a points decision. As his heart pounded, he dropped to the ground and demanded a hundred of himself, and on reaching a hundred, he asked nicely for another 40, which he did with minimal effort. As he walked back to the bench he put his hand under his black-hooded top and found small reward in the two top of a set of six.*



*The sun thought it would wake him, but he was up already. He stood looking down at the water, telling the crab to go back, which it did as the sun could not be held back. He smiled as he walked back to the seat, scratching the back of his hand with four days of facial hair. The crab had come to him. "Wow," he thought. He accepted that he did not have it in him to go down to the water's edge, but he was sure its shell would have protected its brain when it reentered the water.*

*"I love you, John." He smiled, not forgetting to say, "I love you, too," but knowing she already knew, for she must have received her phrase when she awoke, as she smiled for the first and last time for that day.*

*He stretched his legs straight and arms skywards, being careful not to miss the scenery. He sat halfway down the park bench with his hooded top off, the sun washing him as he'd planned.*

*"My mother loves you, John."*

*He saw a mother and daughter walk across his view. He tied the black top around his head, rubbed the grass and sleep from his new beard, and took a pair of Ray-Bans from the smiling face of the guy sleeping beneath the bench.*

*Some people looked at his body; some looked as he passed to blame him for the smell. Others just looked, as people do. The stairs to her apartment were blocked by cameras, microphones, and lights brighter than the sun they lived under. The street was officially closed. Plainclothes cops and uniforms made way for mostly navy blue two-piece suits, some with slits, others with flies. White SUVs with numbers on their sides, marked cars with numbers on their roofs, and a black truck leaning towards the heavy side allowed no one near the place.*

*One neatly dressed couple in their late forties were given an avenue from their yellow cab through and in between the bulky SUVs around the white hoods of the cars and to the foot of the steps. The wrought-iron doors, which looked to have opened from heaven, parted and a sole, solemn figure of a woman dressed all in black appeared. She was clearly in pain. Cameras flashed and microphones waved. Tape recorders were thrown forward, their owners losing their grips, the plastic smashing on the ground as they dropped. The two figures in the black truck reacted. The heavier one on the left sat straight as the lighter one on the right loosened all restraints – tie, top button, and eyes.*

*Lazoo stood, one foot firm, the other cocked, ready but just as steady.*

*A reporter's eye, even through the camera's lens, caught a moment. As Genesis's delicate hand with its fine red tips reached out to her mom's older, supple hand with clear-varnished nails, the reporter turned to look at where her magnificent blue eyes were cast. Across the street and down a bit stood a lean, tanned figure, topless, wearing a black turban, sunglasses, black cargo pants, and black Air Jordans. The reporter shouted, "There he is!", the freckles on the scrunched baby face becoming one orange mush. Everyone turned their heads, their bodies ready,*

*Lazoo said. "Hi."*

*Waving to the crowd, the homeless man stinking of no wash made them laugh as they refocused on the door closing behind Genesis and her mom and dad.*

*He was mindful of the slats and how they blocked the sun, so he lay in front of the bench to cover his back fully with the sun's rays. He had heard the name many times on the radio, on TV, at breakfast, and dinner. Even Michael had said "Gene Reyer" on the way to and from a job. The way he couldn't keep his head still was probably a nervous reaction to women, who, deep down, he wanted to love, but he had not yet defined what that word meant in differing settings and emotional states for himself, for his mother, and for just one of*

*the many women who made his mouth salivate. He had lied to himself so completely that he believed that by freeing evil men from punishment he upheld the rules of a system designed for the pursuit of justice, and that this justified his existence on earth and allowed him to hail the same cabs that hard-working and honest folk could not afford, and that by doing these things he too could eat and sleep deep as they did. For Lazoo, this summation was an observation with no result required, an analysis that served to satisfy him. He was about to manipulate a manipulator.*

*"I love you, John."*

*"I love you, Genesis."*

*The moon wasn't visible, but it still did its job. The lights dimmed on him as he took the sleeping bag from the smiling guy sleeping beneath him to cover himself for his last sleep. When he had beaten the sun to New York's dawn, they had come in their multitudes. He stood above them. He identified the one who had gone back, told the colony, and relayed the message to all crustaceans that he'd found the path about which Darwin had written, and they'd followed him. They must have passed the whales and dolphins on their way to a shore near you, and there they were. There were too many of them and the one he had trusted would not tell of their secret, was walking faster than ever. He reminded him one last time that he still crawled, and that at least he could talk and that there were many signs in this world to read and people to listen for. From them he took the courage they had mustered to have scaled that wall, and their unity in doing it as a species. He put it in his heart and felt her hand reach out.*

*His path to the one way out of that hell was predictable. As predefined, he trudged, hands in his pockets and head down from the sorrow, as he looked to cross with the bunch, waiting for the green man to say walk. He passed a line of padded bodies sweating on a charity meal, with no two of their conversations meeting in meaning, but all seeming hopeful and downcast. He saw the Armani jacket standing at the front of the line with a shopping cart. He rummaged like the rest in garbage cans, and from the bottom of the wired safe on wheels he salvaged a pillowcase, the contents of which he had fluffed so that they filled the silk bag like air. He admired her handiwork, as she had stitched the pillowcase together so it would not leak its contents.*

*The homeless man in the Armani jacket asked Lazoo, "How many marbles we got?"*

*"All of them, bro."*

*"Time to capitalize, motherfucker!"*

*The freight elevator started to make him feel sick. Above his own smell was the stench of spilt milk and vomit. The erratic motor and the aging and stretched cables pulled the flying cabin suddenly to halt. Then it stuttered and stalled as it flew its way up and then down the 77 floors. The pillow protected his head from the muck and the steel floor. He had actually fallen asleep twice as the elevator had lain dormant, waiting for its next passenger. His eyes watched the opening doors, looking for a pair of Italian loafers, listening for brashness, couriers reading their consignment notes documenting the place he had to get to, or opening just one eye to see if Mr Reyer would take the back door from his offices as an escape route to the streets.*

*The light at end of the row again lit itself. "Delia speaking. ... Mr Reyer will be back in an hour."*

*The door closed. He sat up and broke a cardboard box down. He slid it under himself as he backed himself into a corner. He hugged the pillow as he put his head down to look asleep and to dream a way into the top floor.*

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*The courier pushed the secretary against the wall. As he pulled the string of his pants loose, she fought to turn around and so he let her. She crouched down fast, her legs wide open, the g-string falling into place between*

*her pink lips. She took his cock by its stem and licked the head, spitting on it and then greasing the pole, already pre-moistened with spillage of his own. She caught his one eye open, but it did not deter her as she continued on him.*

*She closed the door, opening on the floor he needed with one hand, which pressed the button with the arrows pointing inwards, as her other hand beckoned his ass to push deeper. Lazoo looked more asleep as he blocked their smell. The light at the end of the row lit again as she knelt on the dirty iron floor, her mouth bringing him closer. He planned to deliver. The door opened. This time her good hand was on her clit and her bad hand was jerking him off hard. The explosion matched the moment as she closed her eyes. Lazoo moved out into the floor he wanted as she made her tongue a table onto which the cum the courier had shot into her eyes dripped.*

*The long, carpeted corridor led to offices, all of which were open. It ended at the only closed door, which was also the only door with a bronze plate and a name on it. Lazoo stepped purposefully. He ripped open the pillow case, making a tearing sound that wouldn't alarm anyone snoozing in the afternoon sun. Instead, it should have made them aware that a client had turned up requiring services. As he completed the tear, he expected, with his luck, to see a shredded newspaper that even a scholar couldn't read. It was there. Lazoo's clients, long gone, were now going to pay for Gene Reyer's time.*

*"Come in."*

*He let his last knock go, as his nerves wanted him to. He pushed the door away from himself and put his right foot first into the bright cream-and-brown room. The knot of the Charley Stevensen silk necktie was thick but loose, like the rounded edges of the furniture. The mirrors were huge and glistening, and positioned at all angles. The brown leather couch aged as he stepped. The backsides that must have sat there would not allow him to sit there himself. The black man with whom he shook hands in the picture on the western wall spoke loudly and proudly next to the clothes and cloak his comrade modeled. Two and half steps more brought him to the desk. The half a step ended his journey on a half note, not an even number or an odd one, so he stopped for his counsel to take a good look at what he could smell.*

*To the seated lawyer he looked much taller up close and in person. To the standing Lazoo the lawyer looked much cleaner in a room containing just the two of them. Reyer, using his hands in his lap, asked, "So what's up?"*

*Lazoo looked at the pillowcase he was holding and then at a tray of croissants. Reyer looked at the food his client needed and thought of how he should offer a proud man leftovers from his morning meeting. His hand reached for the intercom, then retracted to support his chin as Lazoo began.*

*"Two hundred grand in the pillowcase," was Lazoo's entree. "I want to lay my hat anywhere but behind bars." He held the pillowcase out further from him towards Reyer's right side.*

*Reyer had waited to hear Lazoo's opening. Then he switched the intercom on as he took his fee from Lazoo and pushed it under the desk.*

*The secretary's black skirt, although pulled down, was still crinkled to tell a tale. She poured coffee and looked at both of his open eyes. Reyer thanked her and made the introduction, "Delia, this is John Lazoo," he said. "Only God knows how he got past you, but he is now ours to protect and defend. John, this is Delia. She is one of the fingers on my right hand – the index finger, to be exact. She will point out any errors in our day." He nodded her goodbye and gave all his attention to his new client.*

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*Lazoo unbuckled his belt and pulled it through the belt hoops of the black cargo pants. The belt slid quickly as the trousers, already two sizes too large, dropped to the floor. Fasting and worry had left minimal body fat*

*and little waist to hold them in place without a belt. The sound of the shower running and the warm steam that filled the room reminded him of two times. The smell would soon sweeten from the lavender lather of handmade soap, and in a short while his body would be clean enough to put against Genesis again. His torso became clean around his neck and under his arms, then his legs and cock and balls became all free and clean.*

*He thought of how quick he was to judge people and wondered if he hadn't been so in love with such a beautiful woman if his trust of other men would be so hard to gain. He thought of how Reyer had begun work immediately in the office, shown him hospitality, and offered him a shower in his personal bathroom. Fresh, crisp, clean clothes were on their way from his favorite designers. He had managed to divert all thoughts of the reason why he was there completely and totally, but now he allowed them to take their place as he readied himself to clear his name.*

*He shaved in the demisted mirror and noticed his new clothes hanging on the door. He listened for Genesis and sifted through his own echoes of her and found the one that resonated clearest and the most relevant, which was, "I love you more, John." He thought of ways of repaying her faith and decided his best would do, and believed he would be okay, even though seven mothers mourned the deaths of their sons, something to which he was directly and obviously attached. He felt responsible for their endless grief. He undid the third button for comfort, cleared away all angst against his counsel, and cleaned his memory till only Janine and Genesis featured, figured, and flowered. In his conscience he flattened all doubt.*

*"Hariss Clariss?" Reyer began. Lazoo told him what he knew. "Jimmy Afra?" Lazoo said what he felt. "Michael Haze?" Lazoo dealt what he wanted. "Genesis Jones?" Lazoo paused and questioned him about the relevance of his question, then decided to tell the truth without rhythm or rhyme. With Reyer looking deep into him, he knew he must keep still and still nail his truth.*

*The intercom flashed and then beeped. "I have Mr Shack on line seven, Mr Reyer." Gene pushed the call to him, picking up the handset afterward.*

*"Jack here," the cool drool through the speaker phone sent things up Lazoo's spine. The shivers were the least to worry him, after the electricity he imagined and the fear he felt. "You have young Lazoo, I gather, Gene?" The thin sound still sent waves.*

*"Lazoo emailed me from Canada." Holding his hand over the phone, Reyer reassured Lazoo that this was the way by lowering his brow two times*

*A bellowing laugh brought brief relief for Lazoo, looking for anything in the hope that the city might say, "Go home and don't you ever come back, y'hear?"*

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*Arraignment was quick, not flashy. Shack stayed back for effect. In his shoes ran a young mind too eager and too angry, whom Reyer dismissed after he harassed him, and in the end it amounted to a simple, "Not guilty, Your Honor!"*

*The judge waved away the people's motion to deny bail due to the risk that he might take flight with a, "Goodbye, counsel."*

*Then the flashes and the lights were looking up at him. All in black, he filled the screen, his body lean and teeth cleaned. The mothers hated him. He stood with one foot on the top step and the other on the next one down.*

*"Now's not the time to pose."*

*A reporter caught the whisper and all the cameras captured Reyer's hand over the mouth trick. "He's innocent, naïve, and you can also add the word crass!" Reyer said as he buckled his bag, counting the seconds and then bracing his back.*

*Lazoo left in a cab as Reyer climbed into the black SUV. Lazoo headed for his white room, with Reyer on his tail.*

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*Watching himself on TV, Lazoo felt that he had ensured that no other combination than the one Reyer had mentioned would appear more appetizing. "Seven mothers mourn and they shall for a while longer," he'd said on the steps. "A city is torn that grown men born twenty years apart aren't safe in their apartments at night. Let me through. I have my name to clear, and only then will the police be further able to identify who amongst you that watch me speak my innocence belongs on these steps at this time."*

*As he looked smiling into the cameras, choosing a different channel to punctuate his statement, he broke a national tradition. He was too ugly too watch. America had not seen anyone in Lazoo's situation break counsel's advice to remain silent with such arrogance and coldness and get away with it. His message to the grieving mothers shocked every woman who heard it. His slighting of New York's finest stunned every uniform in the Big Apple. The reaction from the streets was shock. The spin doctors on high could not manage the disgust through the zillion strands of fiber optic cable that reached all parts of the planet. People voted with their remote controls, and the news channels took him off air for 48 hours.*

*Reyer sat at his desk till three in the morning. He watched the back of the most hated man alive asleep on his leather couch. "You can stare, but the glare of my innocence will blind your mind. Don't stare, counsel – just do. Go for the kill. Kill the mothers. A mistrial on your résumé is a must. All wins make Gene look thin." The voice was real in Reyer's head, yet Lazoo lay five yards away.*

*Lazoo woke in his bed. The sun was the same and the telephone still had no sound.*

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*Lazoo closed the door of the Hilton limousine, pushing it into the body of the car, the hatch accepting the last shove as he looked in all directions. The black Ford SUV with the heavy lean, an issued Cadillac, and Jimmy's afro made the hatchback Michael drove inconspicuous to no one. The other cars lined the street on their own. A driver was looking to vacate their parking space.*

*"You look tired," Lazoo said.*

*"I had a dream that you were so ugly the networks took us off air for 48 hours." Reyer watched his favorite waitress blush as Lazoo ordered. He wanted to stay in his current state, believing he would project an image for Lazoo to mirror. He concentrated on this as the arms of Lazoo's cream suit lit a cigarette. "Don't worry about Stevensen Tait. He works for me."*

*The figure loomed and then continued to zoom in till it towered over the sidewalk table, which was just big enough for two breakfasts, coffees, and glasses of juice and water. Lazoo looked up as a tall, wide-shouldered man sank comfortably into the canvas chair and unfolded his arms to shake his hand.*

*"Lazoo, this is Stevensen Tait, AKA the Shadow. He's an investigator who follows and finds things, people, and whatever evidence we require to make a case."*

*Lazoo sat up. "Nice to meet you, Steve."*

*The name with which he addressed the big man made Tait want to stop shaking hands immediately. Reyer and Tait talked to each other quickly. Lazoo picked out the name "Zarrah Keller," the superlative "the best," and the acronym "FBI." The rest he washed with liquids and blew out with the smoke.*

*The Cadillac stood out. It was a specially stripped-down model, with all its trappings under its hood and an antenna without a radio. Arley Evon's dark hair was pulled back and her brain was in gear. Zarrah Keller took notes inside the car. Across the way in the Swank Swank New York Restaurant Genesis was at brunch with Clariss. Lazoo caught this from the cab out of which he peered as it pulled up on the other side of the jammed, busy, bustling intersection that lay in front of them.*

*Lazoo waited with them and walked with them across the intersection. He stuck close to the old lady, who relied on her walking stick till she found the other side.*

*Zarrah spoke into a plastic, battery-charged Dictaphone as he walked by and glanced once over and into the window of the exclusive dining spot. "John Lazoo stands at five foot eleven inches. ... Black hair makes him look Hispanic. ... His blonde hair makes him look European. A shaved head or close-cropped do makes John Lazoo look like James Elton. ... When he laughs he is happy. He smiles when he finds something that he should give back to its owner. ... He frowns when he is puzzled. ... Lazoo listens like a lie detector and watches like an x-ray machine to bridge the gap his illiteracy places between him and his fine, cultured, and high-society clientele. ... His eyes plus his memory are a security camera that never stops, editing out the innocent everyday events and archiving the drama only, framing an acute but askew angle of all things normal." She had run John James Lazoo and James Elton through every FBI, CIA, FTA, and IRS database, and then her own.*

*Arley Evon wanted Genesis to look up at her, but Genesis looked for the next taxi home. What are the chances I'll hail the taxi driven by a guy called James, she thought. No such luck, Genesis, she told her feathered heart, as she still would not look up and away. The profile of her contrasting, conflicting, and even more astounding life had not changed, but her surroundings were most definitely different to what she had aimed for. Zarrah looked up and away. She felt cold and raised her window, then turned the engine over and got the right of way to follow the cab.*

*The afternoon meeting with Reyer, to which his defense was late, had to finish cordially. Moreover, it had to make him, the client, feel satisfied that progress would be made, and that progress would be a succession of honesty and vision leading to the one outcome he was paying for. Lazoo smiled at Delia as she placed a silver tray on the oak desk in front of him.*

*"Mr Reyer is late," she told him. "He called to say he'll be fifteen minutes."*

*"That's okay, Delia," he smoothed to her. "Not a problem. I don't mind waiting." He noticed a ring on her left hand as she centered the contents of the tray.*

*The door opened quickly and shut as it had been flung open. Reyer walked past Lazoo, hooked his jacket, placed his briefcase on the table, and opened it, blocking his client's view of him.*

*Lazoo looked at the silver tray as Reyer closed the case. "You know who is paying for your fucking time, ah, Gene?" The normally slick attorney waited. Lazoo reaffirmed, "Gene, you fuck! You know when time belongs to us, we have the fucking right to take it back, don't you?" All in one breath, all evenly spread, and all meant to be said. Reyer tried to look surprised, Lazoo continued, "Come on counsel, being slapped up is for your own good. In this room there's you and us – no judge. Or, should I say like in the late-late-night TV programs, we are the fucking judge; we are the fucking jury, and if your grey head doesn't bow we'll dismiss your fucking late ass the next time this happens."*

*He heard them coming, both of them. Delia smiled.*

*"You have nice day Delia." The elevators opened together. He chose the one with carpet.*

*"You too, Mr Lazoo."*

*He stepped into the elevator, turned, and pressed the second button from the bottom in the left line of plastic round indentations. His feeling was good, although he did not yet know the outcome of their meeting as the doors opened and he stepped out onto the ground floor.*

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*The dashboard, leather and grey metallic-coated plastic, resembled the console of a police switchboard or a mission-control navigation portal. Tait watched his boss's mouth articulate words into the receiver. The information coming back into the car registered and showed its dynamics across a set of lights that rose with emotion and flat-lined when the voice deadpanned.*

*"You're absolutely right Gene," said Lazoo's recorded voice. "I said breakfast, but didn't you just hear what I just said, just now? I have now said to you, and for the fucking second time, it is going to be after-fucking-noon tea. Oh, by the way – tell Steve not to be such a nosey fucker. Okay, Gene?" The lights lined themselves at zero for a second, then the recording continued, "Oh one more thing, Gene. Bring your fucking ears at three, Cafe Concoct – three – you hear?"*

*Shack wanted the language and arrogance to be the make-up of Lazoo's personality. The coffee cups and pizza boxes that littered the table closed one by one as the day wore on. Zarrah sat still and watched their boss put words into their mouths. Hers remained closed as they rewound the tape and read the manuscripts projected on the screen. A voice expert and speech therapist moved punctuations; their own speech was muffled till they swallowed their slices.*

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*Zarrah sat comfortably. Lazoo was looking at her, and as one would. After ten minutes she smiled back. He waited to cross the road, his hand touching the hood of the Cadillac. He mentioned his apology as he stepped out when the traffic had come to a stop.*

*The waitress smiled as she replied with the time from her wrist watch. "Just about two-thirty. Would you like anything while you wait?"*

*He looked at the Cadillac and then at the table and answered, "Yeah, a beer. Yeah, a beer." As she walked away, he repeated to himself, "Yeah, a beer. That'll make me laugh. Yeah, a beer."*

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*"So you were in the café downstairs from the time of the first one till the last one?" Reyer asked.*

*Lazoo drank his beer. "I'll correct you when required."*

*"You were seen leaving the building at seven-oh-five," Reyer reminded him.*

*After a couple more, Lazoo joined the conversation. "That's exactly it. If the last murder went down at seven, how could the murderer sever a tongue from Mr Seven, who, I might add, was the one with no tongue, clean up, and leave within five minutes."*

*Reyer rushed his logic. "But Mr Seven's tongue supposedly wasn't recovered, giving a so-called passionate serial killer ample time to leave with it in his pocket, and the guy who owns the joint said that you came and went all morning."*

*"As you do when you deal drugs," Lazoo countered, proud of his alibi.*

*"How come you weren't seen on the security cameras?" Reyer continued.*

*"I practically live in that café. I know where the things are pointed. Do you think a drug dealer knowing where the exhibit bag is would jump into it?"*

*"What do you think about the murders?" Reyer asked, the afternoon sun directly in his hazel-green eyes.*

*"Seven liars in some psycho's eyes," Lazoo retorted.*

*"Why kill in the name of a number?"*

*"Cold blood, under controlled psychosis," Lazoo blew out as he exhaled cigarette smoke.*

*"Cold blood, under controlled psychosis?" Reyer's inflection ending on a soprano note.*

*"The controller of the psychosis fucked up," Lazoo started, then paused to drag on his cigarette.*

*"Go on," Reyer said encouragingly.*

*"A passionate serial would've foreseen the swollen sixth tongue. This guy was definitely calm. He completed the job as if there was money for killing seven guys. A passionate serial would've left on the sixth. Hacking the guy's head open doesn't fit the frame that hangs around a passionate serial's head, that frame being that all seven liars had to die exactly the same, bar one – the one who had the power to end all the lying. He lost his tongue for life, or it will be found elsewhere. Don't ask me where."*

*Lazoo thought about the facts he had received over the course of the afternoon and evening. He thought about what Jimmy, Michael, Shugit, and Simon had said about him and his whereabouts, and what Clariss had not divulged about the early hours of July 7. He amazed himself at the impossible time in which he was meant to have committed the murders and then make them macabre, all on his own. He wanted to laugh, then he needed to cry, then he stayed clear of anything that could make him angry.*

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## PART 2

*In the mirror Lazoo wondered. Steve Tait, Stevensen Tait, ex-cop, lurked in the frame, and he promised it would not anger him when he lost the view of himself, and that he would correct it in the only way he saw fit.*

*Lazoo walked Broadway. He let its marquee lights illuminate the dark path tonight. He emerged empty from the stairs of one dungeon as he sought to form a profile of the figure that loomed large, and to which all those who mattered brought, sold, and pushed information through – Steve Tait to Gene Reyer, his lawyer, and Stevensen Tait to Hariss Clariss, his boss and former colleague of Assistant District Attorney Shack, who had vowed he would wipe Lazoo from the streets he walked.*

*The two doormen dressed in black Armani and wearing sunglasses matched Lazoo's demeanor, which was black, quiet, and with a low tolerance of smiling strollers who moved along the street at ground level. Lazoo looked down at his boots as one of the men held out a bony hand for money, revealing a tattoo in characters. Lazoo paid the hand to hide the tattoo and close the doors of the dragon-red dungeon for the evening.*

*The first doorman shouted in a foreign language, ordering more of his kind to line the hallway. Lazoo walked through. Twelve of them stood with their backs to the wall, suited in black and eyes shaded like Lazoo, except for the burgundy snakeskin cowboy boots at which Lazoo looked down as he took his place at the farthest end of the red-lighted hallway. An open room in front of where Lazoo stood showed the Bauhaus caged in the hunger on a wall screen. The music was louder than the visual inside his head, so he saw only the carnivorous teeth of the monkey behind the bars. The red light at the other end of the hallway swayed, warning of the imminent appearance of the guest awaited by John Lazoo and twelve willing participants.*



*The door opened. Lazoo looked at where he knew the guest's head would have to avoid the hanging light. Then his eyes came down to see a girl who was about the same age he'd been the last time he'd seen his mother. The baby led the guest into the first door on the left, but before he went through the door he stopped to look down the line along their chests, then along their faces covered in black plastic which reflected his own arrogance in the red of the hallway. The little girl glued her eyes to Lazoo's boots, which broke regularity and tradition. The guest did not notice. The young girl, jolted forward by the guest, looked away as they entered the room, an old lady in tow.*

*The yell from behind the door traveled to Lazoo, drawing little reaction from him but stimulating action in his walk. The soldiers filed in behind as he made his way to the other end of his being. The door opened, the cold air but a draft to the body face-down on the heightened bed; in the corner was a crying girl. Lazoo motioned to the crying girl, signaling that the exit was open to her. The old lady refused the opening and stood in the corner for her view of justice. Lazoo stood at the head, protecting it so it would remember his boots, which were the last things the guest saw as twelve bats battered his body till they had tendered all possibility of him ever returning to that dungeon. Lazoo ordered that the guest's nails be removed from his hands and feet shortly after he woke up, and then that all of it be fed to the guest before he was released. He also left a number belonging to the guest's lawyer for them to call once the guest was completely dealt with. He then paid extra for the room to be stripped and repainted.*

*He frowned deep down in his soul as he removed the bloody clothing. Then he felt relief as he deposited the plastic bag with the clothing down the chute. He calmed as the shower heads tempered his body, the hot and cold, ice to heat, and steam from water together a treat, together helping him to delete the emotions relating to a physical act that would make someone believe that he would not retreat. Lazoo slipped into bed and immediately fell into some deep sleep; some of it was black, but all the same it was sleep.*

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*The client sat still as his lawyer thought about standing and leaving him to fend for himself. The Cadillac across the street had a radio, complete with coffee stand, steam, and donuts. Reyer toyed with the knot of his tie and then loosened it. The waitress sensed the tension and left.*

*"Come back here," Lazoo called to her. "I'll order for us if Gene is too emotional to tell us what he wants." Silence prevailed till their coffee arrived. Lazoo pointed at the two occupants of the car across the way. "Steve not here?"*

*Reyer's face reddened, and when the waitress appeared with food, he felt as if he had his back up and said, "Steve is a good man! He has three lovely girls who have no mother ..."*

*"And?" Lazoo felt obliged to join in and encourage communication.*

*Reyer sneered, disgusted but too gutless to say what he wanted. "Steve's taking some time off to be with his daughters." He breathed out in one breath as the cigarette in Lazoo's mouth caught light and burned.*

*The previous day's meeting finished with little result. Lazoo enjoyed the wretched emotional upheaval into which he had placed the much-feared Gene Reyer, but now his personal agendas had to be put to the back of the one mind that he and his legal advisor had to create and share for the sake of devising a foolproof plan to counter the DA, feed the press, place doubt in the minds of jurors, and please the judge.*

*A small gallery on Fifth Avenue with wooden floors felt like the ideal location to create trust. A gift of great monetary value giving the new owner instant status as an art collector would be a perfect way to speed up a relationship which by then should have been blissful and whole. Reyer thought about an early morning message from the porter as he entered the creative space. Lazoo stood in the middle with his hands behind his back, looking at Reyer's favorite painting.*

Clap. Clap. Lazoo's hands fell again out of sight, then his lips moved. Reyer focused his senses as his voice became audible. "Hear that, Gene? The wall has bounced the sound, Gene. Your words must reach the ears of jurors, as the clap-clap-clap sound my hands make find your ears. The wooden floors and minimal furnishings make little work for sound, and its message, to reach its target."

*Reyer felt the movement as Lazoo clapped again.*

*"The things that may absorb the voice of us, Gene. Truths you don't believe, twists that you mistakenly turn, and inflection for the sake of color and not depth."*

*Reyer put up his arms to the painting as he imagined the space it would take on the featured wall of his apartment as he heard Lazoo's voice in the background making the purchase. Reyer's eyes looked bemused in the reflection of the glass box that housed flowers from a French countryside. "The three vases and the painting my friend loves through the encasing. Mr Clariss's account, yeah."*

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#### *PART ROXANNE ROXANNE*

see Illicit Blade of Grass (Rozelle Zofen), Jon Le Mac (the Space Cadet)

*Lazoo looked around the bar. People were everywhere; Reyer was on his right. Finally Lazoo said, "Here she comes."*

*Down the stairs ...*

**CHAPTER 10****PART 1**

The long mahogany table had fourteen places, two at each end and six seats on either side. Lazoo noted white paper stacked neatly with his name aligned in the center in place of plates as he carefully pulled out the chair at the foot of the table at the same time Reyer pulled his out at the head and said, "Twelve jurors will decide your fate, John. Twelve people will know or doubt that you are guilty as charged, John!"

"Can we make them believe that you are, oh, I mean that I am innocent?" Lazoo asked him hurriedly.

"I doubt that John. Hell, you don't even have an alibi, my friend," Reyer reminded Lazoo of reality. "This one from Queens, John, has a self-imposed role of upholding justice, and can't be got to. No family, no relationships – she has missed two days of work in the last fifty years. Being black or white in this case means little."

Lazoo allowed no fear to fall on his mind as he saw the faces of twelve people he did not care to know but who knew him. "Why does color mean nothing to us, Gene?"

Reyer rose from his seat. "Because the killer was random in his selection of his victims, John. The only factor that is common, the only thing that made those seven men corpses of the same slayer, John, is location – Sil House!"

"But you know I'm innocent, don't you?"

*Reyer overrode this with, "If we go down that track, John, we will lose. We must concentrate on the obvious flaws in the story, which I would like to remind you, my client, you have not disputed with your own recollection, or at least with your whereabouts on the night in question. I reiterate to you, it is the idea that one person could have committed these murders on his own. It's the simplest way, John!"*

*Lazoo, still seated, reached for water.*

*"This juror, John, hates you. This juror will like you eventually, and this one here will most likely be the foreman." Reyer paced the room. When he reached the head of the table again he pressed a button on the intercom and said, "Lunch please, Delia."*

*Lazoo, recognizing the break, stood and slowly did a lap of the piles of paper, reciting to the lawyer, who was seated and deep in thought, "This one will feel sorry for me; this one will try and disrupt the process; this one will go with the majority; same with this one, and this one has a mother in a sanitarium, right?"*

*Delia pushed a serving cart through the door and up to the opposite side of the table. They ate lunch at the smaller round table by the window. Lazoo kept looking at the long table with its piles of paper as he swallowed. "I see Tait's back from vacation," he said as he mixed his salad with the sauces.*

*Reyer tried not to look annoyed. "Yes, he is, John. He's a tough guy, is Stevensen Tait."*

*Lazoo munched on, still seeing the long table out the corner of his eye.*

---

*Genesis gathered her bags together. They swung neatly into place in front of her on the edge of the street where she waited. The white Jaguar pulled in, and out hopped a chauffeur in a white uniform. He opened her door and then closed it behind her after she'd entered. He gathered the shopping bags and placed them quietly in the trunk. She tapped the steering wheel with a pen and thought of her shoes and her hair, which*

*now pulled away from her in the back of the chauffeur-driven car.*

*The cameras were all over the sidewalk as the Jag's door opened, but they could only get the tops of her sunglasses. Her eyes behind the shades, she waited for the chauffeur to burrow a way through the crowd of cameras, microphones, and stationed lighting in her path, her shopping bags in his left hand and his right arm fending off the media and paving a way to the bottom of the steps.*

*Genesis noticed Zarrah's identification and grabbed a wrist holding the FBI credentials as she surged forward, her knees coming to touch the shopping bags. Zarrah felt the yanking of her arm and the rest of her body followed. A towering lamp with four zillion watts crashed to their left. Its metal casing bounced off the pavement as sparks flew from the exploding bulbs, hitting Genesis's bare legs and the spaces between the silver straps of her high heels. She saw Genesis's wrist covered with real jewels and dropped her pad in the hand of the strong woman, but she kept her hold on the FBI identification in her other hand.*

*Their questions were all the same as Zarrah's head connected with the sharp, square edge of a camera. "Are you an accessory, Genesis? Are you a madam, Genesis?"*

*Lazoo watched Genesis drag Zarrah up the stairs and through the closing wrought iron doors. The cameras had caught his woman doing what only she could do for him. Lazoo switched off the TV, using the biggest red button on the remote control. Reyer came back through the door and back to the head of the table. "Tomorrow we should have the full amount of the evidence against you stacked sky-high, John!" he told him.*

*Lazoo saw Reyer closest to the black screen. He saw the lawyer larger than he was the farthest from the dark TV screen, seated at the foot of the table. He pushed the red button again, and there again was Genesis rushing the cameras with Zarrah in tow, causing lighting to crash and smash. Gene watched Lazoo's face live and at first hand as the questions flew from the TV speaker, "... you an accessory or Madame, Genesis?"*

*Lazoo lit a cigarette.*

---

*The white washcloth across Zarrah's left eyebrow was getting cold fast. In a short while it would be freezing. "Yes," she said, "that would be nice, thank you, Genesis." She handed the rectangular, folded piece up to her.*

*Genesis walked away to the bathroom. Zarrah loved the painting in which two people were laughing loud. When Genesis returned she commented on it, and Genesis said, "They're crying. They know they can never be together, Zarrah."*

*Zarrah took the steaming cloth and put it to her head.*

---

*Lazoo walked through the park head down, remembering the faces of the 12 people his lawyer would have to convince otherwise. Reyer would have to deliver arguments and tempt their natural tendencies and sub-layered selves, already formed, active, informed by the media, and advised by Assistant DA Shack's staff, with subtle payoffs. His defense would be conscious of giving the jurors a reason to listen to them, making them put down their pens and be unconscious as Mr Reyer made them aware of a new story. Of the 12, two should go, he thought.*

*The music was not what they wanted, but it kindly filled the spaces where they paused and thought of the next matter that linked the last matter to the one they were currently addressing. They treated coffee as a beverage one enjoys to heighten spirits while the legs and body take a load off. They raised the cups and sipped small amounts till thoughts became complete ideas that could be dialogued into one question, or one answer if the ensuing response called for a reply, confirmation, or explanation.*

---

*"How did I get here?" Genesis repeated. Dinner was simple and fat free. Genesis thought of it as it was written and then simplified, making it easy for Zarah to digest. "I was tricked into coming here, Zarah."*

*Zarah drank from the water glass and then the wine glass. "What would absorb such an alert mind to entice you here and then trap you while a cunning plan could be hatched, may I ask?"*

*Genesis, never doubting, replied, "John."*

*Zarah, her body agreeing, with her, said, "This is good, Genesis," pointing down at the food.*

---

*The room remained untouched overnight. He noticed the cigarette smell as he got to the window, just as Delia entered with coffee to freshen the place. Reyer was eleven minutes late and blamed it on Stevensen dropping his girls off at their school. Lazoo was undeterred. His young mind had raced all night; his mouth was eager to explain a subplot to his lawyer. He saw it as an important part of the strategy he could document, or that the stenographer could record from among the words spoken over a period of time, words that vocalized the verdict way before the judge asked the jury foreman for one. Reyer sat at the head of the table as Lazoo stood blowing smoke out the window, into the air above the pedestrians and shoppers and the working people below, people in places they awoke that morning to go.*

*"We're going to contest two, John," Reyer took his words from him. "You know why, John?"*

*Lazoo looked at where the smoke went and shook his head.*

---

*Shack looked at the names at the top of the memo of intent, then looked at his map on the wall. The heads containing the young, eager minds, and those of the veterans whom Shack had hurdled, run over, and stepped on, followed to where he pointed with his baton. The floating screen, with its projection of the list of jurors, became small till the mouse maximized it again.*

*"They're contesting the two passive ones. Any ideas why the defense is picking these two?" He pointed at the white one with product in his hair and said, "Yeah, you."*

*Shack looked like his head and shoulders were part of the ceiling to the young graduate, "These two jurors may vote either way?"*

*Shack turned to the front, crossing the line of the beam from the projector mounted in the middle of the long black table. As he turned to the audience the bright light shadowed and then highlighted the deep crevasses of his starched white shirt, the text wavering on his back. "Very good, young man," he replied somewhat patronizingly. "Any others?" The white one with the black suit raised a finger. "Yes?"*

*"Because they don't care, Mr Shack?"*

*"Very good. What's your name?" Shack looked for answers from normal minds to reinforce his theory of why only two were to be omitted, and those two omissions requested were of the same nature and from the same backgrounds.*

*"Yeah, that's where he wants us," the one with gel his hair said to the young father with his daughter's milk on his suit, "the head nigger said in his chambers."*

*"You mean the black bastard's office, don't you, young man?"*

*Shack had the silverware in front of him. The young men did not notice the orange glow from the brown malt in the decanter. The brilliant-haired one poured drinks for all of them.*

*An assistant with his suit jacket hanging from the back of his chair offered, "So they're fighting, one, on the grounds that he's illiterate, and, two, because she's poor and reliant on welfare to feed her illegitimate child, both black, Mr Shack,"*

*Shack swirled his whiskey. "I forgot to ask if either one of you gentlemen wanted ice?"*

---

*"One more time, my friend. One more time, and on what grounds? I offer none." Delia unloaded lunch onto the table as Reyer made a polygon of his fingers.*

*Lazoo drummed in, driving home his point, "One more time, Gene, and bet you we end up where he has to put back his original configuration! He has no other idea. Trust me, Gene," Lazoo pleaded. "Trust me on this, for this is the input in the place of an alibi, in the way remorse should be felt, Gene!"*

---

*The bookstore shelves crammed Genisis and Zarrah together. They found Freud and giggled about the little man. "Big brain – the only big thing on him, huh?" Genisis laughed and passed her charm to Zarrah.*

*With a book each they vacated the premises and moved to the cafe next door.*

*"Zarrah, where would you rather stay – a place where the elevator creeps, or at my place? Huh, Zarrah?"*

*Her dark hair swung about the tops of her plate. "Yes, I could stay at your place. It smells better than Jack's meeting room, with its smelly boys," she mused.*

*The agent investigated her food as Genisis plowed through hers and loaded her fork. The waiter served them wine while Genisis asked the world out loud, "Why do they put their hands on their asses when they serve wine?"*

*The waiter smiled. Zarrah laughed.*

*They discussed the body of the cushions they each hugged. Zarrah knew from her arm hugging the square, floral, clean and matching fluffy object closer to her that the words were for no reason, but her heart held and her mouth pronounced her feelings when an ear with empathy cared to listen.*

*"Is he trapped like you, Genisis, or is he addicted?"*

*Genisis lifted her wine to the light. "John always told me that if the edges of the wine hung to the places you swirled it, it meant its body had filled out and that its arms clutched the glass in the hope they would climb to the lip, ready to please the drinker's taste."*

*Zarrah swirled her glass to the light and looked back at Genisis, now serene and at ease. She saw her hear something, "I love you babe." Genisis smiled and tasted more of the merlot.*

---

*Lazoo ate alone late at night in the bright cafe, the burger and fries being what he needed, as thoughts of the outcome Reyer sought came and went as he chewed and swallowed. Reyer eased into the bath with the mocha hand on his shoulder, the girl bold in the cold air above the bubbles of the sunken haven, her nipples erect to perfection as her shaven parts sank below the water level.*

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## PART 2

*"We got it!"*

*Lazoo smiled at Reyer's delight. "Yeah?"*

*Reyer walked to other end of the room. "Yeah. Both white, both disillusioned, and both sick and tired of rap music, John." Lazoo folded his arms. "Neither one," Reyer went on, "will be first to commit and hold fast a truth of guilty or not guilty, but will speak consistently of how the government has failed America and how Hispanics, without offence intended, work for cents and not dollars." Reyer put his hands on his hips and thought of his chances against his most challenging and daunting opponent in the law, Jack Shack. "Why are they passive, John?" He shoved it out there. "Why?" Lazoo remembered to keep his shoulders down. "Hell, John – I was just happy they were white."*

*Lazoo nodded his head with his shoulders rounded, even when he lifted one arm to puff on his smoke. "Yeah, I was happy too, when I found out they were white."*

*Delia pointed to the corner as the place where the boxes should be moved so she could set the table for lunch. Lazoo moved 23 of them and stacked them in two stacks of eight and one of seven, then looked at the food and said, "Thank goodness I ran today, Gene."*

*Reyer rubbed his stomach. "Thank God I can swim."*

*Lazoo looked at him and rubbed his own stomach. "Wouldn't want to go swimming in the Hudson after this, would you, Gene?"*

*Reyer grabbed two plates and offered Lazoo one. "Why wouldn't I go swimming in the Hudson after lunch, John?"*

*Lazoo loaded salad onto his plate. "The food would get dirty every time you opened your mouth to breathe, Gene."*

*Lunch was quiet, apart from Lazoo chewing and Reyer muttering to himself. Delia cleared the plates as Reyer marked each box with either an X, an O, or a Y. "The large X at the bottom of the stack, John, goes all the way up to the smallest X, and same with the Os and Ys. Lazoo eventually took the marker from him and drew an O, a Y, and some little Ys on the boxes he re-arranged."*

*"That's a letter Y, John."*

*Lazoo nodded. "As in why something is something?"*

*Reyer stretched his neck and found another picture of himself with Shack. "Could be, John – could be why one X is effeminate in quality and muscular in its advantages over an xx on its own, simple and pure."*

*Lazoo, seated at the foot of the table, smiled, proud that the boxes were stacked in a visually pleasing and systematically correct way, with the letters diminishing in size as they reached the top.*

*Reyer sat with his hands in his lap. Then he put his palms down on the table in front of him. "Now, if and when the jury fails us John, you will do time on death row while I file a appeal to the First Appellate Division for this county, based on numerous instances of perjury."*

*Lazoo shivered; he could never control the tingling up his spine.*

*"Yes, John – they will fail us. By the time we go to trial, Jack Shack will have gotten rid of three to four jurors, and let's not forget the media. Let's not forget human greed. Yes, they are here to deliver a verdict in a case all about you and seven dead men and their families, but they will believe it is all about them for less than fifteen minutes, John. By the time they go to deliberate, thirty percent of the configuration will have changed again, but Jack's line and the way he delivers it will have found its place in the minds of the thirty percent,*

*which I term the core. That is the black foreman, the black lady from the church, the white guy who paints by numbers, and the young white woman who wants to travel."*

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*Shack turned on the lights. Some of them squinted. The two who used to sit in the back supported him on either side at the head of the table. Zarrah, her mouth still shut, thought of the videos and how Lazoo had entertained her and Genisis for two days.*

*"They have settled on a configuration," Shack said, "which I know will change by the time we go to show. Stevensen Tait will shadow the weak ones and give the media bait that their mikes will catch."*

*Their hands were already in the air.*

*"Wait – I haven't finished. Their lack of evidence means that they already believe ours to be circumstantial and are still focused on discrediting the only witnesses we call. Real simple and real clear. How do we close this case before we go on stage? Team!"*

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*"Your father must've slurped his coffee too, huh, Lazoo?"*

*Lazoo stopped midway through sucking the coffee to the top of the cup, articulating the air beneath his top lip. "He could've. Hell, he could've killed seven dumb bastards of all fucking different kinds. He could have, Gene, but now I slurp the coffee. What's your point?"*

*Reyer tipped his cup and lifted his head. His eyes, wanting to laugh, never left Lazoo, who now wanted to be laughed at. "No point at, all. Just after weeks of listening to you slurping I thought it was time to settle my discomfort out loud." He put his own cup down and reached for the day's list, which Delia had neatly typed. "Judges, John, are not affected by the case." Lazoo nodded.*

*"This is like any other case, but they are affected by the media, as we saw with Judge Ito. And there's one more thing – their instructions are the same as always, by the book. However, it's when a good lawyer – a defender, or in Jack's case the best prosecutor I've witnessed – it's when we force him to instruct the jurors, or when we can avoid his intervention. His voice is golden, John. He will speak maybe five to seven percent of the entire time, if that, but when he decides to add that exclamation mark to a passage of play that your average, law-abiding citizen listens to him. Why? Because when he says shut up, Jack, or shut up, Gene – we do." Lazoo still nodded.*

*"There's a chance that the sitting judge in that court room may be taken ill – nothing serious – just something that may take their mind off the case for a month, meaning we will be down to these two." Reyner showed Lazoo two head-and-shoulder shots of two highly educated, well-read, and much-respected heads. One of them would ultimately accentuate his misfortune and inform twelve people of their duty to uphold the law and decide an outcome based on their judgment of the weight of the evidence, and if Reyner had cast enough doubt on the evidence the prosecution has presented. Or the one with glasses looked more likely to hurl one of the heavy, word-laden books of the law at his head.*

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*The ball flew. Did it dip? Did it rise? It found Reyner's open mitt with a thud. "Lazoo, that's an arm!" Reyner tossed the ball back. It looped in a lob as Lazoo flattened his glove to appreciate the return from his lawyer. "No," Reyner said, "I don't use money, John. I call favors. It's a pity, but I woke up one morning and realized that I fight on this side of the ledger because the law itself now only has one law it obeys, and that's money!"*

*Lazoo saw the red hair in the distance and imagined the mash the ball would make, how the freckles would become one red, and then blue, and then black mush. "Do people get hurt in your favors, Gene?"*



*Reyer threw the ball into his own glove, three, four, five times, then looked at where Lazoo was aiming his stare. "I hope not. They know not to get hurt, John. There's a select sort who have a sense to uphold the law at all costs, even if that cost is their standing. Notoriety, gifts, bigger cases – all byproducts. The law as it is written today will change. A precedent set by some Appellate Court judge who was promised his seat 15 years before he was sworn in by his father's golfing partner will again be written. Why? Because it could be changed in the first place! John, the law was not meant to be flexible. It was meant to be rigid. We, the servants of the law, were meant to find ways to improve society by arguing it, and we look to maintain it. We are not God, but we have become that. My mission is to use the law as it stands, in its purest form, and break those who confront me with their laws."*

*Lazoo sorted the sandwiches and handed Reyer his with a bottle of juice, saying "Here," as he handed it up to the now solemn and distinguished figure who sat on the slats. Lazoo sat with his legs crossed in front of him facing Reyer answering whatever questions he asked with short, sharp replies without effects.*

*"Susan Bramley of apartment 702?"*

*"Funny thing, Gene. She actually did do it as a favor for her friend."*

*"I know, John. That's why we don't call her on our list, but I will make a point of making a recall through cross examination during the prosecution's case."*

*"Jimmy, Michael, Simon, and fuckwit – they all have their lines, Gene. You know that."*

*Reyer was silent and then felt freedom. "Yeah. Oh, well – shit happens."*

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*The sofa with golden feet was not as easy to sit on as it was to gaze at for time unaccounted. Genesis's business suit still could not belie her sexuality. Reyer accepted the coffee and she sat next to him, angling her knees so they made space for her and he moved a bit to the left.*

*"So, how can I help you, Mr Reyer?" He looked all around, using his neck as the arm that pushed his head left and right, northeast and southwest. "Let's not insult our intelligence, or waste your education and my experience," she said. "What are you doing here?" Genesis drank some coffee and decided the room was too Clariss. "You like this place, Gene?" Reyer suggested he wasn't comfortable with his one-sided shrug. "John built this for Clariss. Now I run it for Clariss."*

*Reyer watched her body as it moved to the far corner, where her hand reached for a door that he had not previously noticed. She opened it and light threw an obscure rectangle on the dark carpet. She entered the doorway. He stood and walked to where the light beckoned him step. The grey office had an immediate effect on the lawyer seated in front of the desk. Genesis sat back and unbuttoned her suit jacket. Reyer saw the scenery on the wall, and then was absorbed by the picture of the staff on the opposite wall.*

*"Who do you not see in that picture, Gene?"*

*Reyer made the remaining coffee wave to one side of the cup and then swirl clockwise and counterclockwise. He looked above her bust and to her forehead. "He's there, though, isn't he?" He continued to stare at her head.*

*Genesis closed the meeting with, "Is there anything else that you came for, Mr Reyer? Or is that all?"*

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*Lazoo took a gulp of the beer. The barmaid smiled. He did too. Zarrah was late, three or four minutes late, as he had just found out from the barmaid, who was still smiling. Lazoo was as ready as always. Zarrah finally arrived. They talked and shook hands and then went their separate ways. His shadow relayed the details as*

*they happened.*

*Zarrah waited patiently. Being thirty minutes late for an important meeting was not out of character for Shack. Her document was bound and ready to hand over with little or no explanation. The door opened and he stepped into the room, which was clean and neat. He scanned the room and saw it was as he had left it. He sank into his seat and lifted both legs onto the desk, which had been measured to suit his length.*

*"Zarrah, it is good to see you, and maybe it will be even greater to hear you speak." Shack pressed a button and said, "Lunch for two, please."*

*Zarrah looked at her work, leaned forward, let it go, and pushed it so it slid to where the Assistant District Attorney could grasp it.*

*"So, you know who you're after, Zarrah, or were you caught up in the mire of Gene Reyer?" Zarrah watched silently as he briefly lifted the document and then let the pages drop. "Oh, it's all in here, is it?" Shack's brilliant white smile made his pink gums brighter as he forced a laugh out of a chuckle. He watched her eat a bit and then turned to the table of contents as he sat up to face her. "You know, Zarrah, that we could have sent in people, you know? That fiasco was a kidnapping, you know that? Or were you ready for it?"*

*Zarrah put her fork on the plate and pushed it to the side.*

*"If you were here on the State of New York's time, Zarrah, I would give you the manpower to take Clariss down. But since you're a federal profiler it's outside my jurisdiction."*

*Zarrah gathered together the open sides of her bag down to her left as Shack started to read the summary. "Thanks for lunch, Jack. I'll be heading home within a few days. Good luck."*

*Shack rose to his feet, his eyes on the work in front of him. His hand reached out, already motioning up and down goodbye till she grabbed it to shake it firmly, "Oops! Sorry, Zarrah. Yes, good luck indeed."*

*Zarrah dropped his hand and pushed the straps of her bag further up and onto her shoulder. Shack had not really left the page as he turned to the next page while Zarrah closed the door behind her.*

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*Genesis kissed the receptionist's left cheek and then her right cheek without touching. She went down the stairwell and out onto the street through the open door. She would hear the best flashes and one-liners on TV later that night. She had become used to the cream leather interior of the Jaguar. The scenery that passed by was a collage of today and yesterday. In the end it was a montage that she could only just bear, as the same cameras awaited her arrival.*

*Clariss was seated and waiting. Somewhere out there Zarrah would be watching, unless she had given up on reaching the end of her brief. She thought of how Lazoo had felt following an armed man through the restaurant on his way to kill the owner of the establishment in which his whore wife dined with a gigolo.*

*"Good evening, Genesis. My, how hard work becomes someone already as beautiful as your parents made you to be." Clariss held his arms out. She took the left one, causing him to drop the right one and pull back his enthusiasm.*

---

*Shack thumbed to the next page as his other fingers dialed Reyer.*

*"Who's that, my man?" Reyer kindly pushed the redhead to the side. The kiss he gave her was quiet, as it was the Assistant DA on the other end of the phone.*

*"Man, is she blond, black, blue, red, or – let me guess, Gene – she's all of the above. You've found the perfect woman. She's white on the street, she's a mother in the home, and in the bedroom she cooks you in candle wax, huh?" Shack beamed.*

*Reyer adjusted his mind to find the cause for this middle-of-the-night call as the red between the white thighs lay bare. He stared at it as the candle dropped and dripped onto the sides of the neat hairdo. He watched the red hair, which was in between two round, perfectly blown balloons. He studied the red at the bottom of the pink slit, which was yet to be disturbed.*

*Jack's roundabout approach found its destination. "So, why you going to put the state through this, Gene?"*

*Shack heard nothing.*

*The redhead's middle finger was opening the spot Reyner had waited for, the moistness of that place evident on her black nail, as she backed it up slowly on top of his legs past his knees till he could smell how clean she was and had to touch for himself to see if she was as wet as she glistened. "You know it's not too late, Jack." He felt her legs enclosed on his thighs as her buttocks flattened back onto his stomach. He was himself swollen. He could see the ridge of his head now and again as she rode it, ready to be where they wanted it to be.*

---

*Zarrah sat in the passenger seat with more leg room and space to rest her arms than she was used to. Stevensen Tait's legs looked to be in fine working order as his foot flattened the pedal to accelerate out away from the parking space from where they had watched Clariss and Genesis.*

*Lazoo stood in the doorway. Through the wrought iron and the frosted designer glass he saw the black SUV park opposite the white Jag, which he had been waiting for. He thought, but it was too late. Then he thought to be quiet and calm and to rely on his body to take him away. The wrought-iron door opened as the right car pulled into its reserved spot. The doorman stood with his left arm holding the door open, the chauffeur's white uniform skirted the white car to open the back door. Genesis stepped down onto the pavement as Lazoo came down the steps. The crews didn't matter; he let go an elbow into someone's head as Genesis looked the other way, as Lazoo walked diagonally to the corner.*

---

*Reyer was reading the paper rapidly. Lazoo pushed the breakfast cart as he entered in front of him. Reyner looked up. "Good morning, John. I thought that was Delia's job." Lazoo unloaded the coffee and muffins onto the round table and exited the room with the cart, then returned to where the coffee waited to be plunged. Reyner was scanning from the back to the front of the Times, where a picture of Lazoo's elbow and someone else's face had replaced his face. "No words at all today, John?"*

*Lazoo poured the coffee and sugared his own. When he had finished his muffin, he asked, "You looking for leaks, Gene?"*

*"Is that what you call it?"*

*"Leaks – when someone's mouth is too full and their brain is out of control, and their fucking greed from their gut makes them want to give details in the hope they benefit – not of benevolence, but of selfishness. Ah, Gene?"*

*Reyer put the edges of the paper together and placed it in front of him. "My, we do have words today!" Lazoo lifted the window and lit a cigarette. Reyner sugared his coffee and selected a muffin, which he cut in two. "Quite the opposite. I thought the people were going to leak wild words with thick fantasy attached about how an illiterate became the only name in Clariss's will, John!"*

*The doors to the glass elevator door finally opened. The left cylinder creaked, then the right one creaked and croaked, then the left one suddenly went all the way with a bang, snapped, and shattered into what seemed like a trillion pieces of glass over the mosaic floor. Clariss, unperturbed by the mechanical malfunction, stepped over the broken glass. When he had passed the last projected shard he called out, "Someone! Someone! Tend to the broken glass that lies spoiling the mosaic heaven! Someone!"*

*A dozen and one bodies, twelve men in uniform and one woman in a garter belt, came to. "Where, Mr Clariss?" "Are you all right?" "Oh, my gosh! Are you okay, Mr Clariss?"*

*The last of the concerned had flown and found their places amongst the sawing and hammering from on top of the scaffolding as Clariss walked to the middle of the compound's auditorium, transforming himself as he stepped. Jimmy, Michael, and Shugit lounged behind him on the newly varnished grandstand for twelve. The plaster face of the balcony was changing. The grain of pine now ran horizontal. Where there had been two chairs there was one red, velvet-padded throne, which rose high above the place from where he would peer down on the proceedings. As he walked to the edge of from where his jury would view the events, three screens the size of three billboards flickered and turned blue. Each screen tuned in on one channel, the one with the most identifiable logo, as Lazoo's elbow hit you in your face. "Find me a picture of Arley Evon!" Clariss shouted.*

*A voice echoed in refrain, "He wants a picture of Arley!"*

*The camera on the street beamed her from the billboard, the camera upstairs took her from the pages of Cosmo, and some channel-changing found her selling cosmetics. "Now there's a face that knows how to keep its mouth shut," Clariss interrupted Jimmy and Shugit's conversation, while Michael just watched the words fly, bounce, and fall flat on the ground. "That is Lazoo." Clariss pointed at all three screens, curved to the round room's walls. Jimmy poked his afro with his dry pen. "You did not bed Arley Evon, Jimmy, nor did you Michael, and you will never come close to her, Shugit." Jimmy pointed at Michael, and Clariss stared both of them down. "None of you." Clariss ran his hand along the banister of the box, collecting dust yet to be wiped. "He will be here for one last supper with us. You will loathe him after he has left us."*

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*Reyer sorted sandwiches. "Here," he said as he handed Shack his with his bottle of juice. They sat next to each other on a park bench. "How's the family?"*

*Shack nodded. "They're good, Gene."*

*They chewed and swallowed, and when each piece was ready to be digested they interacted.*

---

*He followed the crowds, paid his money, and said, "Keep the change." The crowded elevator made him nervous. To his left a guy wanted to grind shoulders. He clenched his jaw and both fists. Looking down at his knuckles, the tourist moved. The door opened and the fresh air blew in. He followed a line of mostly white people with light hair. The other line had many people with dark, thick hair, all polite, all cautious. He didn't care who the line he walked blocked, as he could see the open air up ahead.*

*She opened her eyes, the eyelids thick from melted black. Her pillow had a ring of salt makeup and dread. She lifted her head to look at it, put her hair behind her, and put her ear back down to the pillow on the bed, and there she stayed.*

*Zarrah walked while unwrapping her sandwich, watching Lazoo blend in, looking like a tourist or a communist in his matte-brown bomber jacket, black denim, and a cap like a real chairman.*

*Stevensen Tait's other foot pumped the disc brake pad till the last of the air had subsided; the drum was empty as the pedal pushed back. Zarrah's dress was pleated. He watched the pleats sway as Lazoo stood out and then stepped in front of two Asians. "Brown jacket, black denim, blue cap," he noted on his pad, then replaced the pen, which was attached to a holder on the right of the dash with a spiral cord, back into its hole.*

*The chauffeur sat and looked out through the window hissing down. The doorman came down the stairs, took off his hat, and placed it under his arms. Shrugging his shoulders, he said, "Haven't seen your cargo this morning, bro," Then returned up the stairs as the window went up.*

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*"I wouldn't say that ever, Jack. Not ever!" Reyer looped the ball and Shack waited for an eternity. He turned his back, flicked his glove flat so that the only part of him facing Reyer and his throw was an open glove, took one step to the left, and made his hand soft so the leather nested the slowly dropping ball.*

*"You ready, Gene?" Jack flicked his tie over his shoulder with the same hand holding the ball. He lifted his long left limb so the knee was touching where his glove hid the ball in front of his right shoulder, cocked back and so far around that the shoulder's point was situated where his left shoulder was when facing forward. Reyer saw the whites of his eyes as he steadied left to right. He placed his mitt to the left of his face and looked at Shack slightly out of his left eye. The knee moved up towards the right shoulder one last time and then it started to come down. It stamped on the ground. Dust and dry grass puffed a cloud knee-high as the fingers let go of the ball. The middle and index fingers pushed down on the ball; the thumb and the pinky and the odd one out defined the direction as the shoulder pushed it forward, the elbow ensuring that the projectile maintained course. It hit a bee, the heavy body blowing as the wings ceased to work. A mother pushing her baby looked like she was next to be hit, but they were on the outskirts of the missile's course. Reyer's left eye went there and back again. The horse's nostrils denied the pollen its power as the ball whizzed on.*

*The ball remembered the formula for velocity as it sped on, Shack proud of his best, Reyer thinking of nothing for once. The ball, at speeds that make freaks weak, sought more space.*

*Thud.*

---

*Stevensen Tait saw and felt the pen slot back into its molded groove. Three blue caps stood in a bunch, one blue cap was in a huddle on his own, and another blue cap coughed like it had influenza. All the blue caps eventually proceeded in single file into the Empire State Building.*

*In the elevator he was not breathing. The guy next to him was groovy. The doors opened and he was part of the New York skyline. He lined up behind the guy with the same cap as his. This must be like being part of a family – look the same, talk the same, line up the same.*

*His comrades laughed, jeered, and jostled each other as they pointed to the blue cap in the other line.*

*The elevator doors closed behind Lazoo.*

*Thud.*

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### PART 3

*"Hey Jude, don't be afraid ... Any time you feel the pain ..."*

*Genesis walked to the bathroom. Her bathrobe dropped behind her, the collar hanging onto the heel of her foot, dragging the thick garment further than intended. The bathroom door opened to her pushing away the pine knob. She turned the brass taps to where she remembered she liked them, hot-cold, hot-cold, but mainly hot with steam.*

*He would forever be part of the skyline in the background of some tourist photo.*

*"Nah, nah, nah, nah-nah-nah-nah."*

*His hands were in his jacket pockets, feeling the jacket's lining, reassuring him in the back and around his shoulders as he pushed his jacketed arms forward.*

*Muted trumpet would be the sound for the useless spaces she moved around a coffee table and to the window, where a skyline, the founding thoughts in a memoir, shimmered to capacity. She went to the kitchen, which was barely stained, hardly hot, and rarely touched. She ran her hand along the centre of this space. It hovered the length of the counter he would stand on the opposite side of.*

*He did not want to look at the moon. Tomorrow night it would be ripe, ripe with life – the life the night lives and the day can only dream of.*

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*The pathologist should never have taken off his white jacket. Reyer wanted to advise him to take off the woolen v-neck vest immediately, even if it meant looking at plaid-patterned Crimplene. "So, where are these John Does now – sorry, what's your name again?"*

*The glasses moved up and down a prominent nose and pointed at a picture of the medical examiner and Shack outside City Hall on his wall. Reyer knew the case and the headline. He could not explain the idea that the reason for a person's death can change, or in whose mind it changes, nor could he formulate a reason for himself, let alone others – in particular 12 jurors.*

*After reason, he would normally have moved to motive, but motives seemed absent, or, more precisely, were second-hand and thin. He couldn't say if one motive had motivated all seven killers or if one killer commanded the operation. The murderer took the life of an unknown. The dead man may have feared his assailant, he may have contributed to his own heart attack, or he may have unscrewed the cap and sorted the pills himself. Mothers could be grieving for their lost ones, thinking that they were involved in some satanic cult and sacrificed to satisfy some orgy of urges that arose from some sordid scene where lying was only forbidden for those caught in the misleading act. Once caught, they were besieged by other offenders asking for severe reprimands, such as the removal of their apparatus of delivery, given to someone else whose truth they lied about.*

*The limo was stopped at an intersection, all its windows open. A classic eighties bass line pounded into reality an ambiance to which the nightclubbers, hustlers, models, hookers, gangsters, and tomorrow's day clerks added their sparkling smiles, movie poses, and catwalk struts, making it a crowd that was in for that moment in time. Every man was an actor and every girl was pretty. Surreal but for real, Lazoo sat alone. The limo drove through the intersection, their hands and bodies coming into the cab.*

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*Genesis took the train of her gown from the driver as he closed the door. The white Jaguar ferried her away, leaving a small g-force in angel dust, her carriage left behind for the cameras, tail lights smudging a trail on the director's monitor. Inside, Genesis sat in glamour. Arley Evon stepped down from her high place and into a waiting long, white limo, and zoomed away after the Jag, following the cab, all on their way to see Clariss. Stevensen Tait's foot came off the pedal as he ignored the horn behind him. The cab in front of the two white, chauffeur-driven cars slowed down to let the pedestrians jaywalk all over their path.*

*Would Lazoo have been in this situation if he hadn't met Clariss? Would Clariss have been responsible if Lazoo hadn't been accused? Would seven mothers know to cry over their seven dead sons if Lazoo had put down the chair? Would their wails be sobs if their sons' deaths had been found to be by other means? Would the informant, who informed the media before the police, have known the contents of that envelope delivered by foot? At which point in the plot did Lazoo feel it was far too late to turn back?*

*Had someone masterfully thickened the plot while distorting reality and deciding on a realism which put each individual inside the place they once-upon-a-time only read of and talked about? Had Lazoo become a monster with effects that one had to be wary of or minimize by passing the entire thing off as just pure, childish fantasy? Remember, though, seven mothers mourned. Who was going to tell them, "I'm sorry they are dead, but they died as you imagined? Not like in this stupid story!"*

*The charge would implicate city officials. The school of medicine responsible for the safe return of the bodies would require representation. The charge would carry less weight, but the implicated were now smeared by implication of association with someone like Clariss. He could have written their resignation letters for them, and sign and file their suits for wrongful dismissal and years of harassment not long after a dismissal was granted – if Lazoo had wanted it to happen that way.*

*Did the damaged body bother Lazoo, Clariss, or whoever was in charge so much that they decided not to return all the bodies, and, in fuming over the body with the axe markings in the head, decide to blow the thing sky-high?*

*Was leaking it to the media the only insurance Lazoo had that a fair review was to be attained, followed by a speedy exit, with blessings from Clariss? Or was the information designed to trap all those inside the events sealed in that envelope in a kaleidoscope that rolled over people as we pulled blankets, coverings, or fleece towards our heads each night?*

*Did Clariss have that much clout that this could amount to a slap on the wrist for a coroner and further claims of evil aimed at the name Hariss Clariss? As John James Lazoo sat comfortably, the electric chair beckoned him. All of this depended largely on how Lazoo saw himself saving Genesis Jones.*

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*Shack put down the phone first. Reyer held his to his heart, and when the ear to the handset nestled neatly against the outline of his pectorals he took it and placed it back on the body of the telephone.*

*The ridiculous-looking English judge's white wig dangled carefully around Clariss's wide face. Reyer looked at Lazoo as Lazoo smiled at Clariss. Phony Judge Clariss offered Reyer a cigar that he had passed on to him. The three of them turned. Clariss was at the peak of the triangle, with Lazoo on his right shoulder and Reyer on his left. The left screen showed all sorts of Lazoo's shots. The right screen showed Arley Evon above Times Square, around the world, on planes, and by coffee tables, especially in waiting rooms. The middle screen showed the disguised guests and real guests and the rotation of the auditorium's jurors on the half-hour.*

*The DJ announced every thirty minutes, "New jury, three white women, three bad men, three pretty boys, and three straight hunks."*

*A shot of Genesis dancing with one of her waiter friends made Lazoo forget he was a guest of honor. Clariss hid his disgust by pointing out Arley Dancing with Shugit. "You will have to dance with her tonight, John," he insisted. "You know that?"*

*Reyer offered, "I'll dance with her, Clariss," in a meandering way.*

*The Judge snapped, "Excuse me?"*

*Lazoo smiled at both of them and said in a timely manner, "I'll do it – if she dresses like Miss Jones."*

*The crowd parted naturally as Lazoo stepped up onto the stage; it parted to where she danced, to where he had to cut in. The white smile on the guy she looked up at was gone. The crowd was back in place. "I refuse to talk to you under these circumstances," she smiled, but not before she saw her face in the middle screen. Arley lay in lingerie to the left. To the right Lazoo smiled for no reason at all as he walked back.*

*"Lazoo, Lazoo – you don't have to put on that bullshit tonight." Jimmy was in full flight.*

*Lazoo nodded at Michael, who was in the same suit, shirt, and boots, only contrasting. "Looks like you thought I wouldn't make it," John said, lifting a beer towards him.*

*Lazoo lifted a beer towards Jimmy and then Michael. "Did you get the fucking queen to poke your ass with the same fucking pin while she measured you, Mike?" Michael's black suit was crisp, his jaw line shining, and his hair parted perfectly messed, not to be taken seriously as a thing meant.*

*Shugit burst in on the group, towering over Michael and Jimmy with two champagne glasses and two women, one with an Adams apple and the other with knuckles. "Lazoo, Lazoo," he said, "you don't have to put on that bullshit tonight." He was higher than Jimmy.*

*Jimmy the DJ ordered the next 12: "Three fat, hairy bears, three blind Chinamen, three hookers from France, and three presidents whose pictures appear on Mount Rushmore," putting on a patrician accent and making Lazoo smile as the crowd radiated.*

*A camera crew greeted the jurors exiting the box, firing questions that echoed above the disco techno. "Is he guilty?" a reporter asked the three bad men.*

*"He's definitely cute."*

*The music was mush and the words a pain as Lazoo headed for the private bathrooms.*

*Cleopatra smoked long, black, thin ones as Genesis waved her fan without offending the black-wigged one. Lazoo opened the door and sank into a seat that brought their knees to their chins. Genesis continued to chat with the eyeliner on the twenty-something relic of a woman who played footservant to Clariss. Lazoo waited, the door opened, and Arley made Cleo bend in two and start to rock backward and forward.*

*"I'm Arley Evon," she said as she held her hand out to Genesis. Genesis put out her hand and they patted exchanges. Then Arley turned to the only male in the room. "Lazoo, I like my picture next to yours. You know that, ah?"*

*Lazoo looked for Genesis, but Genesis continued only to fan brown, thin spirals of smoke. "You know Clariss wants us to dance?"*

*Arley's big eyes inside her long face agreed, "Yes, Lazoo."*

*Lazoo, worried that Genesis would leave the room, eventually put out there the worst-case scenario. As Genesis just fanned and Cleo rocked, Lazoo asked, "Anyone mind if I light up a straight one?"*

*The door flung open and in poured Shugit with four woman – one with an Adam's apple, one with knuckles, and two with stubble and round and hairy bellies that hung out under where their white t-shirts ended.*

*"Shugit, get champagne."*

*Shugit looked down at Lazoo. "Lazoo, bro, I thought I told you. 'Lazoo, Lazoo – you don't have to put on that bullshit tonight'." Lazoo looked down and then up at him. "Easy streets, bro," Shugit said. "Familiar flow on a righteous wave. Like, I will save your miserable day, and fucking fetch quench for your parchment, bro! I'm going, Lazoo. I'm on my fucking way." Shugit was out the door in two strides with the four still in tow.*

*Jimmy, Michael, Shugit, and the four behind Shugit had found two more, who were wearing tutus.*



*"Did you nail him, axe murderer?" Jimmy's fro bounced rigidly to the thick kick that introduced the next song.*

*Shugit, doing the shoulder thing and remembering his lines, said, "I fucking nailed him, black knight. I fucking nailed him."*

*Jimmy looked at Michael with eyes only and head down, starting to put his back into the groove. "What did you fuck him up like, bro?"*

*Shugit straightened both arms of his snakeskin and leather suit jacket and said, "Easy streets, bro. Familiar flow on a righteous wave. Like, I will fuck your shit up if you ever ask me to fetch a fucking thing again." Jimmy put his ear closer to where the shit flowed. "Yeah," Shugit went on, "and Miss Jones just looked at me, bro. Cleopatra fucking blushed at me. and Arley, she fucking winked with both eyes, Jimmy."*

*Lazoo's head understood why Cleopatra rocked close to herself the way she did and nodded in support. Genesis waved her fan as Arley explained the reason why her flight from LA International Airport had been delayed.*

*Reyer stood where he would stand in a matter of days, and Clariss sat where all could see the judge presiding, maybe inclining towards a mistrial or a blackout that would give high minds seconds to consider diversions, or more mirror than smoke, or more puff than reflection.*

*Simon opened the door and three very pretty ones, each with a tray with champagne on ice, carried them to the front of each person seated.*

*Shugit put his shoulder in and then his body. "Lazoo, can I see you in there?" Shugit pointed to the fully enclosed cubicles. Inside, with the door shut, he said, "Lazoo, I got these fucking lines, like this: The Mona Lisa doesn't smile cause the bitch knows she's a fake. The real fucking Lisa got cold as she sat to be fucking painted, bro, so the painter who had waited on her night and day said, 'I will fuck your shit up if you ever ask me to fetch a fucking thing again.' In reply, the original Mona Lisa left. The one we know is a stand-in, bro!" Shugit waited, and then realized that he had shut himself in a room with Lazoo. Lazoo reached his hand behind his back, unlocked the door, and left Shugit alone.*

*The chatter merged with the humming of a system, with bass bins long and deep at the front of the judge's bench. The screens flashed Lazoo and Arley, and then the crowd waiting in the dark.*

*"Ladies and one or two gentlemen – welcome Lazoo!" Kick and hold it for a snare, then the bass slid into a horny riff. "Here we are in a room full of strangers." The kick kicked, Lazoo found the vamping rhythm guitar, the spot swept and found Lazoo already in full stride, his country heel looked as if it would kick each one of the heads of the audience that lined the circumference of the stage as he sucker-funked the faces that peered up at him. The bulbs broke as he passed them. Lazoo brought both heels together and fanned up his arms, outstretched at his sides. A judgment to his left sent his hips that-a-way, then a judgment to the right sent pelvic thrusts that-a-way. His arms were still stretched as the horn section and rhythm underneath played, "Blame it all / on the nights on Broadway." Lazoo feinted his knees to the left, only to bring them back to the front, his shoulders following. Clariss noticed the effort, the second spot warming, and Arley and her entourage gathering in full. Still, Lazoo's strut funk fulfilled and justified his worth to his boss. Clariss nodded, the DJ changed shoulders, and put the earphones to rest around them.*

*Genesis put the needle to the record and held her mug to herself. The guitar player's fingers plucked and pinched at the strings; the higher the note, the more fluent the accent and the more potent its pain. Zarrah sat on the slats. The moon was full and mounted as high as it could that night. Further down the water front Lazoo crouched forward, noticing how comfortable Zarrah was under the moon. Then he sat back on the grass in his white suit and faced upwards with his hands behind his head, looking at the moon through the*

*thoughtful arrangement of the trees and their branches. Stevensen Tait sipped his coffee and watched Lazoo wait for Zarrah to move from his bed.*

*Genesis looked at the moon face-to-face. An escaped accordion player fanned the vocal and filled the background, a dark sky with a few stars. An upright bass player stood in the way of oblivion, guarding the blackness from the fingers pulling round notes from the empty spaces, notes that reminded listeners of an original. Zarrah, searching for the staircase to the room of the one mind that Lazoo and Genesis shared, came to the place outside under stars and in front of a rising sun where their synergetic matter cohered.*

*Lazoo stood with his hands behind his back. The janitors rounded up cords and took brooms and mops from the floor, throwing them into a cart. The sound was deafening to Lazoo's ears as he looked up to where Clariss sat with a mallet, its head twice the advised size.*

*"You escaped without notice, John," he called out. "Doing me out of a moment last night." Lazoo moved his torso with his hands behind his back pulling him back from any answer. "If you had been caught, you would be held in contempt of my court. As a magistrate I would have ordered a hanging, but as remorseful as you are today, unshaven and covered in grasses from the edges of the Hudson River, I feel pity for you as I decide your fate once again, Lazoo." Lazoo still not ready, now only nodded his head. "I've also heard rumors you defaced the Mona Lisa, John. That's treason against the highest of orders known to man, through art, by expression of creativity and talent – and you, an illiterate, claim you have an explanation why she is solemn and somber in her eternal pose?"*

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*Lunch was served in the green leaf paradise, "Lazoo, Lazoo – you don't have to put on that bullshit tonight," the parrots and cockatiel had chorused all afternoon long. Fresh in a new costume, Lazoo the matador turned his hat so that its long edges faced forward and then tilted it back so it sat up off his face, which was still unshaven, but starting to burn a glow.*

*Clariss sawed his meat as Lazoo arranged the green and the red lettuce. "How much do you need?"*

*Lazoo waited for six, seven, eight, nine, ten, in his head. "One million now, two million after the verdict, and three when I kill all of you."*

*Clariss, stabbed the table with the butt of his fork and Cleopatra was there. "One in one hundred dollar bills, unmarked," Clariss went back to eating. Lazoo believed what he had just committed.*

**CHAPTER 11**

Genesis finished her lipstick, the black Charley Stevonsen. Lazoo wiped the cream clean from a jaw line, all in black, all of it Charley Stevonsen

The papers spread out on the floor, Reyer chewed his cereal quietly. New York, New York, the city was ready for him. He flipped his Charley Stevonsen tie over his shoulder. From his balcony the park, the squirrels, and the nuts were all alive. Lazoo, then Genesis were on the screens; the TV was tuned and broadcasting.

In the oak mirror, Shack's wife offered him another Charley Stevonsen, this one blue. He leaned toward the black one. He kissed mulatto kisses for his woman. Shack was black and ready with offence for the defense.

Lazoo who? Yeah, Lazoo! Through the lobby, the press, the press, the fucking press was still there, thicker and harder to get through.

"Good morning, Ms Jones." The doorman opened the New York morning to her. Her driver waited with his arms open by the ready white Jag, also shining. One-two, one-two, one-two, "You are." Her black heels clicked down the stairs and into the back.

"No comment. Seven mothers mourn – that's all," Lazoo said this sideways through the imaginary gap. "That's why."

Reyer watched and felt his task. Lazoo's "Seven mothers' mourn," the pearler, was on every channel. "Seven mothers mourn."

Shack called, "Can you turn that crap down, darling," to his wife. Mrs Shack sat with her finger on the button and her eyes on the screen. "Seven mothers mourn." Lazoo looked hot dressed in black.

Lazoo strode and remembered the letter Y, as Stevie Wonder sang the word "Why". A country heel walked on the sidewalk for millions stuck in the middle between two cameramen, one to the left and one to the right. The white vans were there, their side doors open, the cameras rolling. He planned the last jaywalk as he spotted the black SUV. Zarrah rounded the corner as he stepped across over the gutter into the traffic. He slipped through the traffic and into the park, with only the two cameras and their carriers, then along the path. The grass was dry but his boots were clean. He waited for a woman on a bike to pass, saying, "Yeah, yeah." He kicked on out of the park and down the street a bit.

He took one last look at Sil House, then waited for the white vans. Both side doors opened two limousine lengths from where he readied to step. The first shot was of him waiting to cross; the second shot was a sweep, the cameraman swinging around to catch his back though the opposite door. It caught him crossing the white line, as the real limo rolled in from the left.

"Oh, you are the sunshine of my life ..."

The window hissed down to reveal Clariss and the boys, Simon in the back, with Shugit, Jimmy, and Michael wearing wrist bands and facial hair. Lazoo stood on the concrete, smoking, the café, closed, in behind. The music wasn't muted, but was turned down so it didn't drown.

"John Lazoo, Lazoo, Lazoo – your family have come to bid you luck, love, and a long life," said Clariss. He could see Clariss's hand and Jimmy's fro in front of the rest of him. Lazoo stood under the arch of the Sil House logo, the cameras catching the killer at the scene of the crime. "I thank thee, you, whoever, Lazoo. And I forgive, even though the forgiven can never be forgotten." Clariss did not draw a word from Lazoo, just smoke. Lazoo turned to the right so the camera, now on top of the van, could get him correctly from that

angle.

The media arrived en masse at the front of Sil House. Their cameras caught Lazoo boarding a yellow cab. He peered out the back window. As the distance grew the cabbie smiled through the rear view mirror, knowing the way to the court house. The cabbie thoughtfully turned off the radio. Lazoo asked him to take an alternate route from the one the limo ahead would be likely to take to avoid it leading a procession, saying, "Another way ..."

The cabbie asked, "How is it you know?"

"The ether we suspend the ATMOS," replied Lazoo. "A camera snaps. I click. Another ATMOS."

Zarrah in the Cadillac, and behind her the black SUV, were already in the same lane as the limo. The cabbie used his experience and knowledge of New York traffic to he negotiate lights, cars, and peak hour frustrations, with horns blasting all around them. Genesis smoothed down the sides of her black dress as her driver waited patiently to merge into the traffic behind the limo, which was about to pass them.

Then Genesis shouted, "Wait!" This order was indirect, but accurate in timing, just as the chauffeur was about to embark on a slick maneuver. She watched the limo glide past. Three cars passed and still she again ordered, "Wait!" A black all-terrain toy passed two more cars. Then she commanded, "Take another way, please." She pulled something the cabbie couldn't see from her bag. Noticing that he couldn't see, she put it back away. Then she organized her head.

Lazoo watched people from the back of the taxi and thought of the million-dollar performance that morning as his right, enough to appease Clariss. He noticed how each path had come to a momentary conclusion, right there, right then, as the lights flashed in cascading order of direction – red, orange, green, orange, green, red, and then green, green, green.

The cabbie ducked his cab down an alley. The white Jag followed. The walls of the damp, seedy side of the city flew by on the walls along the way. The driver pointed to them as he smiled and recited from Metofeaz Litigatti, "I own light. Here inverted. There inserted / In respect of, shining from. A Collective-Coherent. / From a darkened, dampened Crevasse In cavern. / Where shaven. In ever. More over. Cover candor. / Spare none. For It belongs."

He had to hoist himself with both arms from the back of the cab. There Genesis was in front with her head down, the arms of the media with their weapons touching her as she ascended the stairs to the courthouse. Lazoo walked with head down and eyes forward. *Smash, a sharp object hit him in the back of the head, whatever it was. "Fuck," he mumbled, "that must be for the elbow." Someone's hand was on Genesis's shoulder, but he stayed as he was and stepped behind her as he reached the first step to the courthouse.*

*"You will die, Lazoo! You will die an electrifying death, Lazoo!" Lazoo found the other steps. "You will fry, fucker!" They must have been the eldest sons, or the youngest. Their mothers must have already been lined up along the corridor. Genesis was almost at the top. "You must be an evil bitch!" He was ready for the words as he brought his shoulders in further.*

*The judge had not yet ordered silence, yet it prevailed during the proceedings. His soft voice set the tone; his instructions were calm and easy to follow. Reyer noticed the judge's demeanor and noted the decibel level at which he peaked and the sternness of his look when his voice toughed just before he coughed to clear a tickle in his throat. Where a fool would find folly, a wise man clears his larynx.*

*Shack leaned back for skeletal comfort, making the most of the home-field advantage. It was his district, his state, and his way. His table was ready with three sets of hands next to his own big fists, which he then placed*

*on either side of his opening notes as he leaned forward.*

*Lazoo's eyes looked forward, straight ahead at the spot just the left of His Honor. From behind, Genisis spotted the lump, a quarter the size of a golf ball, which had mounted itself on the back of his head. His short hair allowed the courtroom behind him to see fresh blood drying and a trail down the back of his neck into the collar of his black shirt. Reyer leaned over after catching a glimpse of his injury and said, "You're bleeding."*

*Lazoo nodded and touched the back of his head. He wanted to lick the blood from his fingers, as he had when he'd been seven, but the people would crucify him for it – right there and right then. Lazoo held his hand palm up and let the blood dry.*

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## *PART ONE*

*Shack had not replaced the surname "Shack". Instead and in case, he had made it memorable. Shack made no reference to that lawyer's presence inside the New York courthouse, the rock upon which New York and its law enforcement fraternity had implemented its clean-up-the-streets campaign. One man's guile colored in his almost black-brown skin, marketed with his wide smile made for celluloid, paved the way to congruency. One way, the right way! Shack's cry was a low, rumbling quake.*

*Reyer ran an eye over the jurors, at whom Lazoo had not dared to look. He noted their formation from the different angles the cameras shot them as he placed a camera in each of their hands and decided on whom the jurors' cams would focus at any given time. Lazoo decided to breathe as he reached for his water. Unaware, Shack also did so at the same time in the same way.*

*Those who had already decided on the sound of silence, the color of its void, the loneliness of its feelings, needed to think again. The judge had just completely laid down the rules to which the participants would adhere during the course of the trial, and then it was time for the Assistant District Attorney to open the people's case against Lazoo, bringing evidence to show beyond any doubt that these murders had happened, and that the defendant was guilty of committing them.*

*The pages, already well turned, turned again. Their fall could be heard from the back of the room. Shack's two long fingers tapped his lips, as his eyes looked as if they felt for the accused. The quiet court could then hear the creases in his suit, themselves now famous for their sound, and viewers around the world saw them straighten out as Shack stepped out from behind his table. His footsteps carefully remembered the paces between the jurors facing this side on and the judge, white and wise, but nonetheless a Judge.*

*The jurors' foreman nodded as if he knew him. Shack allowed a smile, but at the white man in the corner, Number Seven, "Good morning." The rest looked up at Shack, the black woman in front, Number Six, eager for him to look her way. "Calculating: selfishly scheming is what the dictionary says, ladies and gentlemen."*

*Then the smile turned down as he walked to where Juror Number Six listened like on a Sunday morning as Shack began his sermon. "A thug is a tough and violent man, is what the dictionary says. These two words are the only words I could come up with that could help you focus on the atrocity this man has committed."*

*Juror Number Three, the girl who wanted to travel the world, noticed how Juror Number Six held her hands in her lap, and when Shack came over to her, her hands clasped each other in earnest.*

*"Calculating! Thug!"*

*Lazoo saw the gold tip of the silver pen in his lawyer's hand out of the corner of his eye. He watched the speed with which it crossed the page. He let go. He breathed and reached for the glass, the judge taking a good look at him again. The mothers, somewhere in behind him, deserved a good, long, hard look at the back of the man*

*responsible for the way they cried.*

*Reyer stretched his neck left and right slowly, trying not to disrupt Shack's opening, yet.*

*"I can stand here and scream evil, devil, vile – all of which defines his act. But they are words that the defense will take out of my mouth for the sake of a plea of insanity."*

*The judge checked the defense table from above the thick rims of his glasses. Lazoo looked straight ahead as Reyner wrote wildly with his hand as his body faced the jury.*

*"That is why I stress calculating – because John Lazoo knew what he was doing when he butchered seven New York citizens in cold blood. I stress thuggery because that is what he is known for. He is a thug."*

*Shack turned his back on them as he said that. He even looked at Reyner, Lazoo, and then Genesis in the corner, second row from the back.*

*Reyer leaned to Lazoo, his pen tapping his cheek, and said "You okay, John?"*

*Lazoo kept his focus, and his silence. Genesis breathed out from her abdomen. Reyner looked on.*

*The judge checked the murmur from the defense.*

*"Ladies and gentlemen it is a fact that we have prisons in our society. Prisons are for thugs. The defense will tell you that John Lazoo is a product of a failed system. I will tell you that Lazoo is product of a system that failed because they let thugs like him out of it."*

*Reyer noticed that jurors Eight to Twelve thought, as they could feel the draft from the doorway to their right.*

*"Members of the jury, you are here today because I believe in your judgment. I believe that you will judge for the grieving mothers. You will hear evidence from a witness placing John Lazoo as gaining entrance into Sil House about the time of the last murder. You will see from the coroner's report the calculating manner in which this thug killed seven men. You will, based on that evidence, find John Lazoo guilty of seven counts of murder. I am sorry, but I do not stand here and beg you or ask you politely. No, I don't. I tell you to do your duty for today's people and tomorrow's children."*

*Reyer put his pen down and thought of the 12 jurors, normal people stuck in a room with all this death, lies, and cameras. Yes, they had to perform their duty, but they would return to their normally mundane and predictable lives once the circus was over.*

*In opening, Reyner said, "I thank you for your time, ladies and gentlemen."*

*Lazoo took water. The foreman seemed equally as enthusiastic, and Six and Three seemed just as attentive. Eight to Twelve looked for an eternity at the doorway at which Reyner had looked. Once the judge looked there, too.*

*"I agree with the Assistant DA on every matter but one," Reyner began. "My client, John Lazoo, did not commit these horrendous crimes, and the defense will present you with evidence showing why I know my client did not commit them."*

*The court and cameras followed his lean and mean figure as he walked to the front of the room. He placed his left hand on the judge's bench and then removed it. The judge took off his glasses, as he could see the gray hair, the chiseled features, and the long jaw line close up.*

*"I am a busy man and you have families and lives of your own. Whoever committed these murders did not take that into account."*

*The foreman nodded his head, as did Number Three. Number Eight's left hand slowly rubbed her right arm.*

*"They did not think of the seven mothers who grieve for sons who will never come back. You and I will help speed up the process of finding who the real killers are."*

*Reyer found urgency as he marched back to where Lazoo was dormant. He picked up a thick folder of papers. He waved the folder in mid-air, papers falling from their loose binding. Jurors Eleven and Twelve knew when to laugh beneath their veils. The judge reached for his weapon, but Reyer was already back in front of Juror Six.*

*"Yes – killers! One person did not commit all these crimes. Please, all I ask is that you listen with the thought that if you condemn John Lazoo, one man, for these crimes and he is innocent, then the killer or killers will continue to roam free on the streets of your city. Once again, I thank you for your time."*

*Reyer retreated backwards for two steps and turned to the judge, saying "Thank you," with a courteous glance. As he turned to face his client, he saw eyes still focused ahead in the middle distance.*

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*The auditorium's jurors, all in Wall Street attire, all male apart from Cleopatra, the foreperson, looked to the judge in the middle screen, Lazoo in the left screen looking straight down on them, and Reyer, then Jack, then the real jurors, then Genesis on the right screen. Clariss aimed to hit the mark with his hammer, then stopped as Reyer walked backward two steps. His hand reacted to a shot of Reyer smiling down and sexy at the judge, and whack! They rose to their feet, clapped, and cheered. Whack! Whack! They stopped and turned back into accountants and bookkeepers as Simon Campbell's name was called.*

*"Oh my god, who decided he should wear that?" Juror Twelve in Armani said to Juror Eleven in Charley Stevonsen.*

*Simon walked pretending, as they do, taught without thought, on the way to somewhere but nowhere. He walked with his back straight, his head leaning toward where the remnants of their own brains, now lopsided, lay wasting towards the wrong side. He walked without originality, not even accountable for the way he walked, let alone to where. His shirt was two sizes too small. His suit jacket had been measured when he'd been in college, the seamstress not knowing that exercise would not be a part of his daily routine.*

*Seated as a witness, here as called by Shack, Simon squirmed, cracking his knuckles. His left and right eyes decided to cohere as the African American reached the corner of his table as his feet found traction on the polished floor. Simon extended his limbs by straightening his knees in an effort to get more comfort from the hard back of the small chair, sending him back in the seat. Lazoo's profile offered an imaginary point to which his eyes were fixed. He seemed unable to make up his mind for whom he should be there.*

*This was the first time in their illustrious careers that they had met in court. Many a favor had been exchanged since celebrating their passing of the bar exam together 20 years before, but that morning Shack would assume the people's attack against Lazoo and against his friend, maybe foe, Reyer.*

*"So, for the third time in the space of ten minutes, John Lazoo left the café, is this correct, Mr Campbell?"*

*"Yes sir, that is correct." The café owner seemed to squirm in his delivery, a movement Reyer noticed was consistent throughout his testimony, and noted it down on his pad.*

*Lazoo mentally noted what he imagined his lawyer jotted down. His body was upright without language, his face clear of the expressions that express his thoughts when sitting at a sidewalk café or under a tree.*

*The tall African American lawyer walked from the centre of the room to his seat. "What time was that, Mr Campbell?" Shack exhaled as he unbuttoned his suit to sit down in his chair. "Six-fifty-five a.m. till 7:05 a.m., sir," said the café owner, almost jumping his cue.*

*The café owner looked over at the accused. He sat upright, correcting his posture, gathering his thoughts for his ensuing bout with Reyer.*

*Reyer smiled at Juror Number Two and then at Juror Number Four, and wondered if their deceased spouses would be offended if an affair ensued, an affair for which Lazoo would be responsible. He looked back at Lazoo long enough for the entire world to sigh if they knew why he sat there looking straight ahead. He walked to the witness stand as the judge's robe ruffled.*

*Hostile! Hostile! Who thought of the word first? Simon, Reyer, Shack, or the judge would decide if Reyer's line of questioning carried any traces at all of hostility. Judges, jurors, and opposing counsel often failed to see the line that Reyer would step over in the pursuit of his justice.*

*"Mr Campbell, you've known the accused for how long?" Reyer advanced.*

*Simon glanced at Lazoo, paused, and patted his belly without an apron. His fingers caught for a second on the buttons popping to keep his shirt closed.*

*"Since he started frequenting my café," a now-confident Simon confided in the grey, lean figure upon whom all eyes were fixated and for whom all ears remained open.*

*"And how long has that been?"*

*"About a year," Simon said without thinking.*

*"May I call you Simon, Mr Campbell?"*

*Reyer walked to his table past the judge. On reaching his destination, he found a new folder, just like the folder he'd held in the air before, and looked at Juror Number Five, his arms crossed. The jurors had the right to think they were just jurors and that Lazoo was on trial there. The judge remained as he pleased. Shack had to look, and eventually the judge also looked at Number Five.*

*Simon's answer was a relief. "That's what friends call me, yeah." Reyer waited. "Yeah. Friends call me Simon,"*

*The judge looked more concerned after each time Juror Number Five unfolded his arms and folded them again, but Reyer knew when to pull back the glare. He moved on, all eyes now firmly on the witness, Simon Campbell, the owner of Sil House and its café. "In those two years, how many people have you seen Mr Lazoo come into your café with? Take your time. I'll just find a couple of documents over here while you think about it." Reyer shuffled files in his new folder for effect as he opened up the gate for the people's star witness.*

*Simon started to crack his knuckles, first those on his left hand using his right, then those on his right hand using his left, a nervous trait that Lazoo knew Simon had. "Maybe four. Maybe five."*

*"Can you name any of these five people?"*



*"Genesis Jones, Mick Haze, Jimmy Afra – that's it. The other two I don't know." The squirming crept back into Simon's mix.*

*"You say that you do not know the names of the other two people that come into your café with John Lazoo, but you are definite that there are two of them?"*

*Shack had learned one thing about watching Reyer: object and the objection just piled on top of the jargon-speak heap, the mind became caught in Reyer's mire and the jury never forgot, however they were instructed. The café owner sat looking confused. This wasn't part of his rehearsed scenario. He looked to Shack, wishing for a replacement. Shack, his eyes straight ahead, remained resolute in the eyes of the jury for the prosecution's sake.*

*Reyer circled and cocked his weapon again, the pump action being, "Simon, I apologize to you for having to repeat myself, but you are absolutely definite that there are two of them and you do not know their names?"*

*"No, Your Honor," ended Simon Campbell's fifteen minutes of fame, for then.*

*"No more questions, Your Honor," Reyer addressed the bench that watched the proceedings. Reyer dismissed Shack's star witness in less than three minutes.*

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*Outside the courthouse the media shared information, food, and experience. The orange face returned his camera to the van. As he left his post the pretty lady in her navy blue suit wanted to know the names of the two guys waving him over.*

*"Nobodies, just a couple of players, lady."*

*The cab driver and Genesis's chauffeur shared a cigarette as Jimmy pulled chewing gum from his pocket.*

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*Reyer sat back down. Shack sat back down. The door to the judge's chambers closed. The jurors left in a line through the door to their right, Juror Number Five unable to help looking back. Lazoo was still standing as Genesis made her way to the end of her row. Their images loomed for the viewers at home.*

*The auditorium erupted.*

*Lazoo said, "He's here, ah? Gene?"*

*The last shot on all three screens was Lazoo, Lazoo, Lazoo.*

*Reyer did a double-take at his opponent on the same level. Shack reminded him of a famous actor as he and Lazoo stood in front of the courtroom. The cameras in front of the Assistant DA were subdued, but the unruly, marauding mob surged upwards towards Lazoo, mostly waving small tape recorders and long-lensed cameras. Reyer stepped down two steps, then two more, taking the cuff of Lazoo's suit with him. Shack's head rose above the rest, his figure visible above a horizon set by the media.*

*Reyer knew that the case needed structure, both within the courtroom and outside the ring, and he gave the people their win. He put his head down as Lazoo followed, saying "Seven mothers mourn; seven men murdered. I have one client!"*

*The infested steps suddenly cleared. Lazoo looked over at Shack, sharp, smiling and willing, as he said, "One way! Ladies and Gentlemen, one way. He is here on trial as charged for these murders. I will prove him guilty beyond doubt, as it is my duty to do, for you, for your families, and for the state of New York."*

*Lazoo released the top button of his shirt as that word stung his ears once more: "Bitch!" With one eye he spotted the roof of the white Jag, then heard the taunt, "Bitch!" again. Genesis had her hand deep in her handbag as the chauffeur finally opened her door. A crowd of big and small cameras, microphones, and Dictaphones stood between him and the car. There was not a thing he could do. The door slammed and she was inside.*

*The chauffeur was careful, but not cautious enough to avoid knocking a cameraman to the sidewalk. As the cameraman was trotting along beside the car trying to shoot through the windshield without touching it, the Jag's left front wheel ran over the wire to his camera, yanking it back behind his shoulder while the wire beneath the tire whipped him forward. Both camera and cameraman crashed onto the white hood and bounced off of it. The accelerating car pulled the wire tight, lashing the heavy camera backwards, pulling it from his shoulder. As he had been trained, he held on to his camera with his right arm. The camera crashed into the gutter, his hand beneath it. His body and head just lost the race and landed hard. Lazoo noticed the dent on the car and knew he would be held responsible.*

---

*Lazoo sat and waited inside the Swank Swank New York Restaurant. He noticed the cameras outside, with Reyer face-on in front of the orange cameraman, one of the many pretty women holding a boom microphone over him and looking in at where Lazoo tasted the first of the merlot and said, "Yes," to the maitre d'. Lazoo had seen the booth in which he sat a long time before, as, following an armed man, he retraced his route to the back of the restaurant.*

*Reyer pulled a chair out for himself. The pretty woman, without her microphone, pulled out another seat.*

*"John Lazoo, this is ..." Lazoo shook his hand. "Oops!" Lazoo dropped his friend's hand. "You already know me, John," Reyer smiled.*

*Reyer continued to smile as Lazoo shook the right hand that previously held the microphone. Outside the window, the cameraman looked at Lazoo outside his lens as Lazoo got comfortable.*

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*Genesis sat upright and cross-legged with a fluffy pillow still with his natural oils, a smell, a hint of eternity, thinking through the abstracts and the detail painted and mounted on her walls. The contents of her handbag were exhibited on the coffee table her feet were up on. The compact was zipped. The new, pre-read paperback book was there if the need arose. A handkerchief covered most of a handgun, but not its butt. She picked up the hankie to wipe a tear as she absorbed the last tragedy from the painting closest to the open window.*

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*The concrete of the sidewalk felt close to Lazoo as he stood and, with aid of the small table, rocked. The breakfast for two was getting cold; the lips of both white coffee cups were spoiled by the table he leaned on for support. Finely ground coffee granules painted two waves once the coffee settled. He asked the waitress, "What's the time, please?" as he found the rest rooms at Cafe Concoct.*

*Reyer was seated and had lowered the levels of his coffee as Lazoo pulled his chair back. "Five is gone," he told him. Lazoo nodded. "One of the alternates will replace him. The replacement will still hate you, John." Lazoo still nodded. He forked the egg whites, then called the waitress as pushed his plate to the side. "Give me some meat, please."*

*Reyer pushed his plate to the side, too. "Make that two, please."*

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*Lazoo had waited for the weekend, and then it was there. As he walked through the park he thought he recognized the signs of summer ending. He heard someone say, "Indian winter, Indian summer," as he passed a newsstand. Anything Indian was anything but the way things are. Alone, beneath the tree he stands, one leg cocked with nowhere to run. He was in over his head; he would have to rely on Reyer's control. They needed a move. He had to do something to improve their situation. First he had to understand that he had chosen the*

*way he walked that day, then he had to put the events thus far within the right context. Dire? Not by a far stretch of the imagination. Down? He still had the will. Desperate? Who should he be pressured by? Clariss? Would Clariss allow it? He had to see Genesis! He had to be there!*

*"I love you John!" It was soft and tired as it could seem. He held it as he lit a cigarette.*

*The Friday night was bright. Jon Le Mac would walk like this, Metofeaz Litigatti would smile this way, and a real boss would let them be as they wish, playing to their potentially eating egos as much as they pleased. Lazoo rounded the corner. The Broadway lights liked his complexion. The ritzy ones smiled at his gloves. He tipped his top hat as he boarded the limo bound for upper Manhattan's most exclusive salon of love.*

*The receptionist did not notice that his pencil-thin moustache was a fake. He would not allow her to take his long, black, heavy coat. He sat with his white gloves draped across the coat that lay over the arms of the couch with gold feet. The girls on parade noticed something about the smile, but his hat being tipped forward persuaded them that he was just another John. The evening dragged on as they brought him more ale in bottles as he waited. The office door opened, as it had before. The long legs carried her to and from his view. She also did not know why the distinguished lounge, stinking of money, waited.*

*Lazoo sat back, side-on, looking like a phantom in some out-of-tune opera. The jurors were all in their pajamas, popcorn barrels full, some with butter still melting and sprinkled with cheese, others laced with food coloring and sweeteners which were certain to keep a wide eye open. Clariss's seat faced the middle screen. Genesis, with her mild manner, appeared from the wall. The leg-warmers on the banister tickled each other in anticipation of their long withheld lust as Lazoo said no to the redhead and no to receptionist, who was tilting an imaginary beer in the air.*

*Genesis turned the pages of the guest book and studied the style of the suited and stationary guy on the couch. She looked at her watch and then at the receptionist.*

*The receptionist nodded and said, "He's been here since ten. I know – six and a half hours."*

*Genesis wished her a good morning, "Be good to yourself today," then dialed the number of the security company. The ringing stopped and a machine asked for a code. Genesis, trying to hold back laughter, replied, "43-81-131-55-9009."*

*The top hat came off. "You like those numbers, ah, babe?"*

*Genesis hung up the phone and mouthed the words, "What about the fucking cameras?"*

*The auditorium broke into pieces. The one with her blonde wig in pigtails and Miss Piggy slippers said, "What about the fucking cameras, dear?" Hoarse, lippy, lispy, and sassy all in one blow, she blew Genesis a kiss and called out, "Here, baby!"*

*The other auditorium jurors did the same. "Here, baby," "Mine was for Lazoo," "Mine was for Genesis."*

*Clariss called out, "Mine is for their prime, which you all can afford. If you listen like Lazoo, work like Lazoo, and love like Genesis and John."*

*There was silence, then murmurs far from Clariss's ears. "Mine is for your fucking mouth, Clariss," said the one with lipstick for eye shadow.*

*They peered into the tiny but well-organized fridge. Their large, illuminated faces covered all three screens. He grabbed a six-pack and smiled at the back of the fridge. She grabbed the bottle of wine, then tightened her*

*lips and squinted her eyes. She collected a wine glass and turned off the lights.*

*The jurors nodded off or dragged themselves to their quarters one by one. Clariss eventually trudged off to the glass elevator that had never fully recovered. It creaked and then opened. He stepped inside.*

*Seated in front of the half-man-like couch, Lazoo and Genisis talked, planned, and laughed.*

*"So, you silly fool of a man, what other names do you go by?"*

*Lazoo smiled and dried the corners of his mouth. "Let's see, ah – oh yeah. Jon Le Mac – he's a preacher from where people still climb coconut trees to feed their young."*

*Genisis nudged him in the ribs. "Do you ever go by the name of Mr Idiot?"*

*Lazoo laughed till he was bothered by the name. "Oh! Mr Idiot – as in stupid, babe?"*

*Genisis laughed louder than he did. "Yeah. Last name Idiot, first name Stupid, and middle name Useless."*

*Lazoo took it. "You're joking, ah, babe?"*

*"Of course I am, you foolish man."*

*"Never mind Metofeaz, I know who he is. Who's John Reyer Afamasaga?"*

*Genisis was about to open the bottle of wine. Lazoo took it off her. Their heads were close enough for their lips to find one another. It was soft and gentle. Lazoo pulled the corkscrew vigorously, opening the wine bottle. "All the receipts are signed by him, John. And you're the only one who's been here since the refurbishing job."*

*Lazoo poured himself a glass. "He's just an accountant – one of those bean-counter types." Lazoo gulped half the glass.*

*The sun rose and with it the Saturday morning noise. The children in the exclusive street were happy to grow into the adults who walked their pets and pushed their babies past the apartment building. Smoke blew out of a balcony. Genisis stood leaning back on the wall, the sun happy to warm her. Lazoo filled her wine glass with tequila and then drank from the bottle. "Are you at least going to smile at me?"*

*"We have a life time of smiles, John." As she let go of his name he walked to her and nestled his head in her neck, as he loved to do. Looking down, he could see cleavage.*

*Lazoo noticed the limo. Looking over the balcony and down on the black roof now parked directly beneath, he thought of giving the car a drink of tequila, then remembered the damage the Jag incurred two days before.*

*They spent Sunday in bed, as they'd promised each other they would. He cooked himself fish and she ordered Chinese. He drank water and shadow boxed; she read and thought about how warm he was to be with, to sleep with, and to tease. The lights in their white rooms dimmed when the moon could not be found. They said, "I love you," and "I love you, too," as they slept to be ready for Monday – court day.*

*Lazoo stood and watched as the guard waved the detector up and down Genisis, her handbag high in the air. Beep, beep-beep, beep-beep-beep. Lazoo could make anything stop, but not the beep. Genisis caught him looking at them and pushed them forward. "Oh, it must be my bracelet – or the cigarette case." Genisis brought down her bag, eager to show him the metal.*

*"No, that will be all right, Miss Jones."*

*Lazoo bent his neck sideways. Reyer looked at the doors opening, and then, inside, the seats filling. The lights warmed the room and added more light to it.*

*Shack had successfully opened the morning's proceedings by placing Lazoo as gaining entry into the building at 6:55, in time for the final murder. Susan Bramley of apartment 702 told this to a full courtroom.*

*Then Reyer questioned Susan Bramley.*

*Lazoo's eyes were in line with the way his head faced forward. He stretched his neck, turning his head to the right, which brought his face to where his eyes saw Number Five, arms folded, straight back at him. He had to dodge and uncoiled the neck muscle. Reyer looks down at him, surprised at the movement, and throws a glance at Number Five. Shack looked at him as he buttoned his jacket, and then looked at Juror Number Five.*

*The judge, sensing disruption disguised in hesitation, said, "Well Mr Reyer?"*

*Shack looked down at his lap and smiled as he dusted a crumb from his trousers.*

*Susan Bramley shopped off the rack. She worked hard to make the days go away and studied hard at night so she would one day earn a degree. Juror Number Three looked at Susan for a long time. The foreman started nodding, as did Number Six, before Reyer began. On his way to the witness stand he decided to detour. He turned on a dime and ended up directly in front of Juror Number Five.*

*Susan tried to stop her fidgeting. Her fingers were unseen in her lap below the front of the box, but movement was evident in the way her shoulders jittered. Then she stopped. Facing Juror Number Five, who could smell coffee, Calvin Klein, and presence, Reyer asked in a loud and cutting voice, "So at about 6:55, approximately, you passed by my client, Mr Lazoo?" Juror Number Five unfolded and folded his arms.*

*Susan pulled the sides of her cotton cardigan together, showing closely bitten nails in the close-up. Her coach had told her to wait and count to seven. "Four, three, two, one," in her head, "Yeah ..." Reyer turned from the juror and escalated the questioning in time with his stride as Susan pulled her top further past where it naturally met, "Yeah ... Uh ..."*

*"He was at that point talking on the intercom to a resident whose voice you cannot confirm was a man's or a woman's, correct?" Reyer was now letting her have a smell. "Ms Bramley, is that correct?" Reyer nodded at the judge and lowered the tone. "Is that correct, Ms Bramley?"*

*"Yes," the woman clearly stated.*

*"Can you remember what he was saying?" Reyer continued to rush, willing the woman not to remember exactly what his client had said.*

*"He said, 'I'm on my way up'," she confirmed.*

*Reyer's body language continued to badger the witness, while his questioning remained civil in part and attacking when the judge jotted down his notes.*

*"Do you recall the number of the intercom he was talking on?" Reyer edged next to his new friend in the witness stand and acknowledged the judge.*

*"Yes. It was 701"*

*"And how can you be so sure that it was the resident of room 701 that my client was talking to?"*

*"I live in apartment 702 and I was naturally concerned about my mailbox, and so I made a special note of Mr Lazoo and the time," Susan concluded.*

*"No more questions, Your Honor." Reyer walked back to where he began, placing himself again in front of Juror Number Five and folding his arms. The judge waited for him to return to his place at the defense table. Susan Bramley looked to the judge and then to Shack. Reyer then sidled up, comfortable with his back blocking Juror Number Five, and added, "Oh – one more thing, Susan." He stopped, leaned forward, and said, "Your Honor, I apologize."*

*The judge looked down at him above the spectacles. "Go ahead, Mr Reyer. Time belongs to no one, not even you."*

*Reyer noticed Shack smirking for the second time in one session. He leaned his backside firmly against the front of the jury box. Juror Number Five wanted to see around him, but could only fold and unfold his arms.*

*"Did you hear any knocking that morning on the windows of your apartment?" Reyer breathed his work.*

*Susan sat back into the seat. "Actually, just before I left my apartment – I thought I was imagining it"*

*"Imagining what?" Reyer casually inquired, aware that Shack was close to objecting.*

*"Imagining I was hearing knocking," the now confused witness admitted.*

*"No more questions, Your Honor, but I would like to recall the witness later." Genesis smoothed her dress down, her handbag in her lap. The contents felt heavy as she put her hand on it. The lady next to her looked at her and down at her own purse. The back of Lazoo's head had healed; she never did get to ask him how it had happened. The heads of the three women behind Lazoo came together. Lazoo's neck movements said for Genesis what his ears blocked.*

*Reyer pushed a picture in that day's Times in front of Lazoo. The picture was of Jimmy and Lazoo, with Lazoo holding a joint. The doors opened and Jimmy Afra's blonde fro made its way through the courtroom to the witness stand. Three-inch platforms, flares waving, shirt open to abandon, albatross collars spanned over the lapels of the custom-designed Charley Stevensen seventies jacket. An acquaintance of the accused, called by the prosecution, Jimmy looked at Lazoo, who looked as he had since the beginning of the trial – unperturbed, unpopular, and unpretentious.*

*Shack unbuttoned his jacket. Reyer looked at Juror Number Five, whose arms now unfolded. He kept at the juror till Juror Eleven, a thirty-something columnist with brunette brows and strawberry blonde hair, and Juror Number Twelve, a twenty-something security guard from the Bronx, noticed him.*

*Shack knew that with the tripwire of those occupying the underbelly of society was their lack of respect for authority. A confident hoodlum is a trigger-happy delinquent. "Jimmy – can we call you Jimmy?" Shack stood in the centre of the space provided by the architect.*

*Jimmy, on the witness stand, felt like commenting on Susan Bramley's wide ass that had warmed the seat he now narrowly occupied. He noticed the juror in a pink woolen top and scarf around her neck and light lipstick, Juror Number Eight. No longer cold, he wanted to comment on her, too. The judge leaned over to see more of the witness than the top of his fly fluff. Reyer looked at Lazoo. Lazoo just turned his neck, and then his*

*head refused to follow.*

*"Yeah, you can call me Jimmy." The fro nodded once. Shack stayed put.*

*"Jimmy, you heard Susan Bramley testify this morning that she saw and heard the accused talking to the occupant of apartment 701 over the intercom in the foyer of Sil House at 6:55 on the morning of the murders?"*

*"Yeah, I heard – as it pleases Your Honors." Jimmy tilted the fro back to see the judge looking down on him. He lifted one brow at Reyer, winked at Juror Number Eight, then back to Shack, unimpressed. The judge let Shack go.*

*"Mr Afra, I'd like to point out that you are here as a witness for the state, what you have to say is recorded. What you do is answer the questions, nothing more nothing less!" Jack remained centre stage.*

*"Mr Afra what did you do leading up to that conversation with the accused?"*

*Jimmy, now confused, said, "I was actually outside writing poetry and smoking a cigarette, but if that's what she said, then that's what she said." Jimmy winked at the court clerk, earning himself a laugh from the gallery.*

*Shack walked straight, and at him, and when his arms held either side of the witness stand, asked, "Where do you live?"*

*Jimmy grabbed the open shirt with his left hand and kept grabbing till he found an edge of it that wanted to come. "Sil House, level seven, apartment 701."*

*Reyer and Lazoo looked the same way. The dialogue was as predictable as the way to and from the witness stand. Shack sat down. Genesis smoothed her dress and ensured her bag was in between her legs.*

*"Jimmy, have you ever been diagnosed with a mental disorder of any sort?" Reyer asked.*

*Jimmy was quiet.*

*Shack turned to look at where the shot was fired from.*

*The judge looked at Jimmy looking up at him and told him time was up.*

*Looking at the jurors, Reyer said, "Your Honor, we'd like to be able to recall this witness, also."*

*Outside the media were waiting. As Lazoo passed Genesis he said softly, "Call me. I got an idea."*

*Genesis put on her Ray-Bans and slid them all the way down to cover her eyes.*

*Reyer was already standing on the top step when Shack arrived, not as tall as before, eyes showing a bit of puffiness, but he stepped down two steps and then a further two. Lazoo then appeared at the top of the steps. He accidentally started in the direction where Jack's voice was prevalent, then noticed the mob where Reyer was further toward the bottom. Lazoo got in between four reporters. On recognizing him, they moved back, but still took pictures and asked the obvious.*

*Someone pushed him and growled, "You're a dead man, Lazoo." The push nearly caused him to lose balance, but it also allowed him to catch a glimpse of her heels making their way down the stairs. He found his feet*

*with mikes in his face, even though he said nothing. Reyer was in control of the 20-step wave carrying them. Someone else snarled, "If they don't kill you, Lazoo, we fucking will."*

*Reyer said, "The state has a story, and that story is wrong. They have witnesses who are mentally ill and who will lie under oath. Tell me, could one man commit these murders on his own?" Shack could hear him, and that was all that mattered. Lazoo's head came up through the wave; he caught her lifting her left heel into the car.*

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*Reyer sounded the same on the phone, in the club, and in court. He could not yet tell whether it was a good thing or not. "Day off – maybe rest of the week off, John. Jurors Five, Eleven and Twelve gone. It's a pity, as we did okay yesterday – but not to worry. By the time we present our case the jury would have settled, hopefully for good."*

*Lazoo had waited by the phone all night and now it seemed like all day.*

*The phone did not ring for that day. He sat, he stood, he mulled over the events thus far and he created for himself a monologue he had not verbalized, but had developed and had stirred for a while now. If he were to escape the story which had hampered him successfully – note, he told himself, hampered, not trapped – he would seek a power above himself, above the little he knew and beyond the pictures he drew. He would read words; he would find the essence of his being. Being this, being that, being himself above all else, he thought, and if repentance were a word that he knew or his limited vocabulary housed, he would adopt that approach and repent his transgressions.*

*Then, of course, if he had absolute power he would give Genisis, before she was conceived, altruistic love and acceptance of his kind, or, more specifically, him, John Lazoo! Genisis must love Lazoo after the desperation had gone, after the stakes became nil – just Lazoo, just Genisis, somewhere far away, quiet, calm, where the wind whistles between weeping trees and the sun shines to dry the wet winter willow.*

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*He stood in the center of the auditorium in white overalls. He had splashed red, yellow, and blue paint about his baggy white garment. "I would like to redecorate the walls of Manhattan's most exclusive salon of love," said Lazoo, his hands tied behind his back by Cleopatra.*

*Clariss, with his left hand swinging his mallet around in the air, called out, "And for what peculiar and, I do not doubt, spectacular reason do you seek to labor amongst chemicals?"*

*Lazoo stretched his neck from side to side and replied, "Beautification by color is just the surface on which I slide. Beneath that lies a layer of torment of dedication to one woman, as in due course, and if the court permits me to bravely forecast, I will take the hand of one Genisis Jones and lead her from this story to an altar far from the lenses and roving eyes and growing appetites of the viewers the editors seek to please by the manipulation of a love so pure." He stretched his neck again.*

*Lunch was served and still Lazoo strove further, looking for the ideal deal. "Look," he said, "for – for hell or for Satan, if you believe in that fool, all I want is 48 hours."*

*Clariss cut meat and looked at Lazoo's untouched food. "For the rules, Lazoo, every time a rule is broken, two rules are established for the sake of the one rule broken. What are the regulars going to say, John?"*

*Lazoo drank his coffee. "We'll send the girls to them for two nights at double the fee."*

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*Lazoo mixed equal amounts of blue and red, achieving a dark purple for the lounging area by adding four cups of cut peppercorns to the final mix. On his own as he waited for his assistant to show in her overalls, sleeves rolled up, to help and to talk to, he rolled the walls with extra-wide rollers. When he had covered that room he moved to the kitchen. Using mostly blue, a cup of yellow, and a bucket of icing sugar, he brought up the kitchen clean, light, and larger than before, but there was still no Genisis. As he mixed equal yellow and red, and then added a quarter cup of lavender to the deep orange, the phone rang. On the third ring, as he finished wiping his hands clean of paint, the phone stopped.*

*The office became orange, with a hint of lavender. He stood in the brilliant kitchen studying the cheese platter and the two wine glasses he had filled halfway between half and full, but still no Genisis. He could feel the sun coming up. Saturday morning was there, and still no Genisis. Four painters in black overalls, with three black compressors, had arrived. They mixed their one and only color, black, in a large cauldron in the middle of the lounge.*

*Some auditorium jurors had watched all night, others were fresh from breakfast. Others, with blankets in tow, swapped seats and got ready with cereal, coffee, beer, and drugs. Lazoo walked through the brothel; there was nothing much he could do.*

*Clariss cleared his throat and instructed the jurors with his thoughts. "Watch to see misguided energy. His missile flew beneath radar till now, exposed and alone. Lazoo thought, but I think. In the now I live. There, that second then, that's where Lazoo stands. While here now we watch this second here we make real what he makes-believe!"*

*The middle screen showed Lazoo, his overalls just the effect he had personally added for Clariss's sake, but otherwise clean. The painters in black, now with their black masks up and black goggles down, their spray guns testing the air, sprayed a black mist into the atmosphere. Lazoo could only look. The phone rang. It stopped on the third ring. Lazoo had not bothered. The ring in the auditorium rang in the ears of the jurors.*

*They fired test shots onto a white card, then set the spray guns to work ruining and covering his work. The spraying and the intermittent chugging of the compressor engines filled the brothel with an industrial funk. Lazoo put on brave face to bear the downgrade Clariss had promised.*

*Some of the jurors pulled their blankets close, others wished for her to appear, but in the middle screen Lazoo walked alone down a sheet that covered the narrow hallway's carpet. The platter, wine bottle, and glasses were black, as was every inch uncovered by drop sheets. Stop jolted those in limbo in between here or there. Lazoo was above the compressor, and the one wall facing Genisis' desk in the office was left orange. Lazoo walked to the wall and did an about-face. Facing them, filling the middle screen, the painters looked at each other, two androids programmed in one language. The jurors, too, looked at each other. Clariss's tight lips tightened. Lazoo, head straight, hands beside his sides, shoulders square, went go. The screen blackened. Lazoo's skin was black, the painters taking great care to ensure that Lazoo was part of that wall forever.*

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*Janine said, "Now that you don't shower before dinner anymore, young man, I truly do hope that when you are on your own you discover the simple pleasures of water on your skin."*

*"I like showering in the morning, Mom," James answered. "It makes me ready for the kids and teachers at school."*

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*Lazoo turned on the shower built for two. He closed the glass door and sat on the toilet lid to watch the steam fill the glass stall before he could recollect, let alone fathom, the events of the night. He stood up and walked over to the stall, reopened the door, and turned on the other shower head so the two gold attachments guided evenly dispersed water to the middle of the stall, where the sprinkled water accumulated for a moment and then rotated universally into the gold filter – within the time it had taken him to swing the wooden chair*

*through the air and lay it hard across the back of Mr Businessman, within the ten minutes that it had taken Clariss to blacken his entire world.*

*Water on his skin felt good. He knew it didn't clean him completely, but while he was in the stall it was all that was happening. Nothing else happened in that space, just water on his skin, water that was hot, water that was cold, water that could be put to the back of the scene, that unselfishly allowed for the sun outside to shine, water that warmed him when the water outside hit him in the face from angles forced by gale winds, just like the paint from the spray guns.*

*"Every day John, every day, you show me love, John!"*

*He dried himself. The message deserved a smile, but he did not know its origins. He knew her voice, but her body was where? He trusted that Clariss would not underestimate him and what he would do if her body was not well and her eyes and mouth not smiling and uttering, "I love you, John".*

*He saw a picture of Genesis at the newsstand; he refused to recognize the words. He walked with his head down, his third eye and ears worked wildly as he navigated the sidewalk his boot kicked. The elevator opened. He hated the music from the apartment as he approached it.*

*"Come in." Reyer was smart and casual, Shack was a figure in the corner he refused to look at. Women were also there. Lazoo stood on the balcony, cigarette lit. Reyer closed the door on the unwanted and surprised guests. Reyer offered a beer, and had a scotch for himself.*

*Lazoo refused the beer, saying, "Coffee, Gene."*

*The lawyer retreated. A figure was behind him. Lazoo saw a shadow to his left as he leaned over the railing, watching the park from Reyer's perspective. The shadow grew larger as it stepped closer. Lazoo said, "Fuck off," and the shadow turned and walked back to where it came from.*

*Reyer handed him the coffee. He placed it on the table next to the railing and went to close the door, which Reyer had left ajar. Reyer said, "He's gone now." Lazoo looked from his coffee. "They're both gone now, John."*

*The door opened. A blonde, sassy, classy, and in red, but trashy all the same to Lazoo, walked to Reyer's side and leaned her elbow on his shoulder.*

*Lazoo said, "Fuck off."*

*Reyer looked at her and said, "You heard him."*

*The blonde, trained in cool and taught to tease, bent down to where Lazoo's head faced the ground and to his left. Reyer sipped his scotch. The blonde waited till Lazoo told her, "I said, fuck off." She pulled the mini down as far possible and sauntered, as paid, back to where she came from.*

*"She needed her mother, John." Reyer provided the explanation as he emptied the remains of his glass. "What's Jack going to do? She's next on their list."*

*Lazoo stood and looked out at the same space he looked at before. "I'll have that beer now, Gene."*

*Reyer left him alone again.*

## Dancing with the freaks

*Genesis felt encompassed by the American quilt and some hot chocolate, the quilt about her legs and the chocolate and heat around her nostrils. Lazoo was there on TV. Her mother was in her chair. Her father sat with the leg rest of his small couch out, his heavy legs lazy to the right, where his slippers' toes pointed.*

*Lazoo did a look. Lazoo made a move. Lazoo had to be, had to be, had to be cool, be just cool, be cool, just be, just be cool. He also had to be careful, dutiful, responsible, and somehow find the time to be beautiful. "Wow, John! How you going to do this?"*

*Lazoo was now dancing with the freaks. "You're better here, now, babe."*

*Genesis's mother had tried to reach her, but the distance and the way she had arranged the room meant that her touch would never have reached her daughter, so she took it back and put it back in her lap. The bus ride home was a blur. The world just whirled. Lazoo passed and passed again with his smile, his kind heart, his strong shoulders, his seven going on eleven behaviors. "Wow, John – you've opened the door, now, no limits. Your infiltration is immaculate. Now, get out of there, please!"*

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*Shack's profile, Reyer's profile, the judge's glasses, and the jurors faced Lazoo front on. The auditorium jurors – three secretaries, three pool boys, three church goers, and three Lazoo's – saw the other side of his face for the first time. The witness lists altered and passed through many hands till the judge chose to agree.*

*The expert witness and his profile of John Lazoo was perfect. Michael and Shugit remembered their lines for the media feeds; the press releases were word-perfect.*

*The judge announced the end of another day's testimony. The trial in its entirety was going fifty-fifty, and sat perfectly poised. The analysts and anchor people cast light and little doubt over the daily activities of an American courtroom and its workers, hard at work bringing home a verdict that the people wanted, a verdict that would put to sleep the insomniac of ideas. Without remorse, without alibi, and without burden. Being also, really, without stakes, but having everything to lose and a doorway that moved its handle from minute to minute, Lazoo watched for the perfect opening, the gap.*

*"When I see a gap, I take it," was something from the younger, cockier, and more arrogant Lazoo, whom he recognized as he drank coffee with his lawyer. Lazoo had to absorb his disgust and exhale it in smoke. He also had to conceal his contempt for their ways. As he found out on reaching there, "The whole thing is rigged, already."*

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*Genesis felt the trees and the weight of their leaves, the trees being ready to shed those leaves for yet another year. Their orange color lighted the narrow street she walked down in the afternoon sun. She'd left the total burden back in New York, but the weight of his work's images and words and music was everywhere she turned. A bus ride provided a mere second of reprieve, as she now believed the story and took ownership of her part in the real-life drama she also co-wrote. Dinner was a balanced meal with three glasses of water. It waited for her on her return from the small park where all the swings were taken and where young mothers and nice dads pushed and guided their young.*

*"How was your walk, darling?" Her mother passed her a plate of steamed vegetables.*

*"It was the same as yesterday's walk, Mother."*

*Her father, with one eye on the TV, said, "The prosecution have finished their case – defense's turn now."*

*Genesis had started on her food, so her mouth was conveniently full, "Mmm ..."*

*Her father reached for the remote and switched off the evening news. She smiled a kind thank-you. Her mother reached her hand and this time grabbed it. It was still holding a fork, but lay still and flat on the table.*

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*He smiled at the jurors only with his eyes, staying tight-lipped about anything remotely open and humorous about the whole thing unfolding in front his eyes and ears. The same way as the viewers at home and in the auditorium found their daily bread and ate, he waited for the jurors to be seated before he counted the eggs. Five white and open now, Eleven and Twelve white also. The shadow had completed his task.*

*Reyer, in grey again, began as Shack dared not look his way. The man making his way to the witness stand without a briefcase was also in grey. The seams of his trousers were still symmetric, meeting his expectations. Lazoo could see the tall gentleman's knees above the witness stand's front. His wife was there in support, sitting next to a mother three rows back. Lazoo turned before the judge would wait no longer for Reyer's opening lines for the day.*

*"T.S. Smith, please tell the court why John Lazoo hit you across the back with a chair."*

*Clariss stared above the noise from his jurors. The middle screen displayed for him the irony of the real chairman whom Lazoo had displaced and thereby won his loyalty. If it were not for Lazoo's charm and smile, the walking twist, Mr Businessman, the jealous husband of Mrs X, T.S. Smith would have met with death on the night he wielded a gun through Clariss's fine eatery. There would have been no Lazoo; there would have been no FBI sniffing around the gates of his estate. Clariss, however, had forgotten that someone had tried to kill him once the grey suit had fallen into a heap on his office floor. He counted till floats of less than \$2,000. Once he laid eyes on John Lazoo standing there with a chair and his life handed back to him. Clariss knew.*

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*Genesis ate her apple and read her book, her parents being out for the day. Mrs X and Zarrah Keller smoothed the fronts of their clothing the same way. With one eye on the TV and one ear in her book, she pressed on with fiction to displace the story being pushed into her parents' home.*

*Shack stood four steps down from the head of the courthouse steps, where Reyer beamed a smile and a quote for the next day. "It's a foregone conclusion, ladies and gentlemen," he announced, "but the process is of utmost importance. It will define this case and how we have shown beyond reasonable doubt that John Lazoo cannot be proven guilty."*

*Lazoo showed no support for his lawyer's arrogance, and remembered to remind him that there were no winners in that game, just those who get caught, those who forget what the truth is, and those who feed the greed channeled by the cables that lay around their feet. He wished his lawyer's foot would find one of those cables as he quickly made his way down the steps.*

*Reyer's body language was fluent and flashy as he extended an arm to pull up his sleeves naturally, then did the same with his other arm. Rested, Lazoo had plenty of energy as he allowed Reyer to know where he's at. "Gene," he asked, "do you know the difference between good fortune, good genes, and someone else's misfortune?"*

*Reyer's real thoughts of his client showed in the way he wiped the corners of his mouth with the linen napkin as he tried to stare at Lazoo, but he gave up immediately.*

*Lazoo grabbed his hand. "Gene, a manicure for your hands would not be the same if there were no thumb to paint, polish, or buff." Slowly and methodically, Lazoo studied his counsel's fingers.*

---

*Genesis and her parents ate breakfast while the radio updated events overnight.*

*"So, dear," said her mother, "when are you going to move your things?"*

*Genesis held her spoon where it was till she realized she needed cereal in it. "I'll wait until the court case is over. Then I'll arrange for the stuff to be packed."*

*Her mother smiled at her sensible plan and her father agreed with her mother, holding her hand on the table. It lay without a spoon. Her dad nodded as the radio reminded them of the situation.*

---

*Lazoo stood in the middle of the auditorium. Cleopatra was ready to tie his hands with her piece of string where they remained clasping each other. Jimmy, Michael, and Shugit, the only jurors allowed in the closed courtroom, lounged in their dull-black suits. Lazoo, all in black and all in Charley Stevonsen, was alone in the middle. Clariss waved Cleopatra away as she looked up at him from around Lazoo's back. She wound the string around her own hands and quickly found an exit, all the while holding together the split that went all the way up her gown.*

*"Someone must surely pay, Mr Clariss, your honor," said Lazoo. "Must pay, must pay, must pay, they. Whoever they may be they must pay. Seven mothers mourn; love has escaped again. Blood that is linked to deceit must not dry but drain from one's veins. Who must that be?"*

*Clariss held up his hand to three who wanted to speak out of turn and said, "Wait to speak. In time there will be space to speak when a question mark presents that opportunity. Then, without further ado, much to do about an answer, you will do. But, till then, silence in sealing and silence in waiting and silence in studying for when one must speak."*

*Jimmy, Shugit, and Michael sat back.*

*Reyer waited for the little boy who wanted to see if he could beat a car to cross the road and step in between two cars traveling at 20 to 25 miles an hour, quicker than most humans. He said, "No, not today." He made his lawyer wait as he made his way to where the rest of them waited.*

*Breakfast was quick and quiet. "Shugit's up tomorrow," Lazoo reminded Reyer.*

*"I know that, John!" Reyer was just as blunt, and annoyed at being reminded. He was concerned that the illiterate had decided to read into what had already been written.*

*Lazoo finished breakfast, paid the waitress, and left without uttering a word more.*

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*The lock turned and the musty smell had settled there now. He opened windows and found enough coffee and sugar and smoked thoughts while he listened and decided on what he learned so far.*

*"If thoughts were unique to an individual," Lazoo said, "then each individual would have to be unique for any of their thoughts to be a unique thought. But uniqueness is hard to come by. Clariss is definitely not unique. In his world made from money, money made his world go square, tri-oblong, and shapeless. Stained by characters with a weak dye of insecurities casting a washed-up brown that some burned-out, drug-dependent, agency-hack graffiti artist had urinated over a canvas which Clariss thought would become a masterpiece that he would hang from a wall somewhere inside his compound. If Clariss thought he was the target of a sting, then so shall his brain be stung. If Clariss thought that he had found love on the one-way street on which he followed the footsteps of Lazoo, only to find that Lazoo had in hand the hand of Ms Jones and nothing else in his pocket but that woman's heart, so would he travel a street to his demise and eventual defeat if chose not to retreat.*

*"A sacrificial lamb! In offering to whom?, he asked. For there was no god asking or whispering to the boss of this clan, asking that its people show remorse and appreciation for their daily manna and burning incense while the burned flesh of animals stank beneath an almighty power that asked for the death of one so a few*

*more could consume and assume the immortality that awaits when the lights truly dim. Clariss could think through the penile head of his lust and Reyer could make friends with a Negro to suffice the inadequacies his Anglo-Saxon blood. They lack compassion flowing in their cold veins, feeding his book-read brain. Shack could pretend black is beautiful, but the paintbrush which faked the dread's bristles was hardening and its strokes were marred by clumps of the same hate the white spaces evenly disguised.*

*"And the media. The fireman who drowned his victims while putting out the fire. He came to put out the fire, to rescue people. Yes he caught the fire, but continued to hose the place down till he drowned the people he came to save with his camera.*

*"And then Lazoo. Almost an anagram for loser, given to him at birth."*

*Lazoo waited no noise. Lazoo waited no noise, but there was Reyer, the judge, Shack, the jurors, the heated courtroom, the cameras, their lighting, and Jimmy, Michael, and Simon in quick succession.*

*Reyer nailed the one and only question now. "Who are you employed by? ... Let me put it this way, do you receive, or have you ever received, money from Hariss Clariss? ... Have you ever met Hariss Clariss?"*

*"I wrote some stuff for the guy, so yeah, I suppose ..."*

*"Yep."*

*"I have to. I run Sil House."*

*Shack did not come out onto the steps, but the crews followed him. Reyer held court on the top step. With a solemn smile he turned to Lazoo and said, "There is more to this case than that which the cameras catch. However, our judicial system and the law on which it's based, plus the thought processes of twelve people from our community, are the two factors on which I place all trust and hope for a verdict that is just."*

---

*Lazoo spoke at breakfast.*

*They were in the final days. Genesis hired a moving company to bring her things back home and away from there. The help-wanted column was not bright and brimming with exciting opportunities, but normal and reflecting the local economy and the realities of suburbia. She circled openings with a pencil, highlighted possibilities in yellow, and checked off probabilities in someone's ink.*

*Shugit threw his right arm forward, shook his head, made faces like a horse while making noises like a race horse that had just run his last race.*

*The auditorium, absorbed in Clariss's darkness, was quiet. The jury box had been ripped out overnight and replaced by a twelve-story-high grandstand. All the spectators were in black, with black baseball caps. They all wore dark glasses that flashed a red light in each eye every time a heart rate succumbed to pressure, these devices being connected to nodes on each soldier's neck and wrist by black wire.*

*Lazoo was also all in black. He kept his shades on as the guard waved a metal detector in front of him.*

*Shack's and two other pairs of hands lay on their table. The jurors were rejuvenated by the energy injected through Reyer's quick-fire dismissal of witnesses and experts, all organized and led by Assistant DA Shack. They were fooled and disoriented by Reyer, whose compass was pointing to a true north, magnetic, sometimes magnificent, at other times woeful to the discerning eye and the trained ear of purists of the written word and of spoken English, never mind if it were the queens or the owner of the plantation who first signed a writ, writing the worth of a soul.*

*Lazoo's hands were the only pair on the defense table. They were stretched, the furious five exclaimed tension and then eased to comfort to announce relax.*

*The auditorium was darker and more welcoming of a devil trying to summon itself. Cleopatra had a test batch of black valium dipped in aniseed and mortal oil on her tray, marked "I" beneath a brown head, unknown to the naked mind. The red eye in each of the sunglasses flashed, as Clariss allowed, but the chill pills he administered to the 144 seated would kill any frill that beckoned to bone a heart. The grandstand, black from the bottom to the top, was a human sculpture that defined the essence of a character who through history has outlived the subjects it has worshipped, such as the crowds of the coliseums, the crowds that lined roads where someone, a man called, a man so brave, walked to free Christianity, the crowds of Woodstock, and the crowd in the auditorium and its ruler Clariss, who referred to them as his.*

*Lazoo looked as if he had looked at Shugit for a moment. Shugit smiled as if to say, "Did you see that? He looked at me," but the camera back on Lazoo said, "No, he hadn't."*

*Reyer waited for Shugit's flight of fantasy as Lazoo reached for water. Jurors number Five, Eleven, and Twelve, and now also jurors Two and Four, all white, all felt parched in the throat, dry in the mouth, and the need to wet a whistle that could be blown soon.*

*"My water." Before any order from the judge, before a question from Mr Reyer, Shugit opened with an impromptu and uncouth, "My water." The judge asked a poorly paid Court Officer to fetch water. Lazoo leaned toward Reyer and whispered, "Remind them of whose time Shugit's wasting and remind Shugit that water will only save a thirsty man from dehydration," while the Court Officer delivered a pitcher to the witness stand. Shack looked on and Lazoo looked across Reyer's chest.*

*Reyer was in the middle. The last of the red eyes in the grandstand flashed. Clariss saw off its little light, the last in the middle of the stand, with a glance, and when it was truly black Reyer began. "Jenkins Simpson, the jurors have given their time to serve their community, and you have made time in your life to stand as a witness in a trial that is about to end. Yet you feel the need to entertain yourself at the cost of the taxpayers' time, and possibly the life of my client."*

*Shack's objection was timely and assisted in getting the jury to gel. The foreman began nodding his head as Reyer came closer to the witness stand. Lazoo looked straight ahead, a nose in front, but his face void to avoid detection. The auditorium was black. The middle screen showed Lazoo, the left and right screens Reyer and Shugit.*

*"Seven mothers mourn."*

*Reyer looked at his client, but he was still straight ahead.*

---

*Genesis tipped the oven tray to slide cookies into a towel-lined basket, her ear to the radio and eyes looking out to the back yard. Her father swept leaves as her mother picked rotten pieces of fruit from their resting places.*

---

*Beads of sweat had already formed on Shugit's brow. His eyes drooped. The courtroom darkened for him like a winter afternoon in a dark nightmare. The judge, also knowing without proof what took place, asked Shugit if he wanted to go home till the next morning.*

---

*Clariss felt cold. He tried getting in touch with Jenkins Simpson, the late Shugit. Clariss felt like praying, but to whom? Lazoo drank coffee. Shugit was a no-show. Reyer went down the road, up the steps, and into the judge's chambers. Facing Shack, he fought hard to keep the momentum going.*

*In the auditorium, with emergency lighting only, rows of twelve sat in front of the grandstand. They were caped in see-through plastic to cover the black uniforms; their heads were being shaved to rid them of any interference that might congest the connection that Clariss was paranoid. He was losing.*

---

*Genesis read her book and felt the force of an amusement park ride inside the mind of a convicted lunatic who articulated mundane everyday life, easy and edible like sucking a lollipop. She read it through again, and this time she felt the love of an illiterate that surpassed all words written and possible endings to be applied, as she hoped that this would be the last day.*

---

*Clariss pressed the up button in the only place where he could be seen without hearing them. The glass elevator took him up for the fortieth time that morning. Michael and Jimmy, heads bald, argued as they watched the figure of Clariss rise in the glass box and come back down to the ground and up again.*

---

*Lazoo stood up from the cafe table as he saw Reyer stand ready to jaywalk. He walked to where he would run to through the screech of tires, twenty of them from five cars. The front two, from his left and right, faced sideways. The media caught the moment and applied headlines and captions. All his lawyer had was a right hand to his right and a "Sorry!" he issued to the angry and abusive drivers, who shouted, "Should have fucking run you over!"*

*Lazoo stood on the spot and shook his head.*

*"What the fuck would have happened if you got hit?" Reyer shivered as they headed back to the cafe. "You'd have to kill all the world then, John." He was annoyed at his client's insensitivity. "The judge has let us recall Susan Bramley," Reyer let out only after he took his coffee and a cigarette for his nerves.*

---

*Cleopatra said, "The judge has let them go ahead with the last witness," into her walkie-talkie. The emergency lighting, weak and only adequate in the case of a true blackout, became weaker as the siren sounded and red lights threw ray after ray around the walls of the auditorium. Clariss, in the glass box, shut his eyes tight. The lines around his eyes, creased skin running back towards his ears covered by long, grey hair, deepened and then straightened as he strained to bring back what never existed outside of his head. In the middle screen Lazoo stretched his neck once, put his chin forward, took a deep drag off a cigarette, the burning nicotine rapidly assisted by the saltpeter of death-painted paper. Clariss clenched his fists. Lazoo blew a repellent. The visual of the elevator mid-way to the ground came first, then came the blast of the glass showering shaved heads that raised their arms to receive the omen that they had prayed for.*

*Clariss was finally seated. He's needed assistance to guide him out of the elevator through the auditorium and to his worthless throne. Four soldiers, heads shaven and mouths shut, dragged the overweight, cumbersome, and loathsome arms and body of Clariss with little care. Their hands pinched fat, and all he could do was ache. Once seated, Cleopatra slid a smaller tray of candy he needed in front of him. His head back, he popped pills with water, requiring a woman to hold the glass to his lips. Once ingested, the blood carried the molecular messages to pods in the far reaches of a body wasted and weak. Then it contorted and hardened one more time – maybe the last, who knows? Who cared, but for the message to counter the linear focus Lazoo had set long before Clariss's heart beat another borrowed beat? Cleopatra brought a cordless microphone to him.*

*"I said," he announced, "but now I say, he will not look after you. For if he were of love of the things we grew, he would have grown fond of the matte black I pretend to paint, which is in fact of white, like the atmosphere chills steam for the beautification of a winter time in snow. In the arms of the chair we thought he would end, for his evil mind there it should fry. But a lie, a lie, here, there, everywhere, he placed doubt in outer space that the evaporating waters that cover the face of the earth rained down on the plains of a desert. He seeks for self alone, and in a vehicle built for one, you the ones I love, in his small canister you never will fit, even if he permitted you entrance. My loved ones, believe to obey a voice you hear, not a face that chills suns and their*



*suns. Drink me and take pill two on it his face. Drink me and take pill two. From it we erase his face; inside us we kill his face."*

*Cleopatra's tray was mounted with pill two.*

---

*Genesis looked and jotted the bus departure and arrival times at Grand Central down in her diary. She pushed back her already-tied hair as she confirmed the bus for the coming Monday at the counter. She accepted sympathetic touches on her arm as she took coffee and cake at the diner. She sat down and thought things through to that point. She read and understood as the owner turned down the TV on its arm in the far corner just below the ceiling.*

---

*"Bonjour."*

*"Hvat laver du?"*

*"Ni Hao!"*

*"Hallo hoe gaat het?"*

*"Guten tag!"*

*"Huete alles okay?"*

*"Geia sou Aloha kahiaka. Pehea 'oe?"*

*Clariss said to himself, unaffected by pill two, "Language, language, language! Looks like they speak a tongue each for the scattered blood they poisoned Lazoo's blood with."*

*His soldiers sat in the grandstand as ordered, but their tongues wagged worlds apart. His educated ear noted French, Danish, Chinese, Dutch, German, and Greek, then Polynesia came of age, "Talofa." The soldiers became a murmuring of mother tongues and he could not stop it, so he ordered the volume up.*

---

*Lazoo had his hands ready. Reyer was there in a moment and Shack assumed his identity one last time as all jury members uncrossed their arms and legs. The girl who wanted to travel pulled back her already-straight hair. The foreman looked across each chest in his row and then along the faces of the six in the back row and nodded "Yes" to the judge.*

*Susan Bramley was there for the second time, her seat already warmed up. The minor delays gave her reason to be uneasy in the witness stand so she found all areas of her chair, she continued to touch her nails and not touch, pick and not pick.*

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*The auditorium calmed itself down, the greetings and the replies clashing. They returned to familiar pronunciations to rectify the babble, such as, "Fuck, man," "Just yeah," "Okay," "Okay," and "Okay!"*

---

*Reyer took his jacket off. "Susan, do you live at Sil House?"*

*Susan Bramley stopped touching her fingers. "Yes."*

*"Sil House, where Jimmy Afra, Michael Haze ..."*

*Shack objected, but enough had been said.*

*"You're a nurse? Ms Bramley?"*

*"Yes."*

*Reyer undid a cufflink and gave it to Lazoo, who wasn't ready but made it look as if he were. Reyer rolled one sleeve up. "How many days off work have you taken in the last twenty years?"*

*The 24-year-old single woman said, "One."*

*Another cufflink came off and another sleeve got rolled up. Reyer's last line was, "What day was that, Ms Susan Bramley?"*

*Now tangled in her fingers, she answered. "That day. The day of the murders, huh? July the seventh."*

*Shack had only one place in his mind. Lazoo looked straight ahead.*

*Genesis squeezed both legs together on the rusty swing. Too cold that day for the kiddies, she blew cold air.*

*Reyer rolled down his right sleeve and then the left one in the middle of the courtroom. The jurors took a good look at him. Then the Assistant DA, not wanting to meet their shocked faces, looked to Reyer. The jurors looked to the judge.*

---

*Clariss's left hand shook. Cleopatra placed her hand there and pulled two more pieces of candy from her bra. The soldiers were sober. The little matter left in their heads from the effects of pill two met and made sense. The moment when truth and untruth morphed arrived, causing the pillars that supported the courtroom to sway from the bolder of the evils that had just hit it, at speed, with metaphoric proportions of devastation on the proceedings. The ever-twisting line of the plot the least of the concerns. The masses were stunned.*

*Wearing surgical gloves, white overalls, and masks, they carefully lifted the shriveled body of Shugit, Jenkins Simpson, from the cold, red bath.*

---

*Reyer stood on the top step. Shack stood on the same step, back to back. Lazoo, his head down, was the only other person in that circle.*

*"Tomorrow's closing will be a spectacle," Reyer told the media. "You will see the best from Jack Shack. Me, I will be there to close this case so the police can focus on finding who did commit these murders."*

*Lazoo saw Susan Bramley off from a distance as she boarded a cab.*

*"Bonjour."*

*"Hvat laver du?"*

*"Ni Hao!"*

*"Hallo hoe gaat het?"*

*"Guten tag!"*

*"Heute alles okay?"*

*"Geia sou Aloha kahiaka. Pehea 'oe?"*

*"Talofa"*

**CHAPTER 12**

## In Closing

*The stereo responded to the button Lazoo pushed. Now he knew what a system meant, what it could do, and what it could deliver. He used method in the way he moved to ready himself for the last day. Freedom awaited. He must find the real Genesis, thinking, "Stay alive! I will find you!" He had to meet the last of the Mohicans and paint his face finger-red and run like a wild symbol, do whatever the one to scalp all scalps would tell him. Like the mirror said, "Stay alive! I will find you!" Lazoo pushed forward, his Italian shoes polished, his manner unknown, unpredictable, cagey, cold, hot for her.*

*Genesis listed an inventory of her belongings as she dreaded facing the New York streets again. The morning TV anchor people looked like they came up from the cereal box she tipped sideways into a bowl. Their voices crackled, then popped as she stopped their next lines, exercising her vote by turning the power button to off.*

*Lazoo wore boots, as the shoes did not fit. No matter how hard he paced they stretched neither here nor there to let his feet breathe. They elevated a heel for feel as he stepped down from a taxicab. The lady cab driver was hard and had little to say to a villain in a million-dollar mood.*

*Stripped naked, the 570-something limbs met in their crotches, their elbows touching, finding something above the hum and the visuals the screen streamed into them. Their necks were sore. Clariss sat as he starved them of their final pill. It was an all-night vigil in the memory of Jenkins "Shugit" Simpson, he told them, and then they cried from sleep-deprivation and humiliation, just because they were born to bare their genes on the outside.*

---

*Reyer watched as Shack put on his last performance. He wanted to offer his condolences then, but he thought it would be more appropriate that he offer it after the jury delivered its verdict.*

*Lazoo looked at Shack, no longer amazed at the man's ability to offer false hope knowingly to people via his billboards and thirty-second spots. He just looked at him.*

*Shack lifted a lip, his glory, his x-factor, and he knew he had earned his seat. Jack Frost was unperturbed by Lazoo's fearsome focus.*

*The jury was out and seated. The foreman looked along the two lines of chests, chins, and laps, all open, although their minds were now closed, before the clownish lawyers set mockery once again upon the documented covenant, a derivative of two tablets already smashed before they ever found their feet at the foot of a mount in a desert. This law, from a book bound and rebound, was translated and trivialized by falsehood and its hoods who wear the hats of prophets yet speak crap on streets, not knowing they crucified Jesus.*

*Reyer sneered, as the more evil of the two clowns. The judge was just a timid ringmaster, his whip limp, his wrist broken, his glasses fogged from smog exhausted by these two engines of a devil.*

*Shack opened the jacket of his suit, in reverse of etiquette, as he made his final stand. "Calculating, ladies and gentlemen. My colleague Gene Reyner is the best there is in this business. Only the best in this business could blur your vision of justice and offer up some crazed evil character that exists in Lazoo's mind to take your mind away from the murders which his client is charged with."*

*Lazoo knew water, felt fury, and drank hastily not to miss the next lie. He would keep all of them to justify the wrath he will demonstrate at the conclusion of their stint.*

*"But please let me remind you," Shack continued. "a thug is a thug. And if you return from your task with a verdict that sets this thug free I will not sleep, and I find it hard to imagine how you will. A world watches you twelve chosen people. They watch and look for role models that haven't forgotten what our responsibility to tomorrow's children is, to build for them a place where calculating thugs do not walk among us, you and them. Susan Bramley was not paid a cent for her word and testimony. John Lazoo's testimony cost him two hundred thousand dollars."*

---

*The grandstand was a blur. It moved as it shivered. Clariss waved away the cry for food and clothing.*

*"Mr Hariss they need their clothes," Cleopatra stood next to him. "They'll wear their clothes once the jury deliberates. Food and wine will chute down their gobs of holes on the delivery of a verdict, will fatten them one more time, as Lazoo, an evil in boots, their blood on his hands, will be here to claim his just desserts."*

*Reyer knew how well Shack had almost closed the gate. He used the silence he needed. The Judge intervened at the 30-second mark.*

*Reyer considered how he could've gotten the case thrown out at depositions or how he could've appealed to Clariss to offer up a plan B. His considerations formed the thin sheet of ice upon which he could no longer fall back. He had to bring this one home as planned for his memoirs.*

*Reyer looked around the courtroom. He nodded to the judge as he told him to move along, to Shack, to the jurors, and then to Lazoo, who asked him to come down for one last word before he closed with his words.*

*Reyer bent down to his client, and Lazoo said to him, "Seven mothers mourn, so your hands are bloodied. In my will you die. Speak well, for these are your last words!"*

*"Members of the jury, if I had contested your selection I would know all your names. But I didn't. If I had tried to manufacture evidence we would still be watching people on the witness stand being manipulated by my colleague and myself. Yes, manipulated. A harsh word for what we do as lawyers, but a true description of our trade. I ask you, please, look at what has been presented by the prosecution, and then remember the facts with your minds. This process is designed to bring forth the facts. The fact is that my client should not be here on trial, as he was not present at the time these murders were committed. The final fact is, as people with families, please assist my friend the Assistant DA and this community in the process of finding who the murderers are. That is your job, ladies and gentlemen. Locking up Lazoo may allow you to sleep tonight, but shutting your eyes to the facts will not remove the glaring constant from your mind: Yes, Lazoo is a thug, and yes, I am paid to be calculating, but the person or persons who committed these murders are vile, evil devils personified. I thank you for your time."*

*Reyer watched from his seat as the judge gave final directions to the jury before they began their deliberations. Like-minded, they moved together as a herd. The foreman, an African American man, was a leader by choice of the lower to middle-class jury. There would be no fighting. Shack had selected the voice of the people and Reyner had given them their only vision.*

---

*"Let us pray." The ring formed immediately around the oblong of the table, down this side, that side, then this side, and last but not least that side. The foreman copied a line from each minister in his life, saying, "And forgive those who trespass." The black woman said, "Amen".*

*The airy ambience was broken by a police siren; the snare kicked with every second kick, "I'll be wrapped ..." The long table was lined with smiles and bare breasts next to bare pecs beneath the long hair on the boys and the shaved heads of the select, next to the cropped hair of girl look-alikes. Cleopatra led the procession. Clariss was above, riding on twelve inflamed shoulders of his soldiers. The 24 legs stepped right now, to avoid an oak tree. The Gauls stood and held animal meat towards him, and he gagged at the smell. His throne*

*rode upon his shield. That night the fires in the garden paradise burned and burned the faces of the select and the numbers laughed as they kissed good bye to the ones who missed out all night long, the ones "... around my finger," who would be left behind come the verdict.*

*The jurors stood around in the room where they had their morning coffee break, lunch, dinner, and time in the morning before moving into the other room where they put their heads together. The foreman above, but only just, the other eleven said, "If we were to finish tonight, maybe around six, and then be back here Monday morning at nine, that'll give us plenty of time and all of Sunday with our families. How does that sound?"*

*The Times Square crowd moved away and to its lefts and rights as Lazoo walked through space to the street, past the homeless. He patted a horse and smelled the coffee the uniformed officer held away from him, wishing he had a cup.*

*Genesis held her coffee close, and when she had finished with it she swapped it for her juice.*

*Lazoo looked through the window, the lights out. The swing door to the kitchen of Sil House cafe still swung. He felt where he used to sit. His face had a shadow cast down it as his hand shielded the area above his right eye to see inside the closed cafe. The security camera gave the shot little contrast in black, white, and shades of grey. Lazoo looked in on old haunts on the middle screen. Workers and builders were busy transforming the auditorium. Clariss was on the ground level in the middle, where Lazoo would stand in a matter of hours. Clariss watched him closely.*

*Sunday's highlight was the light, but the shower head threw hot sparks on his back, chest, legs, arms, and face from the side. The sudden cold rush from the lone running tap made him moan as he took the late cold blast on the crown of his head and then the back of his neck. Out of the shower, he reached for the towel to dry himself, then went straight to bed before he felt cold again.*

*Genesis greeted Monday morning with a smile, as she witnessed the shower head begin her day again.*

*At the bus stop, the news was the same. It was "V Day", the day of the verdict. She boarded the bus, the African American bus driver's nose widened as he smiled and ushered her along with a "Have a good day." A little girl liked her immediately, but still liked the security of the seat in case the wind blew and Genesis's face changed. The girl's mother looked around to see who her daughter was now pestering with her little brown eyes and said, "Face this way," once she saw who it was. The little girl put her hands in her lap and faced the front.*

*The bus seemed to pull the crowds at the Greyhound stop in as it turned its big wheels into the curb. The orange-haired reporter spotted her and ran alongside the window, his crew in tow. A big monster was on the shoulder of a younger version of himself who followed in the freckled-faced footsteps of the known reporter.*

*Her head down, meager accessories dangled from the hand that covers the right side of her face. The reporter had shoved a microphone shoved at her left cheek. She was unsure whether to be concerned about the spit the last victim spat there or for her privacy having been invaded and then taken for good. A long, black limo stretched to that side of her, so she swapped hands holding her handbag and decided to salvage her pride and keep for herself what she had left.*

*Lazoo stepped extra wide yards wall-to-wall in the Italian shoes. In the end he sat on the corner of the bed and pulled on and then zipped up his country heels.*

*Genesis felt the chill as she reached the tenth step. She thought she saw his shadow still working diligently to left at the kitchen table when she opened the door and asked him, before he could smile at her, "How was your day, Hon?"*

*The cab was clean enough, so he boarded and said nothing. The questions from the driver were the ones he'd heard at the bar and at the newsstand. The driver's identification card was upside down. His dreadlocks smelt of incense and herb. Maybe he rubbed the shit together and then sprinkled it in his bath, Lazoo thought.*

*The place was open; the windows were wide open. The fridge was bare and some of the pictures on the wall were skewed, as if an earthquake had hit without devastating the site. A lone wine bottle stood in the middle of the room. Her pillow lay on top of the bed like she lay in bed. His pillow was still indented, but at the head of the bed. A pack of smokes lay on the windowsill near where he used to stand smoking ideas and blowing some sonnet into a night dark because the day was so bright.*

*The auditorium had been transformed. The chosen, carefully selected on trust fund credentials, wore glasses informing of each one's biorhythms. All blacked out, Cleopatra walked from the glass elevator with pill three, which was black. His head white, Clariss wept a while inside and prayed to the statue for forgiveness, then smiled and raved a little, "They will diminish for themselves him, his head, and its ranting."*

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*The courtroom was full. The news was that the jury had deliberated successfully and peacefully and had found verdict by 9:15, and that they would present a piece of paper with one or two words to the judge by 9:30. This inside information made more money for the guards than their salaries for the remainder of their natural working lives, plus their pensions.*

*Lazoo stepped down from the cab. The orange-haired reporter was in his face. He thought that maybe he could smash the orange mush with his forehead when he said, "Genesis is back town. You going to tell us how she got off the subpoena?"*

*Lazoo stretched his neck instead. He moved the reporter to the side with a stiff-arm, being careful not to push, but just to guide him that way.*

*Genesis sat with a cup of coffee, the last of the coffee she used.*

*Reyer looked at his client. Lazoo leaned forward and thought back without expression, without remorse, without alibi, and without burden. The jury foreman, who could have easily passed for Jack Shack's brother, lifted himself to his feet to deliver what his comrades had loaded upon his frail-looking shoulders.*

*The courtroom was packed. The TV channels were tuned in and front page spots had been reserved. We-the-jury\_, a moment in lives worldwide.*

Lazoo was on trial for seven murders that occurred in one apartment building – Sil House. The murders took place in upper Manhattan, and happened on the hour from one am till seven am on Monday, July the seventh, 1997, starting at level one and finishing on level seven. All the victims were men aged 27, 37, or 47. All the men's tongues had been cut out and swapped except one's. The murderer had gone to great lengths to sew in their new tongues, even opening up one poor guy's head from the right jaw so he could sew his new tongue to his swollen root.

The orange-haired reporter caught the "Fuck you." He smiled as he shook Reyer's hand, and then caught a second "Fuck you," with a brighter-than-the-sun smile for Shack. Lazoo's arrogance overshadowed that of Shack and Reyer. They shared some last-minute words, their handshakes the only touching moment the team shared as Lazoo left them on the stairs. The media let him through and went back to where the bullshit was predicable, at the top, with Shack and Reyer back to back.

The waiters at the bar were tall; the place where they put their hands when they served wine was on their butts. Lazoo sat at the bar, the TV wild with him. The regulars said nothing and the barman poured more. Upstairs, he had noticed and instantly remembered how he had left the windows to the apartment open. He

also noticed that the furnishings were gone, pulled down. He drank one more.

"Silence is a virtue," intoned Clariss, "and virtues if lost cannot be replaced. If we choose to pawn our power, silence, now at this crucial moment, the virtues of love and patience and others listed in script will surely follow the virtue of silence to the brokers who offer us money now for our goodness. Meanwhile, he sits upon evil and hopes he can drown in a bar downtown." He lifted his hand as the 288 red eyes in the grandstand flashed fire at the injustice served, at the ease with which Reyer had misled the world, and at Lazoo's exit to a bar somewhere, somehow, without facing the music, mayhem, or carrying on to martyrdom.

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The movers hurried to the corners of the rooms and collected all the boxes, all of them the right way up. Genesis felt for each box and reminded them, "Fragile – yes, fragile, guys." When they had taken all boxes the janitors moved in with their equipment. Genesis looked at the key to their apartment and closed her hand, making the key vanish.

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Lazoo moved on to tequila. He was now warmed up and ready to move, but his gut told him to stay put, so he looked at another dreadful shot of himself they had caught. He smiled to himself as he saw a couple of pictures shot by the orange-haired reporter, one of him and the one of Genesis when the reporter had first caught him outside and across the road from Genesis's white room. He looked at the key to his white room and put it back into his jacket pocket.

Six o'clock came and they flashed a visual, one without him at the top of the stairs along side those two, as the evening patrons came through the door. The media outside came to life as he paid the bartender his dues for the tab. His profile leaned onto the bar waiting for change. Genesis hovered her hand closely over the bar, the spills, and the coasters over the tops of them. She was slow to move to where he waited, and when she arrived he accepted the change and said, "Bottle of shard-ney, please, Sir," giving back the money. The bartender gave him back his change. He held it for a moment and remembered to put it away.

Pulling a seat back, he rushed around and finished the job. The waiter was about to put his hand behind his back when Lazoo said, "Take your hand off your cute butt and let me do your job, bro! Get lost," the excitement in his voice being something no one could cover. He took the bottle and put his hand on his behind. Genesis, far from smiling, let alone laughing, wished it was for real.

"My parents would like to meet you, John, if you feel like getting away from this?"

Lazoo contained excitement and his delight as he sat looking at her in front of him.

"If you want to touch my hand, John, just do it. You don't have to wait till a line comes that you can ride on – just do it. Here, look." Genesis took his hand with her right one, turned it over, and flopped it on her left one, "There – see, like that."

Lazoo caught the falling glass of wine that Genesis's theatricals had tipped almost clear of the table. It spilled a drop on the floor, but otherwise it was ready to be used instantly as Genesis put it to her lips.

Seven o'clock came and the patrons let Lazoo through to the bar now without notice. Genesis smiled when he returned with a beer, another bottle of wine, and nibbles. "How much does he owe you?" Lazoo asked, looking from his beer.

Genesis smarted, "Nothing, John!"

Lazoo noticed the irritation and wondered how much longer he could hold her there. "What time is your bus?"



Genesis took a nibble and a sip. "Could be a seat for two, John. You know that, huh?" Genesis was being careful not to let her hometown honesty be intoxicated by New York and Lazoo's charm.

The hand that handed him the beer belonged to her father. Her mother brought him one of his sweaters. He arrived with the suit that he'd worn to court. Genesis spoke quietly to her mother as she dried the dishes. The TV was showing Jimmy's mug shot profile, the shaved head much better than the white afro, Lazoo thought.

THE END

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For Lotte Stendorf Jensen

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