

Composition 1, Part 1

Chapter 1:

THIS ANTHOLOGIC LIFE

Last night, I had a dream. I'm walking alongside a row of parked cars in broad daylight, peering through each car's driver seat window as I pass by. This goes on for a while, and each time I think I'm at the final car, there is another one. I start to think that this will never end. It reminds me of how you can draw a circle on a piece of paper, and then put a dot anywhere on the circle and as you attempt to move away from the dot by traveling along the circle, you are actually moving closer to the dot.

As much as you want to escape from the dot, you are going to end up going right back to it. You might think that you are moving on from some horrible part or event in your life, but really you might just be ticking the time away for when you have to relive it. I keep thinking I'm at the end of this long row of parked cars, but I'm probably still at the beginning. Or back at the beginning all over again.

As I pass by each car, I see that every driver's seat is empty, but of course they are empty considering they are parked. Most people probably don't sit inside a parked car unless they are waiting for something, or in my case, someone. Every driver's seat is empty until I finally get to the car that's at the end of the row, the last car before you reach the intersection.

This car is also parked, but running, as if it is ready to stop living such an idle life, but at the same time too reluctant to do so. There is a man in the driver's seat, peering through the windshield of his car, watching all of the cars ahead drive by. Watching them as they pass by under the green light. Watching these cars as they serve their purpose, as they function properly.

As he turns his head to look at me, the day turns into night, and the face I thought he would have is nonexistent. He tells me that we can fool some of the people all of the time, maybe even all of the people some of the time, but we can never fool all of the people all of the time. That we can never fool ourselves no matter how deep inside our mind we think we are.

Before I could ask him what he meant, he was gone, but his car was still there, running. It then started to rain, and a storm immediately followed. I looked up at the rain and lightning, and then back down at the car, and now the driver door was open, as if the car was asking me to take the wheel. For some reason, I couldn't bring myself to sit in the driver's seat, and that's when I woke up.

After I wake up and think for a few seconds, I write down the dream in my composition notebook. I write down all of the dreams I can remember because I believe it's possible that the people we are in our dreams could be another us in another life spawned by the decisions we didn't make in this life. How different our life could have been and how different we could have been as a person if one little decision was altered.

In this life, I made the decision to go to college after high school for a couple of years, and I got what I needed to get to be successful. In a dream I had years ago, I was homeless. My assumption

on why I was homeless was because in that life, I made the decision to not go to college; an assumption based on the misconception that a formal education is necessary to be successful.

So much of a life altered by one single decision. I started to think, even believe, that our dreams show us who we could have been, for better or for worse, as opposed to who we are now. As opposed to this life we have chosen to lead. A portal to possibilities that's just barely out of our reach. Every now and then I ask myself if college was worth it, even though I'd end up losing my sanity, or if I'd have been better off homeless, and maybe at peace.

I close the notebook and put it back on the shelf. A shelf that holds hundreds of notebooks, all containing my other lives. My dreams. My complex. Somewhere along the road of parked cars, along the road of my life, I became aware of the psychological impact writing down these dreams had on me. Had for me. Writing down these short stories where I believed I was the main character. That the story being told was the story of my life. Finding so much meaning in a life drowned in meaningless. This purposeless life. A life with no driver. A life that never passed by under the green light. I try to trick my mind, I try to fool myself. This is me, walking down this long road of parked cars. This is me looking inside all of these cars, looking for a driver. Looking for a sign of life, but the only life I can find are in my dreams. In these notebooks filled with words, living my life vicariously through this strange fiction. I look at these notebooks, and I curse this addiction. This anthologic life.

For so long I have cursed this life, but in the end I can only come to accept it because I believe we all suffer from the anthology complex. We all compile these short stories that turn into fantasies. We all suffer from this condition where we live the life of someone else, the story of someone else, where we see ourselves as ourselves, but under a different persona. Sometimes this persona is a big change, or a slight change. It doesn't just come in the form of dreams, but in the form of fictional work.

We watch these movies and television shows and sometimes we see ourselves. Even if we don't realize it. We read these books and magazines, and sometimes we see ourselves. It comes in the form of art. We listen to these songs, and sometimes we hear ourselves. Sometimes we hear the stories of ourselves. We see these paintings, these photos, and sometimes we see ourselves. It comes in the form of thought. Sometimes we are sitting at home, or at work, or at school, and we begin to think, daydream even, of another life.

Our mind comes up with these people that we represent and these actions that we perform. Unfortunately, sometimes we know the version of us from the other life better than we know our true selves, and sometimes we like that person better, too.

I stare at the shelf, and I try to remember the driver's face, but he was faceless. I try to remember the sound of his voice, but all I can hear is the sound of mine. The problem with trying to remember a dream is that it's like a faded memory sometimes, and if enough time passes by, say a few years, it gets harder and harder to distinguish a memory from a dream. Reality from fiction.

Sometimes it can drive you crazy, but having an organized shelf of notebooks that can differ reality from fiction helps. Another thing about dreams and memories is that they can have very similar

properties. Usually in both our dreams and our memories, when we try to remember them, we see them in third person. In our dreams we aren't Jesus Christ, we are ourselves meeting Jesus Christ, and when we try to remember it, all we can see is ourselves meeting Jesus Christ.

I keep trying to remember his face, even though I know he has no face, and that's when I remembered that I had a dream in that same exact location a few months ago. I was in a helicopter, and the pilot was trying to land the helicopter on the same street I had been walking down in the dream I had last night.

The helicopter lands and there is a lifeless body on the sidewalk near the last car in the row of parked cars. The same last car I saw the driver in last night. I got out of the helicopter and kept trying to walk over to the dead body, but each time I got closer, it seemed like he went further away. It was as if the distance kept cutting itself in half, but I still could never reach him. Just barely out of my reach. After a long time of walking, I simply woke up. Sometimes dreams were weird like that; even though I had that dream in the past, the events in it happened after last night's dream.

That's what I believe anyway. That's what makes sense to me right now. And it's happened before. One time I had eight dreams where if I rearranged them in a chronological order that made logical sense, I could make a tale out of it. That's not to say the tale itself would make any sense. These eight dreams led me to believe that maybe individually, our dreams may seem random and irrelevant, but if we can remember these dreams, or write them down, and then put them in an order that made sense, we could see the many tales of our many lives.

Chapter 2:

THIEVES FROM NEW YORK

About a year ago, I had a dream. Dressed in a rich man's suit and tie, committing a poor man's crime. They put the money in a garbage bag that I supply because I threaten their existence. The funny thing is a third of them have probably never taken the time of day to ponder their existence. Sometimes I wonder if I've taken the time of day to ponder my own.

Is existence really that important? Is that life? Just merely existing. If you are in outer space, and you see a piece of rock in a stationary position, it will stay that way forever. If you see a piece of rock moving, it will continue moving at that same exact speed in that same exact direction forever.

This is true if no other forces are applied to the piece of rock; forces such as gravity, electromagnetism or friction. The piece of rock doesn't have a specific reason as to why it wants to stay stationary or why it wants to keep moving, it just does because it is. It's not waiting for something to come, it's not traveling because it needs to be somewhere. It just does because it is.

Applying this method of thought to the idea of why something that's living wants to stay alive is interesting. I'm holding a shotgun to this bank employee's head, and I'm wondering if she wants to stay alive simply because she is alive. What if she were dead? Would she want to stay dead simply because she is dead?

If she were happy, I'm sure she would want to stay happy. She probably actually would stay happy

until a force comes along, maybe a "force" such as disease, and the doctors tell her she has cancer. That happiness would be gone. She would stay depressed until another "force" came along.

They finish filling the garbage bag with money and I take it. Something so valuable placed in a garbage bag, there is something poetic about that, something symbolic. I run out of the bank and get into my partner's car. His hands are sweating, his face probably is too, and I'm the one who did all of the talking. We drive away with a garbage bag full of money, but we have no real intentions of spending the money on ourselves. He drives into a parking garage and we get out and look at the money. He takes off his sad theater mask and his suit jacket and tells me he doesn't know if he can keep doing this.

I ask him what he means. I knew exactly what he meant. He couldn't keep risking his life and freedom for other people, people he didn't even know. I tell him that there are way too many people suffering out there from poverty, from starvation, from whatever, simply because of this imbalance in the world. I wanted to tell him that he wasn't angry enough. That he didn't have enough hate in his heart. And then I wake up.

Some people die because of a lack of food, and others die because they have too much food. Starvation, obesity. If that's not imbalance, I'm not sure what is. Simple mathematics will tell you that if you have one apple on each end of a table, totaling up to two apples, and you take one apple from one end and put it alongside the other apple on the other end, you have subtracted one apple from one end and added an apple to the other end. I visualize what was once balance, but is now inequality. Imbalance.

There is probably enough food in the world to feed every mouth, but some mouths take more than they are welcome to. How can someone right this wrong? Do you steal that apple back, and bring it to the mouths that starve? Do you steal that money and give it to those who need it? Robin Hood would say yes. He would say you have to do the wrong thing for the right reason.

Earlier today I'm checking my mail, and I hear someone coming down the stairs. It's Mary, who lives in the apartment above me. She walks by and nods, and I nod back. She is walking so quickly that it's apparent that she's late for something, maybe work, maybe an appointment. I'm standing there with my mail in my hand, thinking to myself, realizing that almost every time I see Mary she is in some sort of hurry. A look in her eye that she may not accomplish what needs to be accomplished, and that scares her to death.

I start to wonder if she is always in a hurry because she wants to be in a hurry, like a piece of rock moving through outer space on some pointless voyage to nowhere. I start to think, are people the way they are simply because they are that way, and they want to stay that way. They want to keep being that way. If this is truth then that would mean, according to the aforementioned science, that people can never change. Not unless a force comes along and changes them. Maybe a force such as love, or hate.

Chapter 3:

SIXES AND SEVENS

There are those who will tell you that numbers, mathematics, have the potential to answer every

question there is out there. That if we can understand them, they will reveal the truth. Uncover something we have been looking for the answers to for so long. The problem is that mathematics alone is just numbers, formulas, equations. It's only when these numbers are applied to something that they have meaning, possible comprehension. It's when they are applied we have a science. Science, the language we can understand.

The apples on the table is simply one minus one gives you zero, or one plus one gives you two. However, when we apply the idea that this apple is being taken away from someone, that this person may starve and die, we understand what these two equations really mean.

A few nights ago I woke up at six a.m. because I had to go use the bathroom. I'm in there, relieving myself, when I hear someone yelling at someone else. At first I say to myself, "This early in the morning?" But then I start to listen, I even lift up my window a little bit so I can hear the words more clearly.

A man is yelling at a woman. He yells about how he is always late for work because she can't complete a simple task. On her end, all I can really hear is sobbing, but I can feel her regret. I close the window, flush the toilet and turn off the light as I exit, and I go back to sleep.

Last night, I had a dream where I woke up at seven a.m. because I needed something to eat. I go to the kitchen and make a less than desirable sandwich, and not a second after my first bite I hear someone talking to someone else. I put the sandwich down and out of curiosity I lift up the window a little bit so I can listen to what's being said. A man is talking to a woman. The man asks the woman if she got the car from the repair shop and brought it home last night. She says she forgot. The man comments on how she is always forgetful, and out of nowhere she rips into a furious rage.

She starts to yell as if she were bottling up so many years of regret inside herself. From what I could hear, the man didn't yell back, he just leaves for work. I close the window and leave the kitchen, forgetting about my sandwich. Forgetting about turning off the light. When I get back to my bed, there is a woman lying in it. I lay down next to her but I can't see who she is, and then I wake up.

I'm laying in bed this morning, and all I can think about is why I would have a dream about my discontented neighbors. I keep thinking about why they are so different in my dream than in real life. Probably the same people, but different actions and reactions to an event. I start to wonder if there is a mathematical formula out there that determines what kind of person someone will be. What kind of person someone is. How they will react to a certain event. Can I write down these two peoples' equations and finally understand, finally know who they truly are.

There is a man named Joe in my apartment building. He lives right across the hall from me. Sure, I can know Joe, but I can never really know Joe. I can know what he likes to watch on television, what he likes to eat for lunch, what type of women he prefers, but I can never truly know Joe. I can never truly know Joe the same way one person can never truly know another person.

But still, I wonder if there are a group of numbers I can apply to Joe's behavior, to Joe's habits, to find out who he is so I can truly know him. Just to understand Joe. And when I wonder that, I

wonder if I can find out who I truly am in the same sense. Just to understand myself.

I'm still laying in bed, and I start to think about the times that I woke up. Six, seven. Two different times, two different outcomes. Two different numbers, two different results. If I had waken up at five or eight how different would the outcome be? How different would the result be? I would probably be up too early to hear them or wake up too late and just miss them. I start to wonder if fate has anything to do with it. The objectivity of fate. Was I suppose to wake up at six in this life, and suppose to wake up at seven in the dream life?

I get up out of bed and go to the window to find it is raining extremely hard. I look down my street, down a row of parked cars, and even further down I look, and I see an intersection. I look down even further, and I see the next set of parked cars. I ask myself how much longer this can go on. How much longer it can go on.

Chapter 4:

THE BEFORELIFE

I take a composition notebook down from the shelf and I flip to a random page. I find a dream that I had in January of last year. In the dream I'm at a funeral for someone, I couldn't really tell who. There are many people around, some that I know, some that I don't know. Most that I don't know.

We are all just standing there, no one is crying. There is so much mystery surrounding death; almost anyone will wonder where we go after we die, if anywhere. Despite the fact that in most religions the forthcoming idea is incorrect, I'll say that many groups of people believe that if you are a good person, you will go to a good place when you die, and if you are a bad person, you will go to a bad place.

This creates a sort of judgmental role to be taken place in the afterlife, and gives birth to the concept that we as human beings are split up in death. Depending on the judgment, some of us are sent to a good place and some of us to the bad place. Furthermore, if there is an afterlife, and there is a nowlife, it is perfectly logical to assume that there is a beforelife, our existence before we are sent here, to this life. The question that must be asked is if we are judged when we are in the process of moving from the nowlife to the afterlife, why aren't we judged or split up when we are moving from the beforelife to the nowlife.

If we assume that there are good people and bad people in this world, then judgment and separation is absent and from our basis this would be incorrect. If we assume that there are only good people or only bad people in this world, then perhaps we were actually separated when departing from the beforelife. The only problem is that it may be impossible for we as human beings to ever know what is truly good and what is truly bad.

I try to be a good person. I try to be a decent person. I follow the instructions in life. Stop at red. Don't hit your sister. Go to college. I do all of these things, I follow the instructions word for word, but in the end I get nothing for my obedience. Well I guess I do get something, I get to lose my mind. I get to conform and lose my mind just like most of the other people who follow the instructions.

After I went to college, after I got what I needed to be successful, there was still a chance that I could end up homeless. The truth of the matter is that a formal education is not the only thing to consider. So instead of becoming homeless I become aware, and that's what eats away at you the most, that's what makes you lose it. Becoming aware of human nature. Sometimes I wonder if it would pay to be bad. To not follow instructions. To pass red lights.

I put the notebook back in its spot, and I go into the kitchen. As I pass by I notice that the garbage can is empty. Empty garbage bag. I stop and stare into it. Eventually I start daydreaming about the garbage bag being filled with those notebooks that I keep. Maybe I want to get rid of this addiction. Maybe I need to. Before the next thought can come through I hear something bang the wall near my door.

Well, at first I'm not sure if I heard anything, so I wait for a few seconds and then I can hear people talking. "Move it to the right." I go to my door and look through the peephole. This fisheye view.

I can hear people but I can't see them, so I open the door and I see two men moving furniture into the apartment next to Joe's. I go to my window and look outside, I was right, there are people moving into the building. I'm looking at the rear of the moving truck to see what's inside, and then I see a tiny woman get out of the passenger side of the truck. I didn't really notice it at first because she's wearing a long dress, but she has a prosthetic leg. She has a fake leg because somewhere along the road her real leg must've been taken away from her, by something or maybe someone.

I ask myself, what would I do if I lost a leg, I try to figure out how angry I would be. How angry I would be at myself and the world. I try to figure out how much of a disadvantage someone like her is at, and how much stronger she has to be because of it. How much bitter. Not too long after I see two kids get out of the same side. They all go to the rear of the truck and begin to grab things and help bring them inside into their new apartment.

I run back to the peephole and see all three of them as they walk past with these things in their hands, I can hear the woman who I assume is their mother telling them a joke. I know the joke, but when I first heard it a long time ago, it didn't make me laugh. When she's done, I can hear the kids laughing. The joke still doesn't make me laugh, what makes me laugh are the laughing kids. That high pitched fast paced laugh that kids have. It's not until we get older that this laugh becomes low and drawn out. Trying to figure out when it's appropriate to laugh and when it's not.

The moving goes on for some time, and then I hear the truck engine start. I go to the window and I see the truck sitting there, but running. It sits there for a few minutes, and I look around trying to figure out where the two men are. Where the family is.

Finally I see the two men walking from the front door of the apartment building and they enter the truck. As they are driving away I can hear someone walking through the hallway. I run to the door and I look through the peephole and I see the woman walking by. I hear a door open, and then a door shut, and then silence. Silence. Silence. And then I hear a door open again and I look through my peephole. I hear footsteps, but I see nothing. Nothing. Nothing. And then I see that yellow dress and the tiny body inside it.

She's standing in front of Joe's door, as if she is going to knock on it. I can only see her backside, but I know that her face is full of some kind of confusion. She waits there, just stands there, for at least a minute before she finally knocks. An extremely soft knock, as if she was sorry to bother whoever lived there. That tells me that she either doesn't know Joe or that she is afraid of Joe.

There is no answer to her knock. She knocks a little bit harder this time, but she still gets no answer. Joe must not be home. Where would a person like Joe be? It's not enough to not know who Joe is, but what would Joe be doing right now. Maybe Joe can be defined by where he goes and what he does when he gets there. I'm standing here thinking about Joe and suddenly this lady in yellow turns around, looks at my door and walks a bit closer. That slight limp.

I feel the center of my chest clutch and I back away from the peephole. I just stand there in front of the door, knowing that I will hear a knock soon. Soon. Soon. The knock comes. I start to wonder what this woman could possibly want with me. Perhaps she knows Joe, but I'm certain she doesn't know me. Not literally or philosophically.

I open the door and I'm staring down at this smiling woman. I can do nothing else but smile back. She greets me and tells me she just moved into the building. I welcome her. Then she goes on to tell me that there was one small problem with the move. I ask her what that problem is, and she tells me that the moving men didn't put the children's television in their room, and that the cabinet that they were suppose to put it on is pretty high. That the television weighs a ton.

I put two and two together, simple mathematics, and I realize that she is going to ask me if I could move the television to the correct room. The television isn't too big, but it has one of those huge backs, and that's what makes it so heavy.

I'm picking it up from the ground, and when I look up I see her on the other side of the television ready to help. She tells me I can't have all of the fun. We lift it up and I tell her to lead the way. We put the television on the high cabinet, and the kids cheer. They turn on the television and begin to watch. She gives me her thanks, and says now that the kids are occupied it was time for her to start fixing and organizing every thing in the apartment.

I left and returned to my apartment. Before, when we were walking to her apartment to move the television, she laughed and said it was too bad that there wasn't a man in the house, and then she laughed again. Despite the laughs, I could hear that sound of regret in her voice.

That makes me wonder if she is taking care of the two children alone, that the person she was with either died or walked out on them. It makes me think, how could someone so small have so much inner strength. Enough inner strength to tell jokes despite all of the bad in the world. It makes me wonder if I could ever be that strong. That good.

Chapter 5:

SUICIDALLY INCORRECT

Two nights ago, I had a dream. There's a man looking at me, talking to me, but I can't hear what he's saying. He keeps talking and talking and talking, on and on and on and I'm just sitting there pretending I can hear him. Soon after I find myself walking down this dark hallway. The hallway is

so dark that I can't even see the walls. The man who was speaking to me before is walking with me, still going on and on. After a while I start to hear him, and I realize it's my father's voice. I'm walking down this long dark hallway listening to my father preach about something.

After a while I start to listen to what he is saying, and I end up realizing that he is talking about how someone came up with a theory that suicide may have no resolution to the person who commits it. He tells me that to understand the suicide theory, I have to first understand this other theory, this circular theory.

He says that the circular theory proclaims that this conversation we are having now has happened before, and that it will happen again. That it cycles on forever. That every single thing that happens has happened before, and will without a doubt happen again. Then he goes on to tell me about the suicide theory, he says that this other man says that if the circular theory is true, then committing suicide has no real value or resolution because you will end up committing suicide in every life.

John Doe is born. John Doe lives with the monkey on his back his entire life and then he pulls the trigger and commits suicide. John Doe is dead. John Doe is born. John Doe lives with the monkey on his back his entire life and then he pulls the trigger and commits suicide. John Doe is dead. John Doe is born. John Doe lives with the monkey on his back his entire life and then he pulls the trigger and commits suicide. John Doe is dead.

I guess you can make someone think twice about committing suicide by telling them this, and then asking them if they really want to be John Doe. Or Jane Doe. Do they really want to be the person who kills themselves every time? Then again I guess it wouldn't matter what you say to them, because regardless of what you say it's already been determined what they will do. But then again maybe it's what you said that saved them in the first place, or maybe it's what you didn't say that made them kill themselves.

My father stops talking, and now we are just walking. I start to see a light at the end of the hallway, and soon after the light hits me like a right hook. A gust of wind blows my way, and I hear chopping sounds. Before my father and I stands a loud helicopter. He starts to walk while I'm still standing there, and then he looks back and he asks me what I'm waiting for. And then I wake up.

I start to think about my father and his fight with cancer. I think about how he barely spoke a word to anyone while he was laying there breathing his last breaths, his days numbered. I think about how every time I would look at him I'd see that regretful facial expression.

His look makes me think of all the people who lay on their deathbed regretting the lives they led. His look gets me to believe that there are really only two ways out of life, that you leave either unsatisfied or dissatisfied. That you leave either wanting more time or you leave cursing the life you led. That there are people who go through life not questioning a single thing, just doing things the right way, and it goes with the saying that ignorance is bliss.

Maybe these people are happy in their lives, maybe they aren't, but when they are laying on their deathbed they start to think maybe they should have questioned more things in life. That they should have tried to be more curious. Unsatisfied.

Then there are the people who question every single little thing, the people who are trying to reinvent the way to live life. The people who are searching for the meaning of life. Maybe these people are happy in their lives, maybe they aren't, but when they are laying on their deathbed they start to think maybe they shouldn't have been so ambitious in their life. That they should have just enjoyed the simple things that came their way. Dissatisfied.

Then of course there are the people who don't see their deaths coming. When my father died, it's hard to say whether he was unsatisfied or dissatisfied with his life, or if he even cared to be either.

I start to think about what I'm thinking about, and I think to myself that I sometimes have such a negative way of thinking. How depressed do you have to be to believe that these are the only ways you can feel when you walk through the exit door. Surely there are some people who actually pass away happily. Maybe. I hope.

Chapter 6:

DREAMLESS IDENTITY

The phone is ringing. I hate that sound. I pick it up to make it stop and I say hello. The hospital is calling me telling me that Joe has been injured. I wonder why they are calling me and not someone who actually knows Joe, in the literal sense of course. Why not someone like his parents or his siblings.

Later, when I get to the hospital I find out that I am listed on his emergency contact information. I've maybe talked to Joe a total of four times, but I guess he finds that enough for me to be concerned for him when his health isn't at one hundred percent. They also tell me that they tried calling the first two names on the emergency contact information, but no one picked up.

They take me to his room, thinking I am some sort of close friend to Joe. When I get there he is sleeping, they tell me that he is in a coma. I ask them how he got hurt and they tell me that he was in a car accident. I ask about the other people who were in the accident, and they tell me they are fine. I tell you they could have chosen to send me to Joe or to the other person involved in the accident and it wouldn't have mattered which one I got, because I don't know any of these people.

I sit on the chair next to Joe and I take a deep look at his face, his still, lifeless face. Then I take a deep look at his entire body. I know this man's name, I know the color of his skin, I know his gender, I know which part of town he lives in and I know where he grew up. I know his favorite baseball team and which celebrity he would love to spend a night with. I know all of these things but the true character behind this man remains a mystery.

Knowing the physical attributes and the environment in which Joe resides in is almost helpless when trying to figure out who he is. This probably applies to anyone. Everyone.

You may feel as if you know me, or at least know a part of me, but you don't even know my name. You don't know what race I am. You don't even know if I am a male or a female. Throughout my one sided discourse with you, I have not stated the answers to any of these things, but still, you may feel as if you know me. That would mean you don't know that close friend of yours so well because

you know their skin color or their gender, but because of something else.

I look at Joe and then I look at his monitor. All those numbers that represent how alive he is. Or if you are that type of person, how dead he is. I start to wonder, if Joe died right now, how would he leave the world. Unsatisfied? Dissatisfied? Satisfied? I look at this man and I try to guess what he is dreaming about. If he's even dreaming at all.

Regardless of what he is dreaming about, I know that when he wakes up, if he wakes up, he won't remember the dream for too long. He won't write it down and look for some meaning to it. I know that if Joe doesn't die a satisfied man, he will at least die an unsatisfied man. Not a dissatisfied man. And for that, I envy him.

Chapter 7:

THIS BLOOD STAINS

What exactly is insanity? How do you determine if someone is insane or not? Is it by their thoughts? Is it by their actions?

If we consider thoughts; while someone may think "I'm gonna kill that person" after the bagger bags their groceries improperly, that doesn't mean the person that thinks that will actually kill the person who bagged improperly. Having the sense to not commit the action of murdering another person, to not turn these thoughts into actions, it must keep this person on the sane side. So thoughts alone can't determine if a person is insane.

If we consider actions; if someone jumps out of a five story window for no particular reason we can assume they are a bit crazy. A bit insane. If someone jumps out of that same window because the building is on fire, this is perfectly logical assuming there are no other solutions. In both of the window-jumping examples, the action is exactly the same but it's the reasoning, or the thoughts of the person, that help to determine if the person is sane or insane. So actions alone can't determine if a person is insane.

This morning, I had a dream. I'm carrying something heavy. Now I'm tying two things together. I finish tying, I was tying it to a chair. Now I'm taping something with duct tape. Now I'm tying something else to each other. Now I'm walking over to the light switch and I turn it on. I look down and I see a knife in my hand, it's sharp. I look over to what I was working on, and it's a man tied up to a chair, mouth taped.

His eyes are wide open now because the light woke him up and revealed me to him, just like it revealed him to me. I'm standing there staring at him, and he staring at me. I feel in my heart that I have to kill him. End his life. But when I look at his big eyes I feel as if I can't. Like I'm taking one step forward and two steps back in the process of killing this man.

Finally I decide that I'm not going to kill him. I start to think, I know that I won't kill him so what can I do now? Can I just let him go? Repercussions. I think for a while, and then I start to talk to him. I tell him that I can't bring myself to kill him, and that I want to make a deal. That if I let him go, he has to believe this never happened.

I tell him that if he tells a soul, I will haunt him and his family for the rest of his life. And then after he dies, I will continue to haunt anyone who is close to him and still living. I untie him, remove the tape and he is gone. The chair is empty. I sit on the chair and it hits me, I have to realize that I can't kill another person. I ask myself why? Why is it so hard? Stab, stab, stab, that's all it takes.

After a while of thinking, I figure it out. Why I couldn't kill him. I needed to start smaller. I needed to start with ants, and rats, and squirrels, and dogs, and cats, and horses, and elephants, and then people. It was a perfect and logical assumption. So that is exactly what I do. I find an ant pile and I kick it.

Soon after ants come roaring out of it. So many ants, so much to kill. I think to myself, step on that ant right there. Thought. And then I actually do it. Action. Step on that ant there. It's dead. Step on that one, too. It's dead. All of a sudden it becomes a game, and I'm winning; kill as many ants as you can.

Now I'm stepping on more than one ant at a time, smearing their black skin against the pavement. I start to laugh in my head. Kill that ant. Dead. Kill those ants. Dead. I set up a rat trap, premeditated murder. I'm getting better at this game. The rat is caught. I think, think, think to myself I should hit it with a bat. I get, get, get a bat and I stain its internal liquids against the concrete floor.

Then I start thinking, I should step it up a notch, and start digging up the graves of the dead and pretend to kill them, as if they were still alive. I think to myself, "maybe it's not homicide," but it's one step closer, and then I wake up. Maybe to determine if someone is insane, they need both the thoughts and the actions.

So many people are in love. Love is so common in so many lives, so much that it seems as if it is indefinable. So much that it seems too complex to ever really be understandable, or even be explained. But the fact of the matter is that love is simply just another emotional feeling. Like rage, like pride, love is simply a feeling. Love is a feeling just like the feeling you get after you kill something.

The same way a person searches for love, a person can search for that feeling you get after you've ended a life. Of course, that mysterious feeling is not common, like love, but both of these feelings are more than they appear to be when perceived by human beings. There are so many circumstances surrounding love, so many webs that love can be simple and complex at the same time.

I'm wide awake still laying in bed, and I look to my right and I see my composition notebook laying there as well with a pen on it. I keep it next to me so I can immediately write down the dream I have. I stare at this notebook, and I think to myself, this is my companion. I think to myself, it's sad, but I accept it. I take it, I open it and I start writing the dream down. "I'm carrying something heavy."

Chapter 8:

THE DOUBLE HELIX

Three years ago, I had this nightmare. I take off my happy theater mask and I look into his eyes. I start to look around and from my surroundings I can tell he's a politician. Eventually I can tell he's the mayor of a city. Eventually I can tell he's the mayor of New York City. I guess I already knew these things because they were part of the reason I was here. My partner asks me why I took off my mask and I tell him it's because I want him to see my face. I look into the eyes of the painting again. This is a painting of the mayor of New York City.

After a minute or two, we hear talking and footsteps, so my partner and I hide the best way we know how. The mayor walks into his office alone and he turns on the light, and then sits down in his seat. The seat of the mayor of New York City. I get out of my hiding spot and walk towards him, gun pointing at those eyes, and the entire time he is shouting with his arms in the air. My partner now gets out. I cock the shotgun and I aim. Then I shoot.

His painting of himself is ruined now, covered in blood. Who hangs a painting of themselves in their own room? The front door kicks open and shots are fired. My partner goes down, but not before he gets a few shots of his own in.

I take cover, and I see my partner laying on his back about four meters away from me. My heart is pounding. I don't know if it's because I just killed a powerful man or if it's because a close friend of mine is in danger. The pounding gets louder and louder until it finally wakes me up.

What does it take to truly change the way the world works? Do certain people have to die? Do certain people have to live? Someone said that the more things change, the more they stay the same. I could also kill the next mayor of New York City, and then the one after that and the one after that, but even though the people in this seat change, the seat itself never changes. The people change, but the seat stays the same. So the world and the way it works stays the same. Sometimes what seems like true change is actually just the process of repetition. The process of repetition.

A king named Solomon said that there is nothing new under the Sun, and this is probably true. Every day we wake up, we go through our day, and then we go to sleep, until we wake up the next day to do it all over again. Rinse and repeat. Every day the Sun comes up, and then the Sun goes down. We are born, we have children, and then we die. Our children are born, and they have their own children, and then they die. Our children's children are born, and they have children, and then they die. A way to keep our species alive in a never-changing world.

These thoughts reflect the image of the double helix; the name of the structure or form our DNA takes. Two perfect spirals that continually repeat themselves. Because DNA is almost the road map to life, it is sort of poetic that it would take the form of a repeating structure. The same repeating structure that is symbolic to the lives we live.

The same repeating structure that is symbolic to a world that will probably never change. A world that can't change. Maybe a world that doesn't need to be changed.

There is a story of a group of humans who could only live for six hours. In most cases these humans would only live to see a world with light or a world with darkness, but there were some lucky humans who saw the change from day to night, or from night to day, but they didn't know

what was happening. Unfortunately, before they could understand and document these changes and what was happening, they would die.

After a while, along came a human who could live for an entire week. This human saw changes from day to night and from night to day multiple times, and this human told the other humans that could only live for six hours that he or she could tell what was going to happen next.

So this human would tell the the other humans that soon there would be light, and while some humans died before then, the lucky ones saw this change and thought that this human who predicted this change was some sort of higher being, but eventually that human's week was over and he or she died.

After a while, along came a human who could live for years. This human experienced all the different seasons. This human understood the seasonal changes and the changes from day to night and night to day, and he or she documented and explained them.

Eventually this human told the other humans, who at the time could only live for a few months, that he or she could tell them what to prepare for next. So this human tells the other humans that snow and great cold is coming, and the ones who were lucky enough to last to see this change thought that this human was some sort of higher being.

Eventually this human died after living for so many years. After a very, very long time, along came a human who could live forever. After reading the documents and recordings of previous humans, he or she realized that every thing just repeats itself, even on the grandest scale. He or she saw the end, and then watched as the beginning started again. In this beginning, the human watched as these people who could only live for six hours were born, and then died.

Chapter 9:

THERAPEUTIC SILENCE

It's been a little over a week since Joe has been in a coma. By now I thought that he would have been out of it, but he's not. The people that work at the hospital tell me that he only has a few relatives, and that they can't reach most of them. The ones that they actually do get a hold of don't want to visit, either because they live too far away or they aren't that close to Joe. In the end I guess he is stuck with me.

I'm on my way out to go visit him, this will probably be my last visit. I hope it's my last visit. I hope he wakes up soon and returns to business as usual. I walk through the front door of my apartment building and I see the woman who just moved in kneeling on the ground. She's gardening.

She looks up at me and smiles, and that's when I immediately remember a dream I had of her a couple of nights ago. In the dream she is helping me with something, but I can't remember what. It's unfortunate that I can't remember some dreams that I have as well as others. Sometimes I wake up knowing I just had a dream, but I can't remember the dream for the life of me.

I'm standing there, looking at her with a weird expression on my face and trying to remember this dream, then her smile begins to slowly fade. She asks me if I'm okay, and I tell her I was fine. I tell

her it was weird to see her gardening because I had never seen anyone ever garden around an apartment building. I always thought that was done usually around houses or nice places. She gets up and she says to me, "Your home is your home." And slowly the smile grows back onto her face, and once again I can't do anything but smile back at her.

She's wearing a pair of jeans so I can't see her fake leg, but for a small amount of time I can't stop thinking about it. I didn't dare ask about it. She then starts to talk about how she didn't really introduce herself when I helped her move the television, and she tells me her name is Lynne. She tells me her kids' names are Sarah and David. A lovely family.

I asked her what kind of flowers she was planting, and she told me they were going to be zinnias. She told me it was going to be a shade garden. I didn't really know what she was talking about but I would find out when she was finished. A little while after talking, I see a woman walking her dog. She's walks in our direction as if she is going to enter our apartment building.

Lynne sees the lady a little after I do and she tells me it's her sister, Claire. Claire was coming over for dinner. Lynne introduces me to Claire, and then invites me over for dinner as well, but I tell her I have to meet a friend. Now across the street there is a man walking his dog. This man's dog and Claire's dog start barking at each other. Bark, bark, bark, it gets so annoying.

It starts to remind me of that terrible ringing sound. The phone ringing, ringing, ringing. Sometimes the ringing drives you so nuts you want to just break the phone and live the rest of your life in solitude. Bark, bark, bark. Now I want to kill the dogs. Stop barking. Lynne says goodbye to me, and she goes inside the building with Claire and her dog. The barking stops. I look at Lynne's work in progress and then leave.

The entire way to the hospital, on that dirty bus, I can't help but think if animals have souls. A lot of people say the difference between people and animals is that a person knows the difference between right and wrong. That people have a working moral compass. That people have a certain unexplainable bond with other life forms. But what about the dog that lays there next to its dead master, laying there with those eyes that want to cry. Laying there sad, and when it sees the person who killed its master, it begins to bark uncontrollably.

What about the goat and the horse that reside on the same farm who begin to go every where with each other, and begin to care for each other, so much that when one is sick the other stays by its side. What about the humans who hunt other humans. The sociopaths who kill for fun, for sport. The serial killers who show no remorse. What about the humans who strive to benefit financially off of wars that are unnecessary. Do they have any more of a soul than that dog, or that goat, or that horse?

I get to the hospital, and then to Joe's room and I sit on the chair. I think to myself, what's the point of this. It's not therapeutic for Joe. It does nothing for me. But still I sit, hoping that he will wake up so I don't have to come back here. I guess the only real reason I do it is because no one else has come to visit him.

How would it look if a man was never visited by anyone throughout the entire duration of his

hospitalization. At least when he wakes up, if he wakes up, he will owe me.

After a while I begin to remember the dream that I couldn't remember. Something happened to me and I went to Lynne for advice. She was able to comfort me, to help me with this problem I had. This internal struggle that keeps me prisoner. It was this strong woman in a tiny body. This woman who tells jokes and gives life to plants even though a part of her has been taken away, she guides me through this dark hallway with her slight limp and her bright yellow dress.

Chapter 10:

A GENETIC PEACE

Last evening, I had a dream. There's so much sand, and the Sun is so hot. So yellow. I'm walking through this desert, leaving behind a life I once led. Leaving behind people, leaving behind lifestyles and leaving behind addictions, maybe trying to find some form of peace somewhere overseas. I keep walking and walking until I see this big white house in the distance. A house that has no business being way out here in the desert.

I walk closer and I see a child digging behind the house. I go up to him and I look into the hole in the ground, it's a grave. He tells me he's burying his brother. His brother that looks as if he died of starvation.

Sometimes I wonder if people who die of starvation have that really horrible of a death. In order to feel hungry your brain has to tell you, it has to send messages back and forth and such, telling you it needs more food to be able to function properly. I would think that in order to send those messages, it takes energy, and to get energy you will need to eat or drink.

So if you are sitting there starving with no food to eat and no water to drink, will your brain eventually stop sending those messages because it has no energy to do so? If that's the case, you will stop feeling hungry, and then you will just die.

I'm watching this child bury his brother, and from around the corner I see an old man walking towards me. When he gets to me, he asks for water. Water for him and his family. I take off my backpack and I look inside, bottles of water. Bottles of water and loaves of bread. I look at the dead child in the sand grave, and I hand the man the contents of my backpack.

After, I take another look at the child in the sand grave. A closer look, and I realize that some of the sand is turning red, turning into blood. I assume they killed the child for a good reason, maybe he was dying from a disease with the help of malnutrition. They did the wrong thing for the right reason.

When a homicide is committed, a crime scene is set, but there is no crime scene set on a battlefield. All you can do is step over the body and go on. So that's what I did. I gave the family all of my food and water and I walked on. I continued to walk, searching for a peaceful place.

Eventually I got to a city, but it was so loud. People were talking so loudly, sometimes yelling at each other. It was too loud. Their voices were ringing. Their voices were barking. Eventually I was so annoyed by it that I woke up, and that's when I realized that people were arguing outside.

I go to the window and I see four people, Lynne, Claire, Mary and some man standing next to Mary. And then I see a man sitting in a tow truck in the distance. Mary is yelling at the top of her lungs at Lynne, and Lynne is yelling back. I hated to see Lynne get yelled at, but I hated to see her yell at someone even more. She was such a calm person. Such a nice person.

At first I decided to not get involved, to just watch from up here, but then the man standing next to Mary started to yell at Lynne. I grab a post-it note and a pen and I jot down the words "the sand grave" on it so I can remember the dream I just had, and then I go down there and I ask what the problem is. Mary turns to me and tells me that Claire parked in her parking space. I guess she was over for dinner again. Where's that stupid dog. Why would people cut each other's throats over a parking space.

It becomes obvious that Mary is so angry not because of the parking space, but because something has been bothering her. Maybe a relative died. Or maybe she is beginning to realize that being at the top of your class doesn't mean as much as she thinks it does. That you could still end up being a failure, and maybe even have a side of insanity along with it. Now she's taking her anger out on Lynne.

Lynne, she has no problem with moving the car but Mary is being so hysterical that Lynne feels she is being disrespected, and what was a small fixable problem now becomes unsolvable. Claire doesn't really have much to say, and the tow truck driver is just waiting for Lynne to move so he can tow the car if Claire doesn't move it.

Now this guy who is with Mary, I think she called him Paul, starts to yell at Lynne again, saying Mary needs her space and asks her to stop being an idiot. So much yelling.

While the yelling goes on, I'm staring at my empty parking spot. I don't have a car. I tell Lynne that her sister could park her car in my parking space, and the expression on all four of their faces become exactly the same, as if they are upset that they won't be able to argue anymore. Claire not as much, but she has a degree of it. So Claire gets in her car and parks in my spot, the tow truck driver leaves, and Mary parks her car in her own spot.

I walk with Lynne and Claire into the building and I tell Claire that I don't have a car, so when she comes to visit she can just park in my spot. Claire, the quiet unspoken one, she thanks me in a low voice. Her sister thanks me as well.

I have never seen Lynne like that, but then again I haven't known her for that long. It's like she became a different person altogether. Certain genes in our bodies can switch on and off. Some people are more prone to diabetes and other conditions or diseases than others because of a specific gene they may have. This gene may be in the off position, but certain circumstances can cause it to be turned on and your diabetes will be in full effect.

Sometimes I wonder if there is a gene for murder. A gene for hatred or anger. A gene for happiness or contentment. Maybe a gene even for love. And when a person murders another person, it was because their murder gene was on. When a person is in love with another person, it's because their love gene is on. When Lynne became a completely different person, I wonder if it was because her

anger gene was switched on and she was prone to anger.

On a grander scale, I wonder if every person in the world works this way. Do we do these things to each other, good or bad, because we are genetically programmed to do so? We are designed to react to a certain action? Someone starts yelling at you, and maybe your anger gene will turn on, or maybe your fear gene will turn on. In some cases, because people are so ridiculous, maybe your murder gene will turn on, simply because this person yelled at you. Now you have this murder disease. This human species at work.

When I was younger, I loved God, right now, I don't really care for God, and I'm sure when I am older, I will despise God.

Composition 1, Part 2

Chapter 11:

REALITY FROM FICTION

Years ago on a cold Saturday night, I had this dream. I was driving down this highway, no one else was on this long stretch of road. To the left and right of me were city buildings showing off their city's lights. For a while, I'm looking for something in the car while I'm driving. I check under the passenger's seat, I check the glove box, I check under the driver's seat and I check the seats behind me, but I can't find what I'm looking for.

Eventually I stop looking and I keep my eyes on the long stretch of road. Every once in a while I look out my window to look at the buildings and their lights. Full city, empty road. After so long, it becomes day and I find myself now driving down a road in the countryside, still no cars around me.

Soon after I feel the urge to use the bathroom, but there is nothing around. I pull over and I try to figure out what I'm going to do. There are no trees around, just fields of grass. What if someone drives by and sees me squatting down?

I figure I haven't seen anyone on the road so what are the chances someone will actually drive by and see me. Then I figure even better, and decide to just use my car as a tree, if someone does drive by they'll just see a parked car. Hopefully a cop doesn't come by. Before I go to do the deed, I look at the book on my dashboard, it's titled "Psychosis." I debate whether I should take it with me to read. I decide instead of reading I should just go without it and take the time to think.

Contrary to popular belief, most people don't take books or newspapers with them to the bathroom to read while they use the bathroom. People probably just sit there and think about things. Things they need to do, things they've done. The things that are going on in their life.

Sometimes I like to think people are more aware than they get credit for. A lot of the people I've talked to, sometimes I think they are just completely ignorant of everything, completely unaware of things that are happening in the world, but I know that in my mind they are not as ignorant of anything as I think they are.

People don't talk nearly as much as they think, and I believe spending time to think is the gateway

to awareness. Because people think more than they talk, I have to believe that they are aware of what goes on, and at the end of it all, as stupid as I think this person may be, I know in my mind that this person isn't as ignorant as I may think they are. The people who you have deemed as unintelligent, maybe they aren't as unintelligent as you think.

Time goes by and nothing comes out. Eventually I feel as if I don't really have to use the bathroom, so I get back in my car and I continue to drive down this stretch of road. After a while, I see traffic lights in the distance. At least I think I do. The closer I get, the more like traffic lights they look. And then I finally pass under it, and all of the lights are red. All three.

I start to wonder where I am. Then I start to think about my mother and how she was able to tolerate my father for as long as she did, and my mind freezes. I've been through this before, except it wasn't a dream, it was in real life. I was on the way to my father's funeral. I remember I had to drive from one part of the state to the other, and the entire time I was looking for a photograph of my mother to place in his coffin. Three nights before, I found the photograph and I put it somewhere in my car, but I couldn't remember where. I never found it.

So now I am aware I am dreaming because this has happened before. Lucid dreaming. I stop the car and get out of it. Before I can put two feet on the street it's night again and I'm in the city once more, standing in the middle of a highway. I look up and there is a billboard. On the billboard there is a photograph of a woman I used to know named Maria, and it says she is missing. The billboard asks me if I have seen her. Then I wake up.

Maria is a woman who I was once in love with. Or I should say I thought I was in love with. It wasn't until she left that I realized that a person like me wasn't designed to love. I could be friendly, helpful, kind, but loving someone was just something my brain never fully developed.

When it comes to love, there are some pieces of rock that are out there moving, searching for love, and then there are some rocks out there that are stationary, sitting there still just waiting for love to find them. Then there are rocks that stay stationary, but at the same time are in a way moving because they are rotating on their axis.

These rocks are not searching for love and they are not waiting for it, they are propelling any form of love that comes its way in the other direction. Sending it back where it came from.

For a while, Maria tolerated my insanity. Once upon a time I wasn't as organized as I was when it came to writing down my dreams. Sometimes I would just try to remember them in my head, or sometimes I would just write them on a random page in a random notebook.

The problem was when I tried to put some dreams in a logically chronological order, I had nothing to reference to. I could never find the dream I was looking for. My room would become messy because I would turn the room upside down searching for that dream I wrote down so long ago.

Or sometimes my head would hurt trying to remember every detail of that dream I had. It got really bad when I would mix up my dreams for real life memories or real life memories for dreams. I couldn't separate reality from fiction. The time came when Maria could no longer tolerate what I

had become, and she left. I can't say she left for that particular reason, there were times when I knew in my heart that I didn't have any feelings for her, and I knew she could tell, and I think that is the real reason why she left.

Regardless, I got my mind in order after she left and my strange obsession, my strange addiction, I was able to kick it. It was gone for a while, but like that dot on that circle, the further I got away from it the closer I was to reliving that obsession. A person can meet their destiny on the road they traveled to avoid it.

So eventually the addiction came back, stronger. I started to maintain better organization techniques this time so that what happened last time didn't happen again. So I wouldn't lose my mind again. I started to write down every dream in composition notebooks, and I had a shelf for all of these notebooks.

After a while I started to categorize and date the dreams. Soon after I started to title them as if they were short stories.

Chapter 12:

STRANGE DREAM, STRANGER LIFE

About twenty years ago, I had this dream. I'm sitting in a subway car across from this man. Now I don't look directly at this man, but I'm looking in his general direction and I just know that he is looking straight at me. After a long time I finally muster up enough courage to look at his face, but he isn't looking at me. I was wrong. Soon after this man starts to talk to me, and he tells me that I don't have any shoes on. I look down. He was right.

He takes off his shoes and he gives them to me, and I put them on. The subway train makes a stop, and I get off. As I step out of the subway car, I notice the entire platform is covered in green liquid, and the liquid is smoking. I see benches and other things being destroyed by this liquid, and I automatically assume it's some type of acid. In the distance I see another person step out of a subway car and they are barefoot.

As soon as their foot touches the platform, it burns away. Eventually their entire body burns away, but they don't scream. They don't make a sound. Then I look down at the green liquid I'm standing in, with these shoes I'm wearing that the man gave me, and I'm safe. The subway train starts up again and drives away, and I'm standing there wondering who that man was. Both literally and philosophically.

Last night I had a dream where I saw that same man again for the first time in about twenty years. His unforgettable face. In the dream I was walking through the city, this city that's full of walking pedestrians who are on their way to work, to school, to wherever. I'm walking and then suddenly I bump into this tall large man who is carrying food. I fall down, and the large man just walks away as if nothing happened.

Now I'm being trampled by all these people, and then out of nowhere I see a hand extend towards me. The body that the hand belongs to reveals itself, and I immediately recognize it's the same man who was on that subway car twenty years ago. His unforgettable face. He helps me up, and when I

among my feet all of the pedestrians disappear. They are all gone, it's just me and this man standing on a sidewalk.

I ask him who he is, and he tells me that he is the son of God. I pause, and I ask him if he means he is Jesus Christ, and he tells me that he will be Jesus Christ if that's what I decide to call him. He begins to walk, and I follow him, and I ask him questions. I ask him if he died thousands of years ago, and he says that death is a misunderstood phenomenon. He says that even if he did die, he has always been here. For the past twenty years and for the past thousands of years.

I ask him if he means he has been here literally, like walking on Earth among us people, or philosophically, existing only in our hearts, minds and dreams. He says both, but also says that the importance of one over the other is subjective. And then he looks back at me and tells me to stand there, not to move a muscle.

People always say that, don't move a muscle. Even if I stand perfectly still, my heart which is made up of cardiac muscle is still beating. Still moving. Beat. Pump. Beat. And now it has stopped. Every cell in my body has stopped, as if time is frozen.

In the distance, on the road, I see my younger brother. There are people around him, skinny men and women, even children, with dirty rags on for clothing. He is giving them all fruits. He looks in my direction for a second, but he doesn't see me; it is almost as if I weren't there.

When my brother and I were younger, I would always tell him to share his food with those who asked. I used to tell him that when he got older, he would have to know when to share his fruit, even when they didn't ask, because sometimes those people would live overseas and they wouldn't be able to ask. These were the things my mother taught me as a child.

Now my brother and all those people are gone, and the pedestrians are back. Jesus Christ has disappeared within the crowd. I can move again, and my heart is beating now. Beat. Pump. Beat. After a short while I see my younger brother again, walking among the crowd across the street. He looks in my direction again, and this time he sees me and walks towards me.

We start to talk, and after a while I mention how when we were younger, how I would always tell him to share his food, and that I was proud he listened because getting people to listen is one task we can't complete alone in our lives.

Now he has a look of confusion on his face, and he tells me he has no idea what I'm talking about. He says I never told him to share his food. Now the look of confusion has jumped off of his face and onto mine, and before I could realize it I am staring at his backside as he's walking away. I start to shout, telling him to remember to share his food with others, trying to remind him that kindness can go a long way. I go on until he's completely gone, and then I realize Jesus Christ is sitting in the corner.

He looks at me and he says that it doesn't matter if we are alive or dead, it doesn't matter if we can physically walk on Earth or not. He says that the things we say to people, the things we do to people, they are sometimes remembered, regardless of how important or unimportant it may be.

Regardless of if it was something good or something bad.

He says that while we are alive, we shouldn't care about who we want to become, we should care about who we will have been when we die. What we did or said in our lifetime, that's what will stay in the hearts, minds and dreams of others even after we are gone.

Now Jesus and I are walking again, and it feels like we have been walking for miles. I ask him how much further we have to go, and he asks me if I'm asking him how much further do we have to go, or if I'm asking him how far we have gone, and then I woke up. After I woke up I thought about the dream. I thought about when my brother was feeding the poor, how he looked in my direction and didn't see me. How I couldn't move at that moment.

I wonder if I was only there philosophically, in his mind. I wonder if he was remembering the things I told him. And then I start to think about how he could see me through the crowd. I wonder if at that point he could see me, as if this time I were actually alive. Physically able to walk on Earth, and as he's walking away from me, I'm trying to tell him to share his food.

It's as if I'm trying to tell him this so that when the time comes, he will feed those people, and he won't just leave them to die. It's as if I want him to remember these words I'm telling him even after I've died. It doesn't matter if someone is alive, existing physically, because we still may not listen to them or even bother to hear them out, and it doesn't matter if someone is dead, existing philosophically, because we will remember them. Remember the things they taught us, the things they said and the things they did for us.

So I guess even if you're alive, you may not be able to change the world or even someone's life; you just might have to die first. I start to think about what Jesus said, "who we will have been when we die." If I died tomorrow, who will I have been?

Chapter 13:

LESS THAN MORE THAN EQUAL TO

It seems as if no matter how far you travel, people are alike all over. The culture may change, the language may change, the things they do for recreation may change, but the basic human behaviors and instincts, they remain the same.

In every corner of the world, there are those who take less than what they need, and then there are those who take more than what they need. People who believe in non-violence and those who believe in violence. Those who give and those who steal, and some who do both. I visited a few different countries two years ago and that was what I noticed. I realized that no matter how far you travel, people never change. No matter how far away you try to get from it, the damn thing is always there.

Eleven months ago, I had a dream where I was living in this run-down apartment building in a city located in a desert. I was laying on my bed, and I looked to the right to see a glaring stream of light coming from the window. I got up from my bed and looked out of the window. I looked out and saw a world where people weren't alike all over. After such a long time of searching, I finally found the peaceful place I was looking for.

This place where there were no negative genes. No anger gene, no murder gene. No competitive gene, no jealousy gene. People lived in harmony, and they all shared with each other. No one took more than they needed and no one had to take less than they needed. There were apples on both ends of the table, finally there was balance in this equation that I once thought could never make any sense. I was at peace with myself and the world, but the time came when I had to leave. I had to return to the world in which I came from because it was now someone else's time to find this peaceful place. Simple mathematics.

In order for every one to be able to experience this utopia, this good place, when someone wants to come in someone else has to leave to keep the balance, otherwise this good place becomes the bad place. I turn around and look back at my bed for one last time, this place where I slept so peacefully. There is a woman lying in it.

For a moment I'm at sixes and sevens, and I forget what I am suppose to do. After a few seconds I remember and I start to walk away from this place, and it gets darker and darker with each step until it's completely black, and then I wake up. I look to the right and I see my composition notebook, and I do what I always do. I write down the dream.

Three nights ago I was checking my mail, and I decided to see how Lynne's flowers were coming along. Her zinnias, her shade garden. I go outside and I see that they are beginning to grow. As I'm standing there admiring her work, I see her walk through the front apartment building door with David and Sarah. She takes a look at me, and I smile at her. Something I got used to doing.

The thing was that she didn't smile back at me, she just continued walking. She was in some sort of a rush and I guess she didn't have time to say anything, or smile back. She puts her kids in the car and then she gets in and she drives away.

Later that night I'm sitting in my living room watching television and I hear a loud banging. Bang, bang, bang. I get up and look through the peephole. This fisheye view. Now the man is banging and shouting. I can hear him, I'm sure every one in the building can, but I can't see him. After about a minute he stops, and then he walks away. I see him pass by, but it's too quickly for me to see what he looks like. I'm positive he is coming from Lynne's apartment because I know I heard the name "Lynne" somewhere in his barrage of expletives.

I start to assume that this is what Lynne was hiding from. After he walks by, I'm still looking out of the peephole, staring at Joe's apartment door.

Right now I'm standing over Lynne's body in her bedroom. She's deep asleep. I can tell she's physically and psychologically tired. Tired of every thing. A few hours ago she knocked on my door to apologize about not greeting me the other day.

She tells me that the whole time she was at the hotel with her kids, trying to hide from her antisocial ex-husband, she was thinking about how she just walked away without acknowledging me. I tell her it's okay, and I invite her into my apartment in an attempt to find out why she has these bruises on her face.

She's sitting on my couch telling me about her ex-husband, but not once does she mention how she got the bruises. I assume it's just a part of her life that she will not talk about. Everyone has those. Then she starts to talk about how she feels so alone at times.

I start to tell her about Maria, how even when I was with her I still felt alone at times. I think to myself, sometimes we are alone and in pain for so long that after a while we can't feel the loneliness or the pain anymore. I tell Lynne that even if you find someone, there is still a chance you will feel alone.

As I'm talking, the phone begins to ring. That damn ringing sound. I tell her that I'll be back, and I answer the phone. It's the hospital, some lady telling me that they are going to move Joe to another room. A room where they put other coma patients who have been in a coma for a long period of time. I go back to the living room, and I find that Lynne has fallen asleep on my couch. I was gone no more than five minutes.

I start to say her name out loud, but she's not waking up. I rub her shoulder, but she still doesn't wake up. Deep asleep. I think to myself, what should I do. Just let her rest here until she wakes up? I say her name out loud one more time, this time even louder, but she still doesn't wake up. At this point I'm thinking of getting a large bucket of cold water, but instead I go to her apartment door and I see if her door is open, and it is.

I decide that I will just carry her to her bed. It would probably be very weird to her if she woke up on my couch in the morning. So I open her apartment door wide open and then I go back to my apartment, I go back to her. I say her name louder one last time. And then I rub her shoulder harder one last time. She still will not wake up. I pick her up, this tiny woman, and I carry her to her bedroom and I place her in her bed. I look down at her for a little while. I wonder what she is dreaming about, hoping that she is in some kind of peaceful place. Her utopia.

I look down at her legs but I can't see her fake leg because she's wearing jeans again, but I can however see her feet. She didn't wear shoes when she was coming over to apologize. I'm looking at this plastic foot, and then I reach out and touch it. I slide my hand across it. That cold plastic. This one part of her body that doesn't have to deal with pain anymore.

I pull the blanket over her and as I'm walking away I hear her say something, but I can't understand it. I turn around, and I realize she's talking in her sleep. She talks in her sleep.

I laugh and then I go across the hall, to the kids room. I put my hand on the doorknob, and I think for a little while, and then I open it and I see David and Sarah sleeping. In the corner I see the television on that high cabinet. David and Sarah should be arguing about what cartoons to watch, but instead they have watch their mother take a beating in the places that are still prone to pain.

Chapter 14:

“SLEEP WHEN YOU'RE DEAD”

I'm leaving my apartment building and I notice the flowers. They are growing but they look funny now, as if they are missing something. I wonder if Lynne planted them right. Now I'm at the

hospital, asking someone if they could find out where they moved Joe, he's still in that damn coma. They take me to the room, and I see a few other people who are also in comas. I pull up a chair next to Joe and I sit and think.

According to some scale, if you are in a state of confusion, you are in the mildest coma. A coma is a state of unconsciousness. You are considered unconscious when you don't react to the environment around you. So imagine a person walking around confused and technically unconscious. What happens if that person comes face to face with danger and doesn't even realize it?

Some people will tell you that coma patients can sometimes hear you if you try speaking to them, but I don't know if it's fact or fiction, but I had a weird dream last night and it had something to do with Joe. I decided to tell him the dream regardless of if he could hear me or not. I tell him that in the dream I'm sitting in this small room, at a desk.

On the desk in front of me there is an emergency contact form that I have to fill out. On the wall that I'm facing, there are two paintings. On the left there is a painting of the Chicago Cubs logo, a baseball team, and on the right there is a painting of Anna Briol Walkhill, a celebrity. I don't pay as much attention to the paintings as I do the form, simply because I'm having such a hard time filling it out. If something happens to me who should know first? Who should know last?

I still often wonder why Joe would put me on his list, but I think I'm starting to understand. I'm starting to understand that maybe Joe is as alone as I am. Maybe one man can never know another man, but if we can begin to understand and comprehend these things that this man does because we also do these things, we can come closer to understand who he is through who we are. He probably had just as hard of a time filling out the form as I did.

After a while I think about the other people that I know in my life, are they as alone as I am? There are thousands of people around us but we still manage to drown in loneliness either because we don't know these people around us or we just don't want to know them at all.

At some point during the night I guess my dream completely shifted focus because I also had a dream where I was in a helicopter with someone. He was the pilot and I was the co-pilot. I looked down at this city, this civilization, and I realized just how little I really knew about a world where there was so much to know. So many people walking, working. So many rocks, roads.

In the human body the heart pumps blood throughout the entire system to get nutrients around to parts of the body, parts such as the brain and the muscles we use to walk. The way of travel is through veins and arteries.

While I'm looking down at this place with so many roads, its structure begins to remind me of human veins. People driving to work along this road, blood cells traveling to the calf along this vein. They do this all for the sake of the bigger picture, for the efficient operation of a large system. The similarities of how our body functions and how a city functions are uncanny. Every one has to work. Every blood cell has to supply. Every one has to do their job to keep the system in motion.

The pilot moves the helicopter a bit closer to the ground and as he's doing this there is a big automobile crash on a road below. A small problem in a large system. Now the pilot is bringing the helicopter even lower so we can check it out, and then I wake up. I remember in another dream I had when we finally land, we see a lifeless body on a sidewalk near where the crash took place. I can't help but think about Joe's crash. I picture Joe's lifeless body lying on that pavement the same way he is lying here on this hospital bed. Who is this man who lays here sleeping? Who is the man who lays there dead in my dream? Who is that woman that lays in my bed in my dreams and never shows me her face?

Chapter 15:

THIS FISHEYE VIEW

I pick a random composition notebook and take it down from off the shelf. This one is dated from two years ago. Now I flip to a random page, to a random dream, but what exactly is random? If you stuck an invisible magnet on one side of a die and then rolled the die on a floor that would attract the magnet, you can get the die to always land on four, or any specific number that you want, every time. We have applied a specific circumstance or force, the magnet, to the event, rolling the die, which will give us the same output every time.

Now we remove the magnet and then roll the die five times, we will usually get different outputs. While this may seem random, there are still circumstances and forces at work, such as strength and gravity, but if we can manipulate these circumstances and forces we can get the output we want every time. So considering these elements, true random may be the absence of any circumstances and forces whatsoever. No influences at all.

The dream that I end up reading is a dream about judgment. In the dream I am standing before God, and he asks me why he should let me into Heaven. There was a day when I was younger and my mother came to pick me up from school, and in the car I ask my mother what Hell is. She looks at me for a moment, as if she is trying to determine whether I will understand or not, and then she tells me that when we die, we are either sent to Heaven or to Hell.

I ask her what these two places are, and she tells me that Heaven is a happy place where the good people go, and Hell is a sad place where the bad people go. She tells me that the only one who can decide where we go, the only one who can judge us, is God, because God is good.

She tells me never to judge another person because no matter how good we may think we are, there is still that chance that we can become that bad person we are judging later in life. This bad politician who benefits financially from the murder of thousands of people, he could just have easily have been the good general who saves these thousands of lives, if only the circumstances and the forces in his life were different. But we must also consider that in the change of these circumstances and forces, this general could become the politician.

I tell God that I lived my life the best way I knew how, and I tried to be a decent person. I told him he could accept me for who I am, but that I wasn't going to beg him to let me into Heaven. He looks at me for at least a minute, judging me, and then he tells me to start walking. I begin to walk and as I'm walking there is a light that gets brighter and brighter, brighter and brighter and then pitch black, and then I wake up.

My philosophy on the search for the truth is that I can be convinced. Religion, science, the exploration of the universe, if someone's teachings are convincing then I can believe it. There are people who suffer from a massive amount of pride in their ideas and beliefs and there is no convincing them of another truth. They just won't accept it.

These people have this fisheye view where they think they have the answers, they think they can see it all, but they are looking through only one perspective.

They can hear all these things, but they can't see them because they are only looking in one direction. There was a man who said that you should be like water, taking the form of any cup you should be poured in. An open mind is sometimes the difference between salvation and turmoil. Satisfaction and dissatisfaction.

Chapter 16:

THINGS CREDITED TO FATE

Sometimes our dreams take place in a certain location more than once. For some of us it's a lot more than once, some of us may even have dreams in that certain location every month or every year. The location might be an old house, a place you used to play as a child, the place where you met your best friend or your one true love. This place just keeps coming back to you in your dreams almost as if it were trying to tell you something.

While the location remains the same, we don't usually dream about the same thing. Details, plots, people, these properties of the dreams often change. I'd like to say the location never changes because we think it will always look the way it looks in our minds when we think about it.

Even after years have passed and we've moved on from that place, when we think about it and try to remember it, when we try to think of what it may look like now, all we can remember is the way it looked when we left it.

There is this dream I have often where I'm in the military and I am traveling along with a few other soldiers in this deserted area. There are small rundown buildings and a dirt path for vehicle travel. In one variation of the dream we are all riding in a vehicle. I'm in the passenger's seat, there is a man in the driver's seat, and then there is a big open space in the back for the other soldiers to sit in.

I look down at my dog tags, and they are blank. I look at the driver's dog tags, it reads "Max Harper." Behind me, to the left, there is a metal window slider, I pull it up and I can see the other soldiers in the back, playing cards.

Max Harper stops the vehicle and he points towards my window. I look in the direction that he is pointing and I see this sort of glorified mailbox, I have no idea what it is. Max Harper tells me to roll down my window and throw a grenade inside of it, so that the enemy can't use it anymore. I grab one of my grenades but I fumble with it and then it gets unclipped. The grenade is live.

It falls down to my feet, but I quickly recover it. Now I'm trying to roll my window down, but the damn thing is stuck. I try harder, but the time is ticking away. I start banging on the glass, but it

won't break. This entire time Max Harper is also trying to roll his window down as well, but he is just as unlucky as I am.

Max Harper then grabs the grenade out of my hand, pulls up the metal window slider and tosses the grenade into the back and effectively kills all of the other soldiers to save our own lives.

In another variation, it is Max who fumbles with his grenade and I am the one who tosses it in the back and kills every one. In another, after one of us throws the grenade in the back, we don't realize we've killed anyone until after we get out of the vehicle and open the back to find ourselves looking at dead bodies.

There are also versions of the dream where there are no grenade explosions. In one variation we are driving along and we come to a traffic light that has no business being out there. As we approach it, we realize the traffic light is yellow, and it never changes. After a while, Max Harper, or whoever is driving in that variation of the dream, he starts to tell me that we can't fool ourselves.

Each one of these variations always start out exactly the same, the other soldiers and I are walking alongside that dirt path, and then the dream unfolds into whatever it is going to unfold into. It's almost as if there is a start point and the end point is determined by the choices the soldiers and I make. Should we get in the vehicle? Should we continue to walk down this path?

The start point can almost be compared to the beginning of the universe, if we agree that the universe actually has a start point, a beginning, and then all these things happen, and all of these decisions and actions are made, and this will become the story of the universe. However, in a parallel universe that starts out exactly the same way as the first universe, one simple decision or action may be altered, and because of this different action and different decision is made, this parallel story becomes the tale of this parallel universe.

The location is always the universe as we know it, but like these dreams I keep having, no variation is ever the same. The universe has so many stories to tell.

The one thing that keeps coming back to me with this idea, this concept, is this "theory" that as decisions and actions and the likewise are made and as time progresses, the less of a chance a nonspecific event has of occurring.

In this explanation, the number of the point is the moment in time, and the letter or letters of the point is the variation of what happened at that certain moment in time. The amount of characters for numbers and the amount of characters for letters are always identical. Point 1a is the birth of one of your ancestors from over three thousand years ago. Point 10gv is the birth of one of your ancestors from one thousand years ago, made possible because of point 1a occurring. Point 100nkd is your birth, made possible because of point 10gv and point 1a occurring.

As the number of points gradually increase in the same direction as time, or due to decisions and actions, the number of possible occurrences increases, and therefore the chances of each point becoming a reality decreases. Getting from point 1a to point 10gv is not likely, and getting from point 10gv to point 100nkd is even more unlikely. Consequences may instead land on 100rfd or the

other many possibilities.

Some people say the universe has been in existence for billions of years. Can you imagine how close you came to never being born? How close you and I came to never having this one sided discourse.

We've gotten to a time where the number-letter sequence is so high and so diverse that every thing that happens now, in comparison to the time of the beginning of the universe, is unlikely to happen, and because of this, some occurrences are credited to fate; this idea that this specific event was destined to occur.

Chapter 17:

PAGE 1 OF 8, "THE EIGHT DREAMS"

Third year, January 5th, I had this dream. I had died a long time ago, but it wasn't the type of death where afterwards people would attend your funeral or your wake; it was a spiritual death. I lost all of my hopes but also lost all of my fears. Your beliefs, dreams, goals, they don't matter to you anymore because you realize there is a possibility that your existence may serve no purpose.

What killed me was a note I had received, telling me that at some point in my life I would have to question my existence. Question my purpose, my function. That I would have to accept the answer, the truth that I find, because fooling myself would be pointless. This note stayed in the back of my mind, growing silently like a plant. This note that someone left in place of my wallet.

Sometime later in the dream I am on the subway, and this man tells me that he gave me that note. That he picked my pocket. He bumps into me, takes my wallet, leaves the note there in its place, and now he is trying to give me back my wallet.

A normal person might be angry, but by this time that seed that this man planted in the back of mind has grown fully and is flourishing, and instead I ask him why he did it.

He tells me that besides needing money for food, he did it because he wanted me to think about my life even if it was only for a second. He asks me how I think someone would feel if one day they are leaving their house, and in their mailbox they find a mysterious note like the one I found in my coat pocket. How would someone react to that? Then I ask him if he has been doing this to other people, and he says yes, he says he's been doing it for a long time.

He tells me that people get notes every day, it's just that some are more obvious than others. When you're about to go to sleep laying down on that bed thinking about things, when you're driving down that long stretch of road thinking about things, when you're walking through that bad neighborhood thinking about things, all these moments are opportunities to better yourself.

Regardless of how good of a person you may be now, or how bad, there is always room for improvement. Then he tells me that the improvement he's talking about isn't necessarily what you get from giving to the poor or becoming a better parent, the improvement he's talking about is the one you get from suffering, from misery and struggle. From finding light in the darkest corner.

Now my stop comes up, but I want to hear more of what this man has to say, so I stay. I ask this man if he believes in God, and he says he believes in a higher being but not a personal God. He tells me that he doesn't believe in a God that intervenes with our daily lives and happenings.

He tells me he believes that someone made all that we can comprehend, that someone must have put it all in motion because you can't make something from nothing, and then this being either moved on to other things or decided not to incorporate itself into its creation.

Then he asks me if I believe there is a meaning to life. A purpose to our existence. I tell him that I had been thinking about it ever since I got his note, and that I came to the conclusion that in order for something to have a purpose, it has to have a reason for conception, or a beginning, and a goal, or an ending. Sort of like how most people go to college to receive some kind of document so they can have the chance to work in a specific field or have a certain job.

Your beginning is applying for the college with the intent of receiving some form of education, and your ending is graduating knowing and understanding most of the knowledge you needed, and now your goal or the purpose for that idea being conceived has been fulfilled. I tell this man that if the universe has a beginning, then it must have an end, and therefore there is a good chance that there is a reason why we are here.

Then I tell him that if the universe however does not have a beginning, then it has no end, and every thing that we do is meaningless. There is no goal. He looks at me and he says that our lives have a beginning and an end. I suppose we shouldn't be looking for the answers to why this universe is here as a whole as opposed to why we are all here individually.

There is a brief pause, and then this man tells me his name is Roach. The last thing he tells me before I wake up is that we either die accomplishing every thing or we die accomplishing nothing.

Today, those words make me think of Mary, about how she is trying to accomplish so much and give meaning and purpose to her busy life, but in the end when her time has come, if she doesn't feel that she led a fulfilled life, then just that one second of regret can make her feel as if she didn't accomplish anything. If however in her final days she feels that she did the best she could, perhaps she will be at ease with herself and find solace. For that brief moment in time, she will feel as if she has accomplished everything.

There was a time when I tried to tell Maria about this dream, but she didn't believe me because I was so descriptive as if my memory was at some kind of inhuman level. The truth is my memory isn't really at an advanced level. When I was with her I was consumed with the dreams I had, so I spent days and nights thinking about them, studying them, and eventually it became so important to me that my mind wanted to start remembering every piece of the dream so that I could later dissect it.

After she left, when I started to take them more seriously, that's when my memory really got an upgrade. Teachers always tell you that you are more likely to remember something if you write it down and say it out loud. After writing and thinking about my dreams so much, I became more aware of how they worked. Their patterns and what they were about. There are people around the

world who have this condition where they remember every single second of their life for as long as they live, or something to that extent.

Sometimes I wonder if that applies to their dreams as well, and sometimes I wonder how close I am to getting to that level. It has also been said that every person subconsciously remembers every single thing that happens in their lives, but the problem is sometimes we just can't access that memory.

That's probably why every once in a while a dream seems like a faded memory when I try to think about it, that's probably why I can't remember certain elements of the dream.

A little girl is walking down a school hallway and next to a locker she sees a book on the ground titled "Hypnosis." According to the idea previously mentioned, this memory will stay with her for the rest of her life, somewhere inside her brain I guess, but she won't necessarily remember it.

With my dreams, I've gone through so much memory therapy that I've learned how to remember these experiences that I have.

When I was younger I started to recognize that the dreams I had were sometimes connected with another dream I would have, so I asked a doctor if such a thing was normal. Do people usually have dreams that seem as if they are trying to tell a story? He tells me that he doesn't know, that it's not his field of expertise, but he also says that he wouldn't doubt that it could happen. Then he goes on to ask me what my name is and if I feel depressed.

Chapter 18:

OEDIPUS ELECTRA

I'm walking home from the grocery store and down Chase street I see a crowd. Naturally my mind begins to wonder what may have happened, and as the average human thinker would behave, I assume something bad happened.

As I get closer and closer, the yellow police tape becomes more visible, and then finally someone tells me that someone was murdered. Shot down. This city gets more than its fair share of homicides, but I'm starting to believe that death will never get old. No matter how many times you see a lifeless body, it makes you think.

I'm standing there looking at the man's face, at least they didn't mess with that. Then I start to think of Joe, how even though Joe isn't dead like this man, they both look the same. Their faces are so still. Expressionless, emotionless. Sometimes as a child when my mother would make my father sleep in the living room, I would walk by and watch him as he slept, and it always scared me because he looked so dead. In some dark twisted way, how he looked when he slept was exactly how he looked at his funeral to me.

There was a time in my late teenage years where all I could do was think about death, but I think we all go through that phase some point in our lives and it hits us hard because it's such a hard thing to understand. What is death? The obsession with death ate away at my mind, and it wasn't because I didn't know what happened after it, it was because I knew it would have to happen someday, and

I didn't know when.

I can't say that I've accepted death, but I am not terrified of it anymore because as we all know there isn't really anything we can do to prevent it. In ways birth is the same as death, but because our mind is in a fixed position on life, I don't think we can ever perceive that as what it really means. This damn fisheye view. It probably takes someone until their late teenage years to question life and death, but I'm sure it takes everyone a lifetime to accept death itself.

I get to the front of my apartment building and I look at the flowers Lynne is planting, and they are starting to die. Today I am surrounded by death it seems. They are turning brown and look shriveled up. Now that I think about it, I hadn't seen Lynne since that night she came to my apartment.

As I'm about to open the front door I notice Claire's car in my parking spot. I guess she's over for dinner. As I'm walking to my apartment door I hear talking and knocking, and eventually I see Claire and some man standing in front of Lynne's door. It kind of looks like that man who was here before, the man who was banging on Lynne's door and disturbing everyone in the building. Her ex-husband. But I can't be entirely sure. I nod at Claire and she nods back, and then asks me if I've seen Lynne.

I tell her I haven't seen her in days, and I ask if Lynne is missing? Misused question mark. As I'm asking this question frames of that dream pass through my thoughts. Billboard, have you seen Maria?

Claire tells me that Lynne is fine, she tells me that she was suppose to meet Lynne today to talk but she hasn't been answering her phone all morning and she doesn't appear to be home. As her and the man are walking by to leave the building the man tells me to let them know if I see Lynne, and then he gives me a dirty look as if he is trying to turn that favor into a demand.

After they leave I open my door and I go fill the fridge with my groceries. The damn garbage can is full, so I go outside to throw it out. As I'm walking I notice Claire's car is gone, and in the corner of my eye I see Lynne's window curtains move, as if someone was checking to see if they had left. Someone is home.

I'm walking back to my apartment door and as I'm about to open it, I instead decide to go see if Lynne is actually home, to see if anything is wrong. I knock, and then I say it's me, I say my name, and she opens the door. I jokingly ask her why she's been avoiding me and she begins to laugh, and those bruises on the side of her face seem as if they were gone. I would kill to see that laugh.

I ask her if that was her husband, and she says it was her ex-husband. She goes on to tell me that she thinks her sister is seeing her ex-husband and about how much she hates them both. This damn hate gene.

I ask her why she didn't just open the door and talk with them about it, and she says because Claire would never realize that Silvio was using Claire to get back at Lynne for taking the kids away from Silvio. She calls Silvio an Hispanic bastard.

These adults now sound like they are going through typical high school bullshit. She also adds that she doesn't trust Silvio's temper.

Then Lynne tells me that she knows that Silvio found her last time because Claire told her where Lynne was staying, and that this was the reason why she hated and suspected her sister. Lynne's face is so red that I decide I have to change the subject, and I tell her that her plants are dying. She looks at me confused, then the redness goes away. She walks into the other room and then a few seconds later she walks back out and hands me something. A packet of seeds.

She tells me that she made the mistake of trying to plant zinnias where there isn't much sunlight. That zinnias can't survive in a shade garden. Since there was no other place to plant anything she was instead going to plant Peace Lilies. She tells me that Peace Lilies flourish in the shade. She's finally smiling again. This happy gene.

Not too long after I hear a knock on my door, and I go see who it is. I'm hoping it's not the return of Claire and Silvio. I look down the hallway and I see a police officer and I inform him that I'm the one who lives at that door.

The officer asks both Lynne and I if we saw or heard anything strange last night or this morning, and we both say no. Lynne asks why and the officer tells her that there had been a murder not too far from here. The murder that I walked past.

The officer tells us that before the man was murdered, several tenants from other apartment buildings said he knocked on their door and asked strange questions and looked as if he were confused. As if he didn't know what was going on and he had no real connection to the world outside of his mind. As if he were unaware of his actions.

The officer asks if either of us received a visit from a man like that and we both said no, and then went on to ask others in the building and then he left.

Two nights ago I had a dream where I was digging a grave. At first I'm standing in front of my mother and my father's tombstones, and then I'm standing in the grave digging deeper and deeper not realizing I won't be able to get out. I'm looking for my mother and father but no matter how deep I dig I can't find them. It's funny how I say "them" instead of "the bodies." When a boy is alive and well, you'll call him Jason, but when he's dead and his body is lifeless, most people refer to him as "the body." Where's the body? Bring me the body.

Not where's Jason, not bring me Jason. I think most of the times the people who knew Jason would keep calling him Jason because they don't want to realize his life is gone and all that's left is his body. The human psyche at work.

I keep digging and digging but all I can see in my mind is Abraham Lincoln's face and what I think is his voice. "We can never fool all of the people all of the time." I look up to see if Lincoln is above me, speaking down to me, but he isn't there. Just a voice in my head.

When I look back down to start digging again, I see that woman, and she is laying face down. That damn woman that haunts my dreams. That damn woman who won't tell me who she is. I start to turn her body, and before me I see a woman who resembles my mother.

After I wake up I try to figure out what it means but all I can really come up with is that the dream when I'm in the utopia and this dream mean something, that they're connected at least in my mind. If the woman laying in that bed in the utopia that I am leaving is my mother as well, then maybe what I'm hoping for subconsciously is that my mother is in a better place now. In a peaceful place. Or maybe that I'm willing to switch places with her if she isn't.

Before my father died my mother committed suicide. I believe she killed herself because she felt as if she was born in the wrong time period or the wrong parallel universe. She didn't say it but I know she hated most of the people she met. She hated them because she hated people in general, she hated human tendencies and their lifestyles. Misanthropy.

She hated the imbalance in the world, and she hated the people who didn't care about it even more. Her hate grew so much that it eventually consumed her and took away her life, literally and metaphorically.

The one thing I could never understand was how she loved my father. How can you hate so many people and find room in your heart for this one person. Now my father wasn't a bad man, but he wasn't that great either. He didn't beat my mother, not with his fists at least, but in a way he did hit her. He ignored her, and he didn't care how obvious it was that his work was more important to him than his wife and his family. Somehow she found the strength to stay with him until she died.

After she died, my father realized how much he ignored her. How worthless he made her feel. His guilt turned into physical body complications and then he eventually died. In a way they kind of killed each other, but only in kind of a way.

I remember when Maria thought I needed help, that I needed to go see a psychiatrist or a therapist or something like that. I saw her point, my mind was out there, so I decided to humor her and go see one.

The problem with that was that the medication they were giving me was messing with my memory, and in turn, I couldn't remember my dreams no matter how hard I tried. For two months, it was as if I had no dreams. I couldn't live like that. I wouldn't live like that.

Chapter 19:

THE MURDER DISEASE

Few things are worse than the bad person who pretends to be good. The person in charge of a charity fund who every once in a while steals from the funds, the law enforcement officer who takes unusual advantage of his position among civilians, the politician who sanctions the murder of thousands of people for his own gain. These people make the common criminal who does not hide in plain sight respectable.

In a dream I had not too long ago I am sitting in a car waiting for someone. Time goes by and then

the passenger's door opens and my partner sits down. He has food so we start to eat, and then after a while he asks me why I do this.

Later on in the dream I find out that we were sitting in a parked car because we were waiting for this corrupt law enforcement officer to come home. I tell my partner that I don't do these things so much because I love the innocent, but because I hate the wicked. I tell him that there is more hate in my heart than there is love.

What makes a person more hateful than loving? Is there a mathematical formula? Is it environmental influence? Is it simply biology? Maybe each person at one point in their life is ultimately defined by a dominant emotion. Maybe there is one emotion for each of us that will develop who we are. If at that point you are always feeling angry, you will start to develop this angry persona along with all the emotions and feelings that can be branched from it, emotions like hatred and feelings like contemptment. This is you turning on your anger gene, your hate gene.

Or maybe at that point you are always feeling peaceful and you start to develop this persona that is always patient and loving. This mind that turns on the kindness gene, the love gene. This hatred that I feel asks for peace, for balance in a world that seems to be run by evil people. Balance has become such a large portion of my psychology that when I stub my toe, I have to stub the other so that they both feel pain.

Suddenly my partner puts on his sad theater mask, and I look out the windshield and I see the law enforcement officer walking into his home. In the theater of ancient Greece a comedy had a happy ending and a tragedy had a sad ending. Performers often wore masks to conceal their identity so that the audience didn't associate a specific character with a specific role. That fisheye view.

A performer who was a king in one scene could be a peasant in another. Theater masks, or drama masks, are often associated with the genre of drama, where the happy-looking mask represents comedy and the sad-looking mask represents tragedy. Everyone has heard of the philosophy that in order to know happiness one must know sadness.

There is a theory that in order for you to be happy, someone else in the world has to be sad. Perhaps these are to keep a sort of balance in the world, to be able to co-exist.

After he puts on his mask he is about to get out of the car but I tell him to sit down. I tell him that if we want to get the mayor on corruption as well, we will need to find out about him by watching one of his closest friends, this law enforcement officer. Then when we have him, he will know who we are.

We will show him our faces so that he can associate these faces with the people who killed him. For the few seconds he would have to live anyway. This hate gene that turns on will make us prone to the murder disease.

Chapter 20:

"PROSTITUTE'S FOOT AMPUTATED"

Last night, I had a nightmare. In and out, back and forth, up and down. There are moments when I

wish this prostitute was my spouse so I didn't have to pay her for sex. After we're done, she gets up and starts to put on her clothes and I ask her where she's going.

She tells me she has other customers to tend to. I tell her that I'll pay her double what I owe her if she just stays to keep me company. If she left me, my loneliness gene would turn on and I would be prone to the suicide disease.

She agrees to stay and I tell her to lay down next to me. We lay there silently for about ten minutes, and then I get up to go use the bathroom. In the toilet I see a phone floating there. On my way back to her I see that she has fallen asleep, so I go to my coat and I take out this syringe. I have no idea what this liquid is but I inject it into her upper left leg. After some time passes, I feel for a pulse on her neck and there is none. No signs of life.

I look over her naked body, this work of art. The body part I give the most attention to is her left foot. I reach out to touch it, it's warm. I slide my hand across it. I do it again and again until it becomes cold, and then I take out a less than normal-sized axe from under the bed and I cleanly chop it off. The blood is minimal.

I go to place the foot in my freezer but before I could do so I hear a knocking at my door. I pause for a moment, and then the knocking becomes louder and the man begins to yell, but I can't understand what he's saying. All I can really think about is how I have a more than visible woman laying in my bed who is lifeless and is missing a body part.

I look back into the room from the kitchen, and I see her. This woman laying on my bed, bleeding from her ankle. The knocking and shouting get even louder and now I can hear my heart beating. And then I wake up.

Of course this dream reminds me of the night Lynne fell asleep at my apartment and I laid her to rest. It reminds me about how I touched her plastic foot. This dream almost makes me ashamed because it makes me feel like I have this mutated or abnormal version of admiration for Lynne. Dare I say love, because in my life I'm not sure if I've ever loved anything.

The only real conclusion I could come to for the meaning of this dream is that I am trying to recreate Lynne by turning other women into her, maybe because I've never met a lady like herself.

Either that, or I'm subconsciously fixated on her fake foot, but now that I think about it, I'm not sure how far her amputation went. It could be her foot, her whole lower leg or her entire leg. But the only part of her leg that I've ever been able to touch was her foot. However I'm almost certain that it is not her entire leg because her limp would be much more obvious if it were.

I'd also like to think that the man knocking and shouting at the door is my subconscious telling me that this isn't right. That it's not normal, so please wake up. People have said that the other people in our dreams are simply other versions of ourselves.

This dream also makes me wonder how difficult it is to get away with murder. Most of the time the media makes it seem like committing a murder and actually getting away with it is almost

impossible, because of course most of the stories we see or hear about end up with the criminal getting caught. How many killers do we actually know personally? And if we do know one or more, we are probably one ourselves. Probably not. But imagine you murder a random person in a city you don't live in and there are no witnesses. Do you really think you would get caught?

The first mistake in committing a murder is killing someone you know in a place that you live without any real plan.

Obsessive-compulsive disorder comes in many different forms and can be different depending on the person. Every once in a while I get a dream like this and I become obsessed with it, constantly trying to interpret what it may mean. Trying to understand what it is trying to tell me.

One time, a long time ago, I became obsessed with a dream where I kept taking out the trash but it would keep filling itself up, so I would have to keep taking it out over and over again. Damn garbage bags. Sometimes it even gets to the point where I am so obsessed that fiction becomes reality. One face becomes two and the lie becomes true.

Composition 1, Part 3

Chapter 21:

DEEP SHADES

Two nights ago I had a nightmare about murdering a prostitute. Last night I had a nightmare about a woman's foot being victim to flesh eating bacteria. The bacteria kept eating away at her leg and then eventually the surgeons had to amputate it.

This damn foot, I can't get my mind off of it. What's so appealing about a foot? What's so appealing about this specific foot? It's not even real, it's plastic. Man-made. I think what is really bothering me is that if I had lost a foot of my own, I wouldn't know how to deal with it, but this woman has actually lost hers and it doesn't even seem as if it has phased her.

After I wake up I start thinking, the surgeons in that dream remind me of a dream I had God knows how long ago, where the surgeons say I was actually dead for a little under a minute. God probably actually does know because that may have been part of the series of dreams where I was judged by God, and maybe he sent me back.

There are people who claim that they remember a past life, a life before the life they have now. How many people actually believe them is a different story.

Now there is a knock at my door, I can tell it's Lynne. I can tell because I can hear Sarah and David talking loudly as if they were excited. Even though I can't see them, I know. I open the door and it's the three of them looking up at me. All but one are smiling. Sarah begins to yell, asking me if I'm ready to plant stuff. Lynne says they could use another hand. David, he just stands there.

The next thing I know I'm outside and Lynne is teaching me how to give life. Sarah was helping also, but she was getting herself too dirty so her mother told her to go play with David. David who is riding his bike around the parking lot proclaiming that flowers are for girls. The indirect insult

kind of makes me feel feminine. I never liked flowers anyway.

It's just me and Lynne giving life now, and she's going on and on about how a rose's color has meaning and some kind of symbolization to it. She's so excited about it that I have to let her go on. To see her face light up, all I can do is admire her.

For someone who has lost a part of who they are, it seems like she has become even more of a person. Of course I didn't know her before she lost her foot, but she really is something now. She has a reason to be angry but she's not, I have no reason to be angry but I am.

Now she is on the color yellow. Her color. The color I first saw her in. She tells me that a yellow rose represents true friendship. Happiness. If I could grow a yellow rose maybe I would give it to her, but chances are what should have been a yellow rose would come up a black rose.

I sit here planting these lilies with her on the shaded side of the building. The dark side of the building, and all I can really think about is how my feelings for her are abnormal. Mutated. Black. Dark. These words and words like them. When these lilies begin to grow I can only picture what should be white being black.

I am in deep thought and she is trying to ask me a question but I'm not responding. She looks at me and gives me a shove and I snap out of it, and I ask her what she was saying. Apparently she was telling me about a dream she had last night, and then she asked me what things I dream about? I ask her what she means, because people don't really have a certain theme to their dreams.

Then she says of course people do, she starts to talk about how she always has this dream where she is in a field of apple trees and she is looking for an apple to eat, but the ones she comes across always have dirt on them, so she never ends up eating any of the apples and throughout the dream she becomes hungrier and hungrier until she wakes up.

She tells me that she is always having dreams like that, where what she's looking for is right in front of her but it is wrong in some way.

I start to tell her about the dreams I have where I'm talking to Satan, and I tell her about how normal he looks. I go on and on until I realize that she is a little bit weirded out that I dream about the Devil. Then she starts to tell me about how when she dreams, she still has both of her lower legs.

This makes me think about all of the blind and deaf people in the world. All of the people who are born blind or born deaf. It makes me wonder what their dreams are like. I could only imagine. Some of them can see but they can't hear, and some of them can hear but they can't see.

After a little while of her talking about her leg, I ask her how it happened if she didn't mind telling me. She looks at me and tells me it was a tumor, and then starts laughing. Why is she laughing? She's laughing because having cancer in your foot is such a stupid thing to have, let alone lose a foot over. These are her words.

She says her foot started hurting but she didn't think it was anything to worry about. Then she felt a small bump, but for some reason she doesn't think anything of it. The bump gets bigger and then she finally has it checked out. It's cancer. She thinks to herself, "Who has cancer in their foot?" What are the chances that something like this would happen to her? Is it fate?

So she had to get her foot amputated and have a fake one replace her old one. The entire time she was resting in the hospital, she says Silvio, her then husband, only visited her once. She thought that he felt like she wasn't pretty anymore. That he couldn't have a cripple for a wife. Here is a woman who needs just that one person but they aren't there, and then here is my father who has everyone there for him but he doesn't want anyone.

After she got out she confronted him and it was obvious that he was seeing someone else, so she filed for divorce. She always suspected that Claire was the mistress, but she never had any proof.

Her suspicions grew even more a little while ago when Silvio found her in the hotel and gave her a beating. The only person who knew where she was staying was Claire. She says that the reason she moved to this town was to get away from him, but somehow he found out where she moved to, and he came looking. Again, she thinks Claire was the one who told him.

At first I find the situation a little strange, for two sisters to be involved with the same man, but then again the world is a strange place. This strangeness is what ultimately gets me to seek solitude.

I ask her why then does she seem so friendly with her sister. She says that while she thinks her sister may have betrayed her, she can't be certain of that. She says that Silvio may just be forcing these things out of her. Lynne has quite a story, but then again everyone has a story to tell, everyone's a writer. Some more than others, some less.

Chapter 22:

ALL MEN ARE DESTROYED EQUALLY

There are some hospitals that have no room thirteen. People are just as afraid of superstition as they are their diseases or conditions. Some people are anyway. I'm sitting next to Joe and I'm reading him a dream from one of my composition notebooks.

In the dream, Jesus and I are in the middle of an ocean and we are fishing and talking about religion. I ask Jesus if he thinks that the world would be better without any religion at all, and he says to me that while the intentions of most religions are good, when these intentions are mixed with human instincts there is a chance that they may become corrupt.

He says that one's individual pursuit for truth is much better than a group's pursuit for truth. That we must each find our own kind of wisdom by ourselves. He says that when one person is bombarded with so much information and knowledge by another person or by a group of people, that they will become radicalized if they believe what they hear too quickly.

He says if the seed that is planted in their heart grows too quickly, they will give no thought to what has been preached to them. They become obsessed with their new lifestyle and their new ways of

thinking without questioning it; they genuinely believe their eyes have been opened and that they have found their purpose.

Sooner or later they try to force these ways onto others because it is righteous, but certain ways of thinking is only meant for certain types of people. He says that when someone finds their own religion by themselves, that they will then be able to grow properly.

Jesus then goes on to tell me a story about a society who finds a young boy who is about to die on the street. They bring him to a hospital to keep him alive, but they can't find out who his parents are or come into contact with anyone who knows him. After days of searching, it is apparent that there is no one to be found, and that the boy would be brain-dead even if he did wake up.

After much thought and debate, the society decides that his life is no longer worth anything, so they begin to remove some of his organs to donate it to people who still have a chance for a life. They take a kidney. They take part of his liver. They take some bone marrow. The child has become a great resource and an answer to those in despair.

Some people in the society become angry and begin to threaten the hospital. They say that such a thing is wrong. Doctors are murdered. Nurses are murdered. Eventually the boy is murdered by one of the angry people to stop the hospital from degrading his existence to nothing.

Then Jesus looks at me and he says that sometimes it might be better to just not believe in anything. Jesus tells me that wherever I may travel, not to become a product of the environment, but to impose my own influence on the people of that place to create the environment.

I'm in mid-sentence and someone walks into the room. I look up, and I see a woman, maybe in her sixties, and she's just staring at me. She excuses herself and starts to walk out but I get up and ask her if she is Joe's mother. She says yes, and I tell her that he's been waiting for her. I tell her that I would leave but she asks me to stay, she says that it has been so long since she's seen him.

Later on I learn that twelve years ago Joe was disowned by her and his father because Joe was gay. A homosexual. She says that she didn't want to do it, that she wanted to accept him, but his father was so hellbent on the subject that she didn't have a say. I guess the disowning played a big part in Joe's life and had a negative effect on his relationships with others. Maybe that's why no one ever visits him. He tells me he would spend a night with Anna Briol Walkhill but he's just lying so I don't think any less of him.

His father recently passed away and his mother finally found the courage to come see him. She says that she would have done it whether his father was alive or not. That she was tired of not being able to see her own son. Before I leave, for some reason she gives me her phone number and address and then asks for mine. I don't get people sometimes.

Who is Joe? Does someone's sexual preference tell you who they are? Some men are killed because of the fact that they can fall in love with another man, and when someone is killing someone else, they usually kill that person because that person is associated with something that identifies them.

When a soldier kills another soldier, it's not because they know each other. It's because the other one looks different. Talks a different way. Is a different race. Has a different uniform. If someone murdered Joe because he was a homosexual, that person is murdering him because he thinks he knows who Joe is, when really a person's sexual preference doesn't tell you who that person is. It's just as useless as the way someone looks or the way someone talks. Difference is murder.

I'm thinking about Joe, and the thought that runs through my mind is that homosexuality may be literally wrong, in the sense that one plus one equals three is wrong, but homosexuality is not morally wrong, in the sense that murdering another human being is wrong.

However, many people will say that that the normalization of homosexuality opens the door to the normalization of incest, bestiality and the many other lifestyles we have yet to conceive.

Chapter 23:

THE CITY OF ANGELS

The anthology complex. It's a disease. A psychological build-up of fiction. I have to know that there is a better life out there than this one. There are people who write down their dreams, it's nothing unusual, but the degree to which I have taken it has been from a habit to a lifestyle. An obsession and an addiction. These are the words of a therapist I was suggested to see many years ago. "I did what I could." Those are the last words of a dying writer.

Years ago I had a dream where I was in an apartment on a very tall building. I was on the balcony overlooking an entire city. If you looked down from it you could see all the people below you, they looked like ants. A plane flies by and it has one of those advertisement banners attached to it. "Welcome to the city of angels." Los Angeles.

I go back into the apartment and on my bed there is a shotgun there waiting for me. Just like most of us have a dominant hand or a dominant foot, we have a dominant eye, and in the Bible it says if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off, if your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out. My question is what if your entire life is dominantly evil.

I'm sitting on the edge of the bed with the shotgun pressed against my chin. My right hand starts to shake. Do it. Just kill yourself. It starts to shake even more and the shotgun is slowly rising up on a surface it calls home, my face. Pull the trigger. Just do it.

I see my mother's face and for a second I am aware that I am dreaming, but as soon as I realize this the shotgun slips and goes off at a weird angle, and then it's just darkness and silence.

Lots of times after we wake up from dreaming we may remember more than one dream, as if there were two or more parts to the dream, and these dreams were connected by an intermission, even though they don't always relate. A black silence. This is what the silence and the darkness felt like, then later I found myself still alive laying on the cold floor of a hospital building with my entire lower face missing. I'm in so much pain but I can't yell because I have no mouth. I guess I'll be doing a lot more thinking than talking now.

The pain becomes unbearable and just when I think I'm screwed, I see that same shotgun laying there a few yards away from me. I crawl to it and I press the shotgun against bleeding flesh and bone and I pull the trigger in attempt to finish the job and find salvation from this pain, but nothing happens. I can't die. Then again I don't think any of us ever really die.

If the mind is separate from the body, then perhaps even after the body has died and withered away the mind continues to live on.

Despite the fact that I didn't die the second time around, the pain is gone now. There is no added damage from the second firing but the damage from the first firing is still there, and I'm bleeding all over this cold floor. As I run to find a bandage of some sort, pieces of flesh hit the ground. Meat hits the ground. I find a room with bandages and I wrap my entire face to conceal this entire night, and then the black silence returns.

Now I'm sitting in a car looking through my windshield and I see two people arguing across the street. I sit there and think about why I couldn't kill myself, why I couldn't die. I ponder if I'm actually still alive.

The thing about being a free thinker, or an "enlightened individual" is that in the process of becoming these things you may either succeed in finding wisdom or the wisdom you seek will cause you to have a mental breakdown.

I'd like to believe that's the sole reason why parents or society don't approve of those who do not want to conform because such a path of isolation causes one to be different, and difference is murder. This isolation causes the individual to think and he or she becomes aware of the world around them. Truly aware.

This awareness, or this truth, it can become so overwhelming and while certain people will be able to absorb it, there will be those who cannot, and those people who cannot, they realize that the road not taken is not taken for a reason. They realize why so many people conform to its society and abide by its standards.

One of the two figures is completely shadowed in darkness, and the other seems as if it has a white light casted on it. After a while the dark figure withdraws a gun and points it at the light figure. I look down at the other seat for my shotgun but it's not there. When I look back up the two figures are now completely visible, two ordinary men arguing but the argument has escalated to what could become murder. I get out of my car and walk towards the two men hoping I can make things okay.

Fear is what keeps many of us from living the lives we want to live, so when fear is no longer an obstacle, what becomes of a person? His or her true self? The only thing that would have kept me from walking towards the men is the fear of losing my life, but right now I'm almost sure that none of us ever really die, so I walk up to the man and stare at him. I try to speak but I can't.

He looks at me and asks me what I want. That him and his pal here are ready to settle this dispute on their own terms. I continue to stare at him and I try my hardest to mutter any words I can, but I

still can't speak.

He tells me to take off my bandage and talk or to get the hell out of there. I walk up to him and try to take his gun but he shoots me twice in the center of the chest. This man knows that the heart is not located on the left side of your chest.

I fall to the ground backwards, but I don't feel anything. I look down to where there should have been two bullet wounds but there are no wounds. The other man, the one who was once casted in white light, he stands there and starts to laugh. The man with the gun becomes angry and begins to shoot at me again even though I've already fallen to the ground. Even though I'm completely helpless.

Eventually he runs out of ammunition. The man with the gun walks closer to me and stands over my body, and he sees that I am still alive. He is in disbelief. The man who is laughing stops laughing and also comes closer to me, and then he kneels down to whisper something in my ear. He tells me that the Lord has spoken.

Chapter 24:

ECHOES FROM THE SUN

There is a story of a group of people who have spent their entire lives in an underground cave and their knowledge is limited only to what they can see and hear, and then one day they are let out of the underground cave and for the first time they see the Sun. They see powerful rays of light and trees and birds and realize that there was so much more to learn. Maybe you know this story.

At night, some of us gaze at the dark sky and wonder what is beyond what we can see and what we can comprehend as human beings. Things like God and Satan, if there is life elsewhere. Even if we are one day able to see and comprehend these things, we will have to accept the fact that there is still even more to discover. No matter how much you think you may know, you will never know it all.

However, one might argue that because knowledge presumably has no limits, it therefore cannot be compared or measured to or by anything.

One person might know that an object's mass plays a role in how strong that object's gravitational pull will be and another person might not, but because there is so much to know one might also say that regardless of how much more knowledgeable the first person is than the second person, both individuals are equally unintelligent. Or equally unintelligent. This is why a wise man will tell you he's a fool.

There is a theory that a single cell can represent, or is, a universe, and that a universe can represent, or is, a single cell. The basic fundamentals of the idea are influenced by significance and perception. The human body is comprised of cells that will help form a body part or an organ, and these parts of the body will help form systems such as the reproductive system or the respiratory system, and these systems will help maintain a functional organism.

Likewise, the universe is comprised with many similarities. There are planets. Cells. There is a star

with a mass that is great enough to have a dominant gravitational pull and force these nearby planets to revolve around it, such a system is called a solar system. There are many solar systems throughout space, and the compilation of these solar systems form galaxies. Body systems.

Furthermore, many galaxies form a universe. A universe is followed by an omniverse, which is all possible universes, and who knows for how long this can go on, however if you tweak your perception, imagine that a cell in your body is one universe. All these cells help make up your heart, just like all these planets help make up a solar system.

If we were to shrink ourselves down to a size where just one of our cells were more significant, or in other words bigger to us, we might find that the place we are in follows the same exact standards as the place we were when we were normally sized. With this in mind, is it logical to assume that everything is the same? That without the perception and significance that is constructed by the human brain, a single cell is the actually identical in every property to a universe.

That even if you meet a giant who is a million times bigger than you, it means nothing because there is another giant who is a billion times bigger than the giant who is a million times bigger than you, and to him you are both small and stupid just the same. And then you find out there is a giant who is a trillion times bigger...

Anyway it goes on and on and on. Maybe this is all just the rambling of a part of me that has lost its sanity as this has happened to me before, but I've found that even in falsehood you can dissect some parts of truth.

Often times our dreams are never resolved. We might find ourselves running through a storm but we never find out why. We might be searching for our first class on the first day of school but we wake up before we see if we find it or not. We might be parked in front of a house but we don't know what or who we are waiting for, why we are waiting there and how long we've been waiting there.

A long time ago I used to have these dreams where I was kept in solitary confinement in a prison. In a cold, dark corner in a small piece of the universe, I have to spend these days of penitence in a penitentiary.

Time goes by and I suffer. Sometimes a guard will walk by and I ask him why I have to suffer, and he tells me that some of us are just meant to suffer for the things we've done. Sometimes I ask him how I can make things right, and he tells me that the only thing I can do is offer the people I've wronged my suffrage.

The one thing I can't solve, the one thing I can't figure out about those damn dreams is what crime I committed to be put in there in the first place.

Two things that have always fascinated me in my life are warfare and prison. Not necessarily the soldiers or the prisoners, but the idea of sending one group of humans to kill another group of humans, the idea to segregate certain people in compliance to a few rules on a few pieces of paper.

The one especially interesting aspect, or question, of war, is who exactly is at war? You can have a war with several countries, several people or even a war with yourself; a mental struggle.

The Civil War was a war where one nation fought amongst itself. Who is at war, who is being imprisoned. Once a prisoner becomes institutionalized, once they become so comfortable to the society within the prison walls, when you set that prisoner free, you may actually be imprisoning him in the outside world. Just like that piece of rock in space, a prisoner sometimes wants to stay a prisoner. Maybe that's why most of them end up going back to prison after they are freed.

On the news they say they caught the person who murdered that man not too far from my apartment building. It was over some drug situation, and the perpetrator is going to be locked away for a long time.

The victim was intoxicated at the time of his death, and the assailant was caught and it is speculated that after being shown that they had forensic evidence on him, he confessed and provided details about others in his organization in an attempt to reduce his prison sentence.

One thing we will all come to realize eventually is that we will always want more until we decide we want nothing. We are always waiting for our plates to be filled, but even when they are there is always an empty side-dish.

We tell ourselves we'll be happy and content when we get that job. When we fall in love and get married. When we have a house. When we have children. The thing is it's never enough. It will never be enough. Not until enough is enough.

Chapter 25:

THE MOTH EFFECT

I open the front door to the apartment building and the Sun's rays hit me as if I had been in darkness for years. I notice that the plants are beginning to grow, and I can only hope that they grow properly. I start to think about how the Sun's rays, as powerful as they may be, how they don't reach the garden, and how sad the zinnias that were there before must have felt.

In the distance I see Mary getting out of a parked car with a bouquet of red roses, and this image reminds me that it's Mother's Day, but I've never figured Mary for a mother. Maybe the roses have nothing to do with the holiday.

Mary passes by me with a fur-coat that probably cost an animal its life. Insult to death. I'd like to think that the animals that are killed for their fur were primarily killed for their nutritional value. There can't be any righteousness in killing an animal simply for its properties in appearance. Only to gain in the selling of fur or leather.

I can also tell that she's drunk when she walks pass me, and that she's not conscious enough to notice that her driver is yelling out her name because she forgot something. I end up having to help her in that department.

Lynne told me that red roses symbolize love and romance. These red roses remind me of Maria,

but in particular, they remind me about two dreams I had about her a couple of years after we met. Maria and I both worked at the same place, and often times we would end up working at the same times. I usually walked to work, but one day when I was halfway there to work, it started to rain. It really started to pour. Maria, who drove to work, saw me walking and she stopped and gave me a ride to work.

We had been together for at least two years and then one night I have this dream. I'm walking down stairs. I hear this woman sitting at the bottom of a staircase crying. I ask her what's wrong and she looks up at me with big watery eyes.

The scene shifts like dreams like to do, and we are inside of a house. I look at her hand and I see a tattoo. I ask her what it is, and she tells me it's a butterfly in the shape of a heart. I ask her why, and she says to me, "Because it's through fate that we find our soulmate." I didn't have as good a memory then and I didn't start writing down my dreams yet so I can't remember the dream so well, but I can remember what she said about finding your soulmate with the help of fate clearly.

The butterfly effect theory basically states that one event, no matter how big or how small, can effectively influence the course of the future. One question often associated with this theory asks if the flap of a butterfly's wings in one part of the world can cause a natural disaster in another part of the world.

I gather that her tattoo meant that regardless of how random or senseless some things may be, coincidence has nothing to do with us finding our one true love. Our soulmate. That we find the ones we are suppose to live the rest of our lives with through fate.

The next thing I know, I'm lying in bed with the woman. Sometime later there is a banging on the door, and all I can hear is the name Diane ringing through my head. The woman gets up out of bed and goes to see who it is, and it's Maria on the other side of the door.

A few months later after having that dream, I have it again, but different things happen. It's the same woman in the same house, except this time I don't cheat on Maria. I tell Diane that I have to leave, that I'm not attracted to her flame, and she becomes furious, but before I go to turn away I notice that her tattoo is on her right hand this time. It's plagued me for years. In the first version of the dream, the tattoo is on her left hand, and in the second version, it's on her right hand. That one little change.

Because of free will, it sometimes seems as if we all write our own futures. There is a man who sets up dominoes to fall in a specific order in a specific way. He hits the first domino. The beginning. Everything goes to plan, and finally the last domino falls. The ending. He does this until he feels confident that he knows what will happen every time. Now he sets them up again the same exact way, but this time he gives domino number sixty-seven a free will. He hits the first domino to start the sequence.

Everything goes to plan until it gets to sixty-seven. Sixty-seven has removed from its spot and has wandered off, ruining everything. Now this man knows that he cannot predict what will happen if these dominoes have a free will.

I've just come back to my apartment building after visiting my parents' home, a nice big fancy house that they left for me some odd-numbered miles down the road. I go to that area once every few months because it's where I spent my childhood. Everyone probably longs for their childhood in their adulthood for reasons I shouldn't have to mention. Down the road a few blocks from the house is the church we all used to go to. My mother, my father, my brother and I.

I didn't know it back then, but my father didn't believe in God. Or Satan for that matter. Most people who don't believe in one don't believe the other. He never said he didn't believe in him, but I know he didn't; I know he went to church simply because it was the one thing my mother ever asked him to do.

He was a good liar, he had everyone fooled. He had several different masks so that you couldn't associate his face with his character or his role.

After my mother committed suicide we stopped going to church. My father and I, I mean. My brother was no longer around. I'm not even sure if the church-going people would want us to keep attending service, considering the good book says suicide is a sin.

Some even-numbered years later my father developed cancer and it killed him. Maybe it wasn't the cancer, maybe it was because he was so angry that he wouldn't be able to continue his quest for knowledge. Up until even now I question whether knowledge is a good thing or a bad thing because the gaining of knowledge by humankind is a double-edged sword. It can be what saves us or what destroys us. Someone said that an individual's gaining of knowledge either brings them closer to humankind or it causes more and more of an isolation from it.

I open the front door to the apartment building and I see Lynne checking her mail. She looks at me and smiles, and takes out all of her mail. I say hello and we both begin to walk towards the stairs. She asks me if I want some junk mail and tosses me some of her mail. It's junk mail. I read the name who it was to be delivered to, "Lynnette Parker." I guess she didn't take Silvio's last name.

On our way to our apartments Lynne tells me that there was an old woman here looking for me earlier. Joe's mom. Lynne gives me one more piece of paper with a name and an address on it, but no phone number. It appears as if Joe's mom, Kathleen, wants me to visit her. I thought I was out of the whole Joe thing once she came back.

I put down both the junk mail and the piece of paper that Lynne got from Kathleen on the table and I sit down on my couch and I think about what she would want. And then the phone rings. That damn ringing sound. I pick it up before it makes me go deaf and I hear a lady on the other end. Joe's mom, Kathleen.

We end up talking about Joe's condition, and about how the doctors say even if he does wake up, they are not sure if he will be "normal." In other words, they are not sure if he has suffered any brain damage. She also gets me to agree to come visit her on the upcoming Wednesday even though she lives on the far side of town.

Is it our brain that determines who we are? Is Joe the way he is because of the way his brain is constructed, and if he has indeed suffered any brain damage, will that change who he really is? We've seen the victims of stroke and how the ones who suffer from brain damage change completely. How they stare at you blankly. How they can't recognize people they've known their entire lives. How they can't do things they did before. How they can't continue their quest for knowledge because they have been compromised.

If Joe wakes up and there is a screw loose up there, will he still be Joe, or will he put on a mask that no one recognizes?

Chapter 26:

HEADS, TAILS, SAME COIN

"Our destiny is frequently met in the very paths we take to avoid it." So many times a young man will curse his father's name and swear never to follow in his footsteps, and so many times that young man goes back on his word and does indeed follow in his father's footsteps.

He doesn't follow the imprints in the ground because it is his fate to do so, but because later in his life he begins to understand why his father was the way he was. Sometimes these thoughts are met with forgiveness, even long after the father has died.

I hadn't had a dream worth writing down or remembering in days until last night. Last night I dreamed that I was at some sort of crime scene, trying to find the clues to a puzzle that seemed as if it didn't really exist. I see the chalk outline of a body that was here before, but has long since been gone. I wish I knew the victim's name so I didn't have to refer to the body as "the body."

A woman comes up to me and tells me that this is the sixth body that they've found in the month that was killed in the same manner. The likings of a serial killer who should only be referenced to as a serial murderer. This is the life of the sixth damned person who had a damned name that this serial murderer has taken on my watch.

I'm at the grocery store now, in line, thinking about how a human being could murder another human being. What it takes. How your brain has to be constructed. How your environment has to be. I remember one of my teachers in high school telling us about an experiment.

There was a contained area where rats resided, and as the population grew the rats started to kill each other. It makes me wonder what will happen once humankind begins to overpopulate, if those happenings haven't begun already.

Hunting a murderer and becoming a murderer are two different things, but also one in the same. The first step is realizing that you are a murderer yourself. Maybe not literally, but philosophically. Just as you may wear the mask of the law enforcement officer, you can easily go backstage and take it off and put on the mask of the murderer and the audience won't have a clue. The scary thing is you may not have a clue either.

So it is gathered that if you want to be able to catch a murderer, it would be good to know how the mind of one works, how their brain is constructed, but the problem with this method is that there is

a chance the person who is in pursuit of this murderer persona may lose sight of where the line is.

The separation between good and bad, and bad for the sake of good. Icarus flew too close to the Sun and the consequences were less than desirable. There is no success if you become the very idea you hunt, but that of course is relative.

I leave the store and when I get outside, I find that the bread I purchased has been smashed by the milk. That damn baggar. I look back in the store and I notice that the baggar is gone. At this point the dream starts to skip around as I remember it and then I find myself following someone.

The only thing I can think of is that chalk outline I had seen earlier before, and how a person could murder another person. How someone could get away with it so easily, six times. I stare at the back of the head of this man I am following and I start to wonder if I could kill him and get away with it. I start to picture the murderer I have been looking for, I try to picture him as myself. What goes through the mind of a murderer. Certainly thoughts plagued with narcissism. I would find it hard for my serial murderer to not be some type of narcissist if he believes he can take the lives of others.

Chances are every person on this Earth probably has some form of narcissism in them, big or small, superficial or buried deep inside the mind. There must be a reason why people long ago believed even the Sun revolved around the Earth. They must have thought they were important.

I stop walking and I watch as this man walks away from me. Further and further, until he is gone. I can't kill this man; I have to find out why. I realize that if I want to catch this murderer, if I want to understand the mind of a murderer, I need to start smaller. I need to find my murderer persona and understand it. Maybe I need to kill something. Not a human of course, something smaller.

Maybe an ant, or a cat. A goat or an elephant. I swear to myself that I will never go as far as killing a human being.

I woke up and couldn't help but think about how two people who learned to do something exactly the same way could end up doing that trade so differently. Roll the dice. This dream leads me to believe that nothing in life is pure good or pure evil. That everything is merely pure perception.

Now the Moon has taken the place of the Sun and there is a knocking at my door. It's Jamal, a man I haven't seen in probably a little over half of a year. Years ago, Maria wanted me to see someone about my obsession with my dreams, so I did, but it wasn't too long until I stopped going.

Maria realized that I didn't care, that I wasn't going to try, so she left. The man who I spoke to asked me so many questions that instead of trying to analyze myself and trying to figure out what is making me the way I am, I started to wonder about him himself. Why he has chosen this specific field of work.

My interest in him only ravaged my obsession with my dreams and the many ideas about life that I had taking up space in my head. Soon after I found myself visiting a group therapy session that dealt with drug abuse. Not necessarily for the triumphant stories and the lack of self-acceptance

stories these people had, but to analyze how the human mind can become so attached or dependent on a certain way of thinking. That fisheye view.

Usually addictions become obsessions, but in my case the obsession became the addiction. I needed to see these types of suffering people so I could learn more about existence, and now I had one more addiction on my list.

At a drug abuse session is where I met Jamal, who was forced to go to these sessions by his friends and family. The sessions didn't help though, I could see he was still involved in that type of life. That look of paranoia. Some people prefer Hell. After one session, we both ended up taking the same bus home and that's where the story begins.

Jamal tells me that he is in some sort of trouble with certain people, and that this was the last place they'd look for him considering we don't socialize much anymore. I wanted to tell him that I didn't care about his troubles, but the truth is he never had a chance. Not where he grew up. Not who he grew up with. Someone dealt him a shitty hand. He says he only plans to stay for a night or two at the most, and then he tells me he'll be back. It turns out his younger brother was standing outside, and that he would also be residing here for the time being.

Jamal says that his brother's name is Derek, and that he won't be a problem. I let them both stay in the room that houses my composition notebooks as it's the only other room in the apartment. I tell them not to touch any of the notebooks because they are in a specific order.

In the morning when I go to see how they are, I see that Jamal is still sleeping, but Derek is wide awake. He is reading one of my notebooks. I wasn't surprised because I knew someone like him wouldn't be able to resist his curiosity. To see this complex of puzzlement before him.

From the moment I saw him I knew he was one of those kids that didn't belong out on the street. He wasn't like his older brother even though these were the types of people he was around all day. At a young age he must've figured out that life was much more than it seemed to be, but the truth is he never had a chance.

Chapter 27:

SATAN IS IN THE DETAILS

Jamal is reluctant to tell me who he is hiding from and why he is doing so. I have to know what I'm getting myself into so I tell him if he doesn't tell me something, he will have to get the fuck out. He tells me that he borrowed some money from someone, and that he hasn't been able to pay them back.

He says that in the past, that person has broken some of his bones, so before he goes back to his home he has to have the money first. I ask him how he's going to get the money and he tells me that he has some sort of deal that is going down in a few days. I tell him that a few days and one night are two different things.

Derek is now going through my composition notebooks as if he were studying for a test the next day. The only thing more intriguing than his reading skills and his comprehension skills are the

questions he asks. He asks me how a dog could have a soul. How come fate and coincidence are the only options. Why a thief would rob himself. When the universe ends, is it actually beginning.

While Jamal is making phone calls, Derek and I are discussing the dreams I have had, except he doesn't realize that they are dreams. He thinks they are short stories attached with some kind of message.

Three days go by and they are both still here. Derek has taken a liking to my "short stories," and Jamal is constantly on the phone. Last night the people on the news say there was another murder around my area and once again it was filed under "D" for drugs. People killing people. Sometimes I wonder if man discovered murder or invented it.

Now I'm on the bus taking a trip to visit Kathleen, Joe's mom, because it's Wednesday. On the bus I remember a dream I had three years ago. I'm in an airplane, and the only other passenger is a man sitting to the left of me. He begins to tell me about the evolution of man, how the creature first learned how to communicate with its own kind and other kinds around it. He tells me how all forms of language is simply the outward projection of the mind.

The questions someone asks, the way they react to a certain event, these are who they are or who they want to be. He starts to tell me that man created a part of the brain that deals with everything that is exterior to the body it belongs to, and a part of the brain that deals with everything that is interior to the body it belongs to. He tells me that these functions were birthed from the need to survive.

Now the man is telling me that he once knew God, but that they had been separated long ago because they disagreed. He tells me that they were working on a project. They were nearing completion when they came to the last aspect of the project, whether all the lifeforms in all possible places would have a free will or not.

He tells me that God believed that they should have a free will, but that he himself believed that they should not. That if these lifeforms had a free will, they would eventually destroy the entire project itself.

He says he tried to remind God that even the beings who created him and God had stated that giving him and God and all the others of our kind a free will was a mistake. Apparently the mistake was going to happen again, and maybe again sometime down the road.

So this man says he and God argued, disagreed, and then they were separated, God being sent to one place, and the man being sent to another place, and it was decided that God would finish the project alone. The man was angry when he saw that God had decided to grant the lifeforms a privilege of free will.

Several days later, the man swears to God that he will make the lifeforms murder, steal and deceive one another to show God that giving them a free will was a mistake. The man says he kept his promise for years, and eventually the sins grew to a degree that he no longer had to continue to prove his point. The lifeforms became so sinful that they teach their offspring the ways of sin, and

it simply carries on by itself.

Now the man says after so many years, he realized that God had not once shown his face to his creation. He had not once intervened. He let his creation destroy itself as if he didn't care. The man says at that point he isn't so much concerned with the wills of the lifeforms as he is with the will of God.

For years he claims that God is a hypocrite, saying he has given will to his creation yet has no will of his own. God never responds. This man says that those were his last words to God, and since then he has been waiting for God's reply. The man says knowing God for as long as he did, he will probably only speak through the actions of his creation.

I ask the man how he knew God, and he tells me that he was once one of God's angels. I start to wonder that if maybe it was this man who was running the entire universe instead of God, if our lives would be better. We would however have no free will, but that's of course if free will is what we think it is. I say to the man that perhaps God has actually intervened. I tell him about Moses and Jesus, and the man says that God was not in these people.

He says that Moses and Jesus were just two of the people who were born from people who murdered and stole and deceived. That Moses and Jesus learned and chose to deceive people because of the free will they were given by God. I ask him about the people who God has spoken to, people like Abraham, and he tells me that these people were disillusioned. They saw God because they needed to see God in a world such as this one.

Now there is a familiar-looking man walking towards us, and after he passes, the man I am talking to tells me that the man who just passed us is the antichrist. I ask him why he looked so much like Jesus, and the man tells me that it was merely a mask. Just like the mask he himself was wearing a mask.

I arrived at the home of Joe's mom, Kathleen, still wondering why she could have possibly wanted me to visit her. By the end of the night I realize that she has been alone since her husband died.

All the relationships she had in the past ended in bitterness because of the sins of her son or ended because the other person had passed away. It's funny how once someone reveals that they are a homosexual, they immediately become a different person. The friends they had and the people they knew, some of them disappear. However, that's not to say that some of them don't stay. There are always people who will accept you for who you really are, or even who you really aren't.

Like so many other people, Kathleen, Joe's mom, suffers from isolation within. Like so many people she is surrounded by billions of lifeforms, yet manages to feel alone, and so now in her times of desperation she reaches out. She seeks forgiveness not from me, not from Joe, not even from God, but from herself because self-acceptance is the beginning of the end. Accepting that she was not strong enough to say no to her husband and the others who condemned her son. She tells me that when Joe wakes up she wants to be next to his side, she wants to move on with the little time she has left, and she wants to die satisfied. Not in those words.

She asks me if I understand these words that she is saying, but I can't possibly comprehend them the way she does, the way she wants me to, simply because I don't have children. Because I've never had a wife or a husband. Because I'm not so old that I think time is running out for me to fix the messes that reach out from the past and into the present and await the future. I can't possibly understand because for the most part, my heart is filled with more hate than it is love. This misanthropic life.

As I'm returning back to my home, I decide to instead spend the night at my parents' house because in my apartment building there are fools and intruders. People like Lynne who ask you to garden with them. People like Joe who put your name on a form. People like Jamal who seek refuge, and when you show them kindness they lie to you. People like Mary who at the very sight of them makes you feel sick.

Even my home is a place where I don't belong. I sit here and even the home I grew up in, my parents' home, I don't feel I belong. I feel as if there is no place for me in a world with so many people I can't call my own, but as I'm beginning to fall asleep, perhaps to dream of a paradise where I do belong, a utopia where I can find people who are like me, all I can think about is Lynne and the time she said that your home is your home.

Chapter 28:

BLACK AND WHITE

I wake up and for a second I don't know where I am, but the painting of Jesus Christ on the wall reminds me that I spent the night at my parents' home. It also reminds me of the dream I just had, but I can only remember bits, pieces and parts. In one part of the dream, Joe's mom, Kathleen, and I are at the hospital visiting a sleeping Joe. She offers me a piece of gum and I take it, but I don't really like gum so I put it in my coat pocket.

The next thing I remember is that I'm leaning over Joe's body trying to read what's on the dog tags that are around his neck. Either I can't remember what I read or they were just blank.

Now I'm awake and back at my apartment building and standing in front of my door, trying to look in through the peephole from the outside, but of course that doesn't work; all I can see is black. This is a one way street, one way view, and you can't just expect everyone to see things the way you do. Sometimes you just have to look at something at a different perspective, through the eyes of someone else, but if all you can see is black, then you may have to trust that person to guide you through the darkness.

As I'm trying to look into my own apartment I hear someone coming up the stairs. I take out my keys and pretend to go through them. It's Boris. I'm pretty sure he's Russian but that's about all I know about him. He looks at me, nods, and I nod back, and he goes up the next flight of stairs.

Once he's gone I start to look through the peephole again but still all I can see is black. I don't know why but I just keep trying to see at least something, just a little color, just something other than black, and that's when I hear a familiar voice. "What are you doing?"

It's Lynne, holding a basket of laundry. She's so small I didn't hear her coming up the stairs. I tell

her that I reversed the peephole so I could see inside my apartment when I'm coming home, just in case there is someone inside ready to attack me. She starts to laugh and that makes me laugh. I'm getting better at this.

She asks me what made me think of doing that, and I tell her that it was actually from an old television show and that my peephole wasn't actually reversed. She laughs again.

She walks by me and she says that she has something she wants to show me. I follow her into her apartment. Then through the living room. Then into her bedroom. I see her bed and I can't help but think of the dream I had with the prostitute. She points to her left and I come closer to see what it is. It's a painting of a white rose with a Sun behind it, giving it life.

I remember that she told me that a white rose meant innocence and purity, silence and secrecy, but I know that the feelings I have for her are anything but passionate. This feeling that I think might be love is simply obsession in disguise.

I've seen so many famous paintings by artists considered the greatest, but I've never felt anything from them like other people do. I think the thing is you have to see one of these paintings at the right time in the right place under the right circumstances, and that's when you will truly understand what appears before you.

For a second everything makes sense, and the painting stares back at you and you understand it. That's how I feel looking at Lynne's painting, because this white rose and this Sun have so many meanings to me.

I ask her if she painted it herself, and she says yes. She tells me that she has been painting since she was a little girl. She starts to tell me she paints because it's like gardening. You have an idea for a painting, and you plant that seed. Once you start painting you are creating a universe of your own and there are no boundaries.

Eventually your universe starts to grow and you paint what your heart tells you to. It's just like writing or playing an instrument. She continues but I lose focus of what she's saying when I hear the news on the television. I tell her to wait, and I walk into her living room, she follows.

Police have discovered thirteen bodies in a small abandoned apartment building. They say the bodies are, just like the other deaths, related to drugs. I can't help but wonder if this is actually the work of a serial killer instead.

Lynne and I talk about it for a while, and then I go home to find that Jamal has left. However Derek is still here, and he is of course reading one of the composition notebooks. I ask Derek where his brother went and he said he left. He tells me that Jamal made a phone call early in the morning and then just left, and that he told him to stay here. I then ask him what he's reading and he tells me he's reading about the short story where the main character realizes that their dreams were actually altered memories of horrible things they had done in the past.

How the main character talks about how dreams are so similar to memories. How when the main

character had a dream of his parents dying in a house fire that he or she barely escaped, it was actually him or her who set the fire in the first place in the true reality. That was so long ago I didn't even remember writing it down.

I ask Derek if he wants anything to eat and we end up ordering pizza. While we are waiting, Derek tells me something I already knew. That Jamal lied to me. That he didn't really owe anyone money, he was just trying to get himself and Derek out of what was happening in the southern side of the city. All the killing, all the drugs.

He starts to tell me about how there is a huge drug war going on. He tells me that it started because one of the dealers from one of the organizations started selling drugs to a family member of one of the top guys in the other organization.

Someone said the best way to eliminate your competition or to win a war is by having your enemy destroy itself. Start shipping drugs to your enemies country and soon they will have a domestic problem. The people will get addicted and start acting like addicts and that's the only seed you need to plant. The rest will follow.

Then he tells me that one of the top guys tells one of his own guys to murder the punk who sold drugs to his younger sister, and the next day that guy is found dead lying on the ground for everyone to see. That must have been the man who was intoxicated at the time of his death. The one that the police officer asked Lynne and I about. Then he tells me that the guy who did the killing got caught and was ready to bring the whole crew down. I was right. Now I stop him and ask him how he knows all of this, because he couldn't have been a major player at his age.

He tells me that his brother is the one who is the major player. That his brother has murdered people, and now both the police and the friends of the people he has murdered are looking for him. Jamal, that shithead. He brings his problems here and endangers my life.

I ask Derek if he knows anything about a building full of dead bodies but he says no. I'm guessing that Jamal called someone this morning and got the news that they found thirteen bodies in a building, so he went back out there. For what reason, I can't figure that out. The building full of bodies reminds me of a dream I had a long time ago.

I'm in the military walking along a dirt path with other soldiers, and eventually our journey is halted by a house on the road. It starts to stink, and one of the officers sends me and another man to check what's in there. Right before we kick down the door I glance at the man's dog tags, and they read "Max Harvey."

What we see before us is piles and piles of dead bodies left behind by a war that will probably end all of mankind, or at the very least destroy this part of the world. Murder contracts. The smell becomes so strong that it wakes me up. The dream makes me wonder if the world we live in is as bad as some of us think it is. After all, the decisions made before our time could have left behind a world far worse.

The good book says that the first murder was by Cain, done to his younger brother, Abel. Cain,

who is portrayed as a sinful man, murders his brother after God rejects his offerings but accepts Abel's offerings. What was probably the cause and effect of a jealousy or anger gene cost a man his life, and I could only hope that one of Jamal's negative genes didn't turn on and in turn will cost him his own life.

I can only hope that his anger gene is still switched off, but who am I kidding. In order for certain species to survive in a certain environment, sometimes a certain switch has to always be on.

There is a knock at my door, but it's not the pizza-man, it's Joe's mom, Kathleen. I want to tell her that it's not such a good idea for her to drop by unexpectedly, but how can I, the more I see her the more senile she appears. Derek retreats back to his room, so I am left alone with her, and this time the theme isn't forgiveness, it's salvation.

I'm not a people person, I am exactly the wrong person to talk to about these things, yet she confides in me. Thank you Joe for sucking me into a world that I do not belong in. Her problem now is how can Joe get into the kingdom of Heaven if he doesn't change his sinful ways. How can he be saved if he dwells with a lifestyle which is not right.

Eventually the pizza gets here and I offer her some, but she doesn't understand how someone can eat pizza so early in the day, so Derek finally comes out and he and I end up eating all of it. Derek and Kathleen, Joe's mom, greet each other but I can tell they both feel weird about it. I guess it's because they are the exact opposites of each other. Young, old, black, white.

They both come from two very different lifestyles, but I bet if you put them both in a room together long enough, they will both tell each other their life stories, and what was so black before starts to get a little color.

There is a story of a woman who forgot the English language after being hit by a car, and the only words she knew were the words she heard. She wouldn't remember the word "hypnosis" until you said it to her, and only then would it be part of her vocabulary again. The philosophical concept of the story is that we only know and understand what we have experienced.

Chapter 29:

RAINING IN NEW YORK

She looks at him and he can see the sparkle in her beautiful blue eyes. "I will never forget this night," she says to him. "I am so glad we found each other," he replies. They continue to dance slowly to the mellow music being played in the background, as do all the others who were invited to this victorious celebration party.

There is a smell of expensive perfume in the air, and any other type of smell would simply be unacceptable. In the middle of the large extravagant room there is an elegant piece of marble, a statue carved to depict a man holding the hand of a child. The people dance around the piece of marble, and those who aren't dancing mingle with the others who aren't dancing.

One says to another, "we are doing God's work." In the corner of the room there are bottles of wine and other types of fine drinks, but these drinks are overshadowed by the seemingly endless amount

of food ready to be eaten. This is a party for the celebration of a charity organization that had just reached a remarkable goal.

Even though the party in this dream seems as if it had been going on for a long time, the night was still young.

My partner and I walk through a parking lot filled with cars that could only be owned by individuals with a high standard of living. The high class. We put on our theater masks and get through all of their poor attempts at security, and then we knock down the doors and interrupt the most beautiful party you have ever seen.

My partner fires a round into the ceiling of the room and everyone stops dancing. Everyone stops talking. Soon after the music stops, and that's when we know we have the floor. The owner of this charity foundation, who is standing on the stage waiting for our demands, he's a thief. Not a thief like me or my partner, but a thief who hides behind the persona of a decent and honest human being.

He wears this mask that is his actual face, hiding in plain sight. He steals from his donors and with this money he provides for himself a lifestyle that people can't even dream of. Well, most people.

There was a man who said that all warfare is based on deception. To seem as if you are attacking when you are actually resting, and to seem as if you are resting when you are actually attacking. Of course, this doesn't just apply to warfare, as this owner has figured out.

My partner and I drop the two dead bodies we are carrying on our shoulders. These black bodies that are losing flesh, and we explain to them how their boss was the one who caused this. How people like him are causing problems around the world because of their greed and selfishness.

We tell them how this boy and this girl, who were extremely close friends, could have had a life together. How they could have danced in the rain, how they could have held each other, how they could have gotten married, how they could have had kids. But instead, the only good thing they had in their life was the fact that they died together, of starvation.

By the end of the night we have killed the owner and destroyed the statue of deceit. Before we killed him, before he starts begging for his life, he tells us that it's the mayor's fault. That he himself had nothing to do with the stealing of funds from the charity, but everyone here and everyone like this owner lies. My partner asks him, "what about her life, what about his?" He has no answer. After he's dead I think to myself how many people we will have to kill before everything is right, how many people will have to die, and then I wake up.

My father always told me that if you can think of something, and comprehend it, then it is possible. That the only things that are impossible are the things we don't even have the capacity to conceive. The owner thinks of starting a charity company out of goodwill, but along the path he loses his way and thinks about stealing from the people who want to help; then he makes it happen.

What he failed to comprehend is that you can fall when you are up and you can rise when you are down. Memento mori. Philosophically, metaphorically and literally. Robin Hood would agree.

Some people think that it's money that can make the world a better place, that it's money that can change the world, but even if a person who was determined to make a difference had an endless supply of every type of currency in the world, the person wouldn't be able to change much. There's a chance that they could make the world worse.

The person starts giving out all the money to all of the poor people in the world and then no one is working. The system that was so similar to the system of our bodies shuts down because red blood cells no longer need to work. They can stay at home in their large mansion and let the brain cells experience cell death.

Some people think a better way to change the world is to take from the rich and give to the poor and balance everything out. That everyone should be financially equal in every way. The word "communism" may come to mind, and there are those who dread this idea. Those who will do anything to stop the idea from spreading.

Change is difficult; maybe because the world wants to stay this way because it is already this way, or maybe because people don't want to change because they are the way they are and want to stay that way. If that makes any sense.

The phone rings and it's Kathleen, Joe's mom. She tells me that Joe had waken up, but soon after had a seizure and is now in critical condition and will probably slip right back into that brilliant coma.

As she's talking, I can hear that sound of a person who wants to start crying but never does. The little pauses, the sighs, the regret. She thinks that it's her fault that Joe was about to die because she didn't stand up for him. Because she didn't even stand up for something that was part of her, that came out of her, that was her flesh and blood and DNA. Her capacity to conceive had cast a shadow on her capacity to nurture.

Her depression reminds me of my mother, and in turn her suicide. I think of Joe and I think of Kathleen, I think about how their relationship now has the same amount of dialogue as it did for the past who knows amount of years. Now I can't help but think about my little brother and the event that happened with my mother.

How she fed him poison and then fed herself poison. How she was the one who decided that this world was too cruel for her young son to grow up in. I still have that image of them both in my head, coming home from school to find them both just there, lifeless. It took a long time to let them both go, but what I learned from that is that people's flesh wither away because you have to let them go. You have no choice. The human heart beats 2.5 billion times in an average lifetime, but eventually the beating and the pumping must stop. That muscle must die.

I open the door to find Derek going through my composition notebooks as usual, and then I hear a car door slam and I shift my head to look out my window. I see Lynne, her two kids and an older

woman getting out of the car. I assume the older woman is Lynne's mother.

Sarah takes something out of David's hands and then David hits her. "Don't hit your sister," the older woman says. I hear them pass through in the hallway, and there is no need to look through that fisheye view because I already know who's passing by.

For David and Sarah I can only hope that no one gets in the way of their childhood. That no one separates them and no one causes them to have a less than desirable childhood. That even if they don't have what they want, they have what they need despite all the people around them who may take more than what a single human being actually needs.

Chapter 30:

FRIENDS IN LOW PLACES

I'm walking down Chase street. If you walk down a certain street enough times, it will get so that you remember what cars it parks, what trees it houses and what buildings it erects. I walk into the grocery store and buy what I usually buy, and I notice they hired someone new.

I walk back out and there is that car again. The car I saw on my way to the store. I have never seen it before on this street but it's nothing strange. Cars come and go. So do trees, and so do buildings.

I'm at the front door of my apartment building now, looking down at the life that Lynne and I had created. These growing flowers, these peace lilies. That's when I see blood on the door handle. I peer inside and it's almost as if I can see silence because the atmosphere looks so dead. I open the door and walk inside slowly, and I see more blood on the ground. Not a lot. There's never a lot.

I go up the stairs slowly and when I get to the top, my heart stops. It's Kathleen laying on the ground, no signs of life. I put down the groceries and I go up to her, but the muscle has died. It's stopped pumping, stopped doing its one job, and because of this the entire body suffers. I think to myself, why is there a trail of blood, I start to wonder if she fought off whoever did this. Then I remember that Derek is still here, and the drug war he was telling me about.

I go into my apartment and look for him, but he is nowhere to be found. Maybe the blood was his. I think that until I realize my backdoor is wide open, and there is no trail to be followed.

I call the police and tell them what has happened, and then I go back to the body. I go back to Kathleen. A woman who I only knew through Joe, and I barely know Joe at best. I told her to stop coming, not because it was for her own safety but because she was bothersome, and being bothersome is what got her murdered by a blade that didn't even have her name on it. These stab wounds.

I hear Lynne's door creak, and then I hear her voice. She's calling out my name but in a way that appears as if she's asking me if I am who I am. Then she asks me if the ambulance had come yet. I find out that she had already called the police, but she stayed inside her apartment because she is terrified of dead people and that she didn't want the kids to come out and see it. I look at Joe's door, and all I can think about is why mother's have to die so close to their sons.

The police arrive, take over the crime scene, and then ask us questions. They question everyone who was in the building at the time, which wasn't much because it was early. They ask about the blood trail, if anyone was missing, but that question goes unresolved. I figure if Derek is still alive he's long gone anyway, probably looking for his brother.

The body is taken, and as I look outside my window to see her being carried away, I see the large group of people who are wondering what had happened. Wondering if someone got hurt, or if someone had died. Ambulances, police cars, they do that to people. They attract them and cause them to huddle up because there must be something out of place. The ambulance sits there, running, but not moving.

After a while, they finally drive away, and I wonder if that's the last time I will ever see her again. I wonder how I will tell Joe what happened when he wakes up, if he wakes up.

Some time goes by and I'm sitting on my couch, Kathleen's death hasn't fully sunken in yet. It probably never will. The deaths you hear about on the news are so foreign, but when the death has happened to someone you know, when it's so close to home, it's a different story.

Across the hall I can hear Lynne arguing with her mother about something, probably about getting out of this part of town because it's too dangerous. It's not really that dangerous, though. The real danger is where basic human needs are not met.

I get up to go to the room where Derek was staying, the room that houses all of my composition notebooks, and when I peer inside I see an open notebook on the ground, it was obvious that Derek was interrupted.

As I go to pick up the notebook, I too am interrupted as the phone begins to ring. That damn ringing sound. The ringing sound that tells you that you will be engaging in a discussion with another human being very soon.

What the ringing doesn't tell you is how long the discussion will be, or what the contents of the discussion entail, or who exactly the discussion will be with. I guess if you have caller identification, you can see who it will be sometimes. If you know who it will be, then there's a chance you can figure out what the contents of the discussion will be about. If you can figure out what the contents will be about, then perhaps you can figure out how long the discussion will be.

I pick up the phone, it's the police station, asking me to come down and answer a few questions. Police officer, question, less than two minutes.

I'm at the station, more specifically in a small room. Before me there is one police officer, a detective, asking me questions. What time did I discover the body, when did I leave the building, what was Kathleen White doing visiting me. As time goes on, the questions get more offensive, like I'm the fucking murderer.

On my way back home I pass by my parents' home, and the church we used to go to, but I don't visit either. Instead I wonder why I have allowed myself to become so far gone. From people,

society, common traditions. A woman has died and part of it is because she met me, but the only thing I can feel is the need to know where she is now, to know what happens after the heart stops beating and the brain stops thinking.

Some time goes by and now I'm making breakfast. Before I can really start there is a banging at my door. It's the police, but not any of the ones I've seen before. One of them is telling me they have a search warrant for my apartment, and another is telling me that I'm under arrest for the murder of one Kathleen White. I am confused, possibly in the mildest state of a coma, I can't comprehend a word they are saying to me.

They say that I may not have done the actual stabbing, but that they know I played a role in the death of Kathleen White. That I wanted her dead. Another officer starts to pat me down. He puts his hand in one of my coat pockets and takes out a piece of gum, and that's when I wake up.

The use of an unreliable narrator is sometimes necessary to depict the atmosphere of the narrator's mind. There was a time in my life when dreams and actual real-life memories were difficult to differentiate, separating reality from fiction was not feasible. Sometimes we wake up from dreams angry because we wish it was real life, and sometimes we wake up relieved because it wasn't.

I look in Derek's room, he's sleeping. I turn on the television and hear about how several more people have died. All most likely having a tie to the drug trade. Not too long afterwards, there's a knocking at my door and I look through the peephole. It looks like one of Jamal or Derek's friends, but I can only assume because there is no one here to guide me. I open the door and the man asks for Derek. I ask him who he is, literally.

He says he's a friend of Jamal's, or, was a friend of his. I ask him if Jamal is okay, but all he does is look down and nods sideways. All forms of language is simply the outward projection of the mind. What kind of life is this?

I wake Derek up, and they both leave. It's probably the last time I will see either of them, and finally this place where I reside is my own again. I go to the room where Derek stayed, and I look at my composition notebooks. All in place, as if they were never touched. Derek has the mindset, but what he chooses to do in life is up to him. Heads, tails, call it in the air.

I had this dream one time where I was walking through a city, the downtown area, and there were so many busy people. People who were going places; people walking, driving, running, bicycling. In the contrast there were people who stayed still, laid still, sat still, stood still. These were people without homes; men, women, children. Families. Every system produces waste.

I walked past a man who was sleeping on a piece of cardboard, and sat down on a bench that was next to him. Still on my journey to a peaceful place that I had yet to find. Seeing these people like this made me wonder if it was their own fault that their lives turned out like this, or if it was the fault of society. Is it that for one person to live in a home, another must be without one? There was a man who said that a nation is only as strong as how it treats its unfortunate.

All this time I'm thinking that these people screwed up somewhere in their lives, but what I don't

realize is that some of them chose to be homeless. It's almost as if it were something you read out of a book about Nirvana, that these types of people are trying to free themselves from suffering.

Later in the same dream, I try to look up at the night-sky, but there is too much pollution in the city. All you can really see are small white dots, and one big dot that is sometimes yellow. If you're lucky, there won't be white smoke passing through them.

These thoughts bring me closer to my window, and I try to look out at the night-sky, but still all I can see are little white dots. I continue to look around and then I notice Lynne is down there, looking at the flowers. They are growing well. Like many other things, the critical determination on whether these flowers will flourish is how they are developed early on.

Like someone out of a mystery-murder book, I watch her silently. Her facial expressions, her actions, the only thing I can't see are her thoughts. Now I see light, someone is coming out of the building. I've seen this large woman in the building before but I don't know who she is. Her and Lynne begin to talk.

I can't hear what they are saying but they are laughing and smiling, pretending as if the echoes from the Sun reach every part of our world. That there is no darkness that cannot be shone out of existence. But there is.

And then that's when it happens, a loud boom goes off in my apartment. At first I think someone has sneaked in, but after a while I realize I'm the only one in the apartment. I heard the boom clearly, but I couldn't tell where it came from. I check my bedroom, nothing has changed. Then I go check the composition notebook room; the shelf that housed my notebooks had collapsed and before me was a mess of black and white. It reminds me that there is still trouble in the world.

Composition 1, Part 4

Chapter 31:

THE SIN CITY

Last night, I had a dream. I'm in a room where the walls have recently been painted black, I can tell because of the obvious smell of fresh paint. What color the walls may have been before my arrival, only God and Satan know.

On these walls there are light switches. The normal light switch you would find in your room. The light switch that you flick on without even realizing it because by now you've been doing it for so long that it's second-nature. The only difference is that these switches are about ten times bigger than the normal-sized light switch, and a little bit more white.

I start to walk up to one in hopes of flipping it on so I can light up this room, but as I walk closer and closer I notice there is writing above the switch, as if it's the switch's title. When I get close enough I can finally read it, the word "Hate" has been written here in red. A few feet to my right, there is another switch, and that one is titled "Love" and has been written in green.

A few more feet to my right there is yet another switch, and this time I can't read the word, but I can

tell that it's in yellow. As I continue to look around, I realize there are hundreds of these switches, and as I pass by each one, they are all titled uniquely, the ones I can read anyway. The only similarities are that some are in red, some are in green, and the others are in yellow.

"Murder." "Jealousy." "Friendly." "Sacrifice." "Indifference." Those are five words that I pass by on the walls. Eventually I come up to the switch titled "Anger." I think to myself that if I turn this switch on, someone or something, maybe even perhaps myself, will become prone to the anger disease. After a while of thinking I convince myself that I am already angry, and that this switch is suppose to be on anyway, so I flip it on, and I immediately find myself outside in a city full of life.

People, cars, music, lights, yelling. I start to walk and after about ten yards I notice that the people who I am passing by are looking at me funny, but I don't know why. I walk for a few more yards and this continues, people looking at me strangely as if I am not one of them. As if I am not their kind.

Finally I look down to see if there is anything wrong with me, and I realize I have a bandage around my mouth. I look behind me and I notice pieces of flesh and my teeth have been falling out behind me. I cover my mouth, my bandage, and I walk into a store and head for the bathroom. How I know exactly where the bathroom is remains a mystery, but I walk into a stall and I stand there, trying to figure out what I will do next.

After a few minutes I hear the bathroom door open, someone walks in. The person begins to talk, they begin to speak about how the project needs some kind of loop function. Then I hear another voice, a different voice, a voice that says the only way to integrate a loop function is by stressing a single point.

They start discussing how this single point would be the basic function and main center of the loop function. How the project itself will perceive it as either birth or death, when it's really one in the same. How one will perceive the action as "going away from" and another will perceive it as "coming towards to." They say that with this point, the beginning and the end is merely an illusion.

I open the stall door because I want to see who these people are, and when I finally do all I see is a figure that seems to have a white light casted on it, and the other figure is completely shadowed in darkness. They both look up at me, and I realize that the outline of their bodies resemble that of children. The dark figure hands me a composition notebook that is mostly black, and then hands me a black pen. Shortly after, the white figure hands me a composition notebook that is mostly white, and then hands me a white pen.

Opening both of the notebooks I assume they will be empty, but they have both already been filled with words and pictures. When I look back up I see that the two figures are gone, and I notice that something had been written on the mirror in blue marker. "Welcome to the sin city." Las Vegas.

I wake up and I sit on the edge of my bed. The first thing I think about are the switches on the wall, and the titles they were given. Then I remember seeing the words denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance, all words we have seen from the five stages of grief. Yellow, red, yellow, red, green.

I walk into my living room, the television is on; there is a part of me that remembers turning it off, I always do, but there is also the part of me that forgets. There is something on the news about past findings in a project called the Human Genome Project, a project that started in 1989 in an attempt to identify and map the many genes in the human genome.

These sorts of things, the human condition, they interest me, so I sit down to watch, but unfortunately that part of the news is ending and once again I find myself watching news about the violence in this city.

Two children, both girls, were victims to a drive-by shooting. The reporter says the shooting more than likely has a relation to the thirteen bodies found earlier this month in an abandoned apartment building, but there is no concrete evidence. Regardless, the police department is furious and has snapped due to the many recent homicides; who wants a higher murder count? The random arrests and police brutality will start soon. Max out the jail cells.

I'm at the bus stop now, waiting for a bus to take me to a department store where I can buy a new shelf for a few hundred homeless composition notebooks. The bus, unlike some other things, eventually comes after such a long time of waiting and takes me to my destination, which is also unlike some other things.

Along the way to the department store, I see black and whites, a name for police vehicles, and they are all over the place. If only the police department had the funds and the man and woman power to do this every hour of every day, crime might move to another city in another state that doesn't have the funds.

Walking through a neighborhood, I see a lot of kids playing in clothes that don't quite fit them right, playing with balls that don't quite bounce properly. Sitting on the steps are the older kids who have seen and done a bit more than the kids who will survive them. The kids who will succeed them. Shouting from the windows of the apartment buildings are the mothers, who are yelling at the little ones to come inside, or to not play too close to the street.

The fathers, they are probably either gone, or too busy working all day, every day, which also means gone as well. Then there are the kids who don't have a mother to be shouted at by, because their mom is a single parent trying to make ends meet. I think of Lynne and her two children, what it would be like if they lived here. I wonder if there was ever a time that they actually did.

At the department store I order a new shelf, a better shelf, and they say they will deliver it within three business days. The night falls and I get on a bus that takes me in a different direction, and I'm finally back home.

As I'm entering the apartment building, I look down at Lynne's flowers, and then up at the Moon that looks as if it's giving its light to these flowers. These flowers, growing in darkness, they remind me of my feelings for Lynne, and then I tell myself that the light from the Moon is coming from the light from the Sun.

I open the door, walk up the steps to the second floor and walk towards my apartment door, and I notice that Lynne's door is slightly open, and I hear two women talking. I can immediately tell it's Lynne and Kathleen, they had met once before because I was gone, and it seems they have met once again under the same circumstance.

I go to her door and knock two times and then open it, believing that I have the right to do so because Lynne only knows Kathleen through me, and I see three women sitting at a table, and they see me and tell me to come in. I greet Lynne, Lynne's mother, Emily, and Kathleen, and they tell me they ran into Kathleen in the parking lot. That they were talking about Joe. I picked a great time to come home.

At the end of the discussion, I learn that Kathleen took the liberty of contacting the landlord and informing him that Joe was in a coma, and if she could take his things from his apartment. With his rent being way overdue, provided she had identification, he agreed, and she was to take his belongings in the following week. That made me wonder what types of things Joe owned. If maybe knowing about his possessions would help me better know the dreamless identity of Joe.

One wonders if it is the things we own that define who we are. Will the behavior of a woman who owns an expensive car differ severely from the behavior of a woman of the same age and background who owns a cheap bike? Certainly it will play some kind of role in something.

The party is over, and I go back home. The phone is blinking red, it has a message. I hear the voice of Kathleen telling me that she was going to visit. Kathleen, visiting, about thirty seconds.

The light stops blinking red, and then I remember the dream I had, the switches on the walls. In particular, I remember that I saw the words lust, gluttony, greed, sloth, wrath, envy and pride in red writing on the wall, and realize that just like the words from the five stages of grief, that these seven words were also from a popular list of words; the seven deadly sins. I start to wonder how many other lists of words I may have unconsciously put in my dream.

There is a knock on my door, it's soft, which means it's probably Lynne. I look through this fisheye view and I see her wearing the same bright green shirt she was wearing before, and for a second I fool myself into believing that I know who she is, philosophically, and even if I can't see other things because this view is so narrow, I at least know I can see her, and understand her. This fisheye love.

These thoughts make me smile, but then she starts to walk away. I forgot to open the damn door. I open the door and she looks back, I say hello. She starts to walk towards me and smiles.

After the general phrases such as "how are you?" and "I'm glad to hear that," she starts to tell me about how her mother was visiting and was going to take Sarah and David with her for a little while so that they didn't have to deal with their father, Silvio. As I'm wondering why she is telling me these things, Mary walks past us.

Lynne says hello, but Mary doesn't reply. Maybe she is still bitter about the parking lot thing. Mary makes me realize how much I hate people and their tendencies. Flip on the hate switch and make

me prone to the anger disease.

Chapter 32:

IN BETWEEN OBSESSION AND ADDICTION

Piled up in the corner of the room are these black and white covered notebooks that don't quite make it to the ceiling. Written inside of them are tales of fiction that have a longing to become true. While this is each composition notebook's final resting place, there is however always one that takes the place of the other half of the bed I sleep in. The one that still has pages to be filled, and is not yet ready to join the others. These are the words of a therapist I was suggested to see many years ago. "Var intet rädd." Those are the last words of a dead king.

The same day the therapist told me that I wanted my fantasy to become reality, I asked him if he knew that there was a word for the killing of ants. He says no, and I tell him that the word is formicide. I ask him if the reason for this word's existence is simply for classification purposes, say, John Doe kills ants in his basement so we need to classify him under the word "formicide," or do human beings really consider this act of killing ants to be anything but trivial. That ants deserve to be recognized as living organisms.

He tells me that he doesn't know, and then the silence that is suppose to be therapeutic comes. "What the hell am I doing here?" That's what I think to myself.

I close the door behind me, the door to the room that those notebooks sleep in, and on my way out I stub my left toe on the couch. Because of the way my mind works, I purposely stub my right toe as well. Max out the balance. Strange dreams, strange life, and somewhere in between, strange memories.

Sometimes the fantasy tries so hard to break through into the reality that it becomes painful. One time I had a dream where my partner and I were somewhere overseas and had a slave owner in front of us on his knees begging for his life.

As I'm standing there with my gun pointed at his head, I realize that I can't pull the trigger. It must be my first time. I also notice that neither my partner nor I have masks or suits on, I'm thinking this is one of the first events in the story about the thieves from New York. Anyway, the thing is I'm so angry and full of hatred for this man that I start to taste blood in my mouth, and then I wake up and find that I have been chewing on the inside of my mouth, and when I open my mouth, some of the blood falls down and stains my bed sheets. This is not the first or last time it happens.

After I finish stubbing both of my toes, I go to the bathroom and take a shower. I get tired of standing so I sit down facing the dial and I feel the hot water hit my body. I'm so relaxed that I eventually fall asleep and begin to dream. In the dream I'm standing alongside a row of parked cars, and in front of me in the distance is the Mount Rushmore National Memorial.

George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt and Abraham Lincoln all before me representing the first one hundred and thirty years of the history of the United States. It's a shame that the project was cut short in 1941 due to a lack of funding. Maybe if it wasn't, the completed sculpture would be represented in this dream.

After some time I find myself still standing in the same place next to the same car still looking before me at the memorial when a storm starts. What's interesting about this storm is that the rain is unusually warm, and there is no thunder, only lightning. I suppose it happens sometimes. After so long the warm rain becomes extremely cold and I wake up and find myself in the shower being hit by cold water.

I turn the shower off, grab the towel and then go to turn on the light, but when I flick the switch on, nothing happens. No light. I also realize that there is rain hitting my window and I wonder if the power went out. I open the bathroom door and peer outside into the rest of the apartment and notice that every thing that runs off of electricity is off. The power did in fact go out. Not too soon after I hear thunder. I open the door to my apartment and look out to the second floor hallway, no lights are on. Son of a bitch.

I go to my bedroom and put clothes on and then lay on my bed and attempt to figure out what I'm going to do with no computer or television. After a few minutes I get up to check if my flashlight still works. It doesn't, and when it gets dark in a blackout, it really gets dark. I decide to go to the store and buy another one, and as I'm closing my door I catch a glimpse of Lynne's door and I wonder if she would need one as well. I knock on her door, and David answers, this cool little kid. "Mom, it's your friend."

She comes to the door and I ask her if she needs a source of light. Not in those words. She says no, that they have candles and flashlights, but she says that she could use some batteries. On my way out I see that the rain has begun to settle down and that I might not really need my umbrella, but I take it with me anyway. I come to Chase Mart all the time for groceries, but in all my years coming here I have never bought a single inedible item.

When I walk through the front doors, I see a new yet familiar face at the register. New as in I've never seen her at the register, but familiar as in I have seen her somewhere before. I go to the batteries, and I realize Lynne didn't tell me what kind she needed, so I buy one from each rack, and then I go buy my flashlight.

As I'm walking towards the employee I realize that it's Julia, a girl from one of the drug session things I used to go to. I refer to her as a girl, even though by now she is a woman, because of the many years I have on her.

I hand her my items and when she looks at me I can tell she recognizes me even though we have never spoken before. Unlike Jamal, she doesn't have that look that implies that she is still using drugs. This one, she actually looks drug-free.

After the transaction is complete and as I'm walking away, she calls me a bastard. I turn around in question, complete confusion, and she says she can't believe that I would just walk away after what I did to her and pretend we didn't even know each other. That I must still be getting high and lost all of my brain cells even though I've never used an illegal drug in my life. Then that's when I remember what hides in between fact and fiction.

You're at this place filled with a bunch of people who want to better their lives, but they need the help of others if they want even the smallest chance to succeed. At this place they tell you their stories, and then they tell you their dreams. You are sitting there, a tourist among people who you do not belong around, but these people, they intrigue you. They show you what it means to rise when you are down. They show you that even the bloodiest battles with your mind can in fact be won.

Now you see a girl named Jane Doe get up to speak. You call her Jane because you don't know her name or who she is. If you had known about Joe at this moment in time, you might make a joke and call her Jae, and they would go hand in hand. Jane stands up there, and she tells you her story. She doesn't tell you about the rape yet because it's too personal, but she will later on when she's ready. For now, she tells you about how she sat in her bathtub, about how she wanted to commit suicide, a word used more than just for classification purposes.

Then she tells you about how she dialed her grandmother's phone number, how it would be her last cry for help. That if her grandmother didn't pick up, then she was going to do it. She tells you about how her grandmother's home phone doesn't have an answering machine or caller identification, so she lets it ring for a long time, but no one ever picks up. She tells you about how ending that call meant killing any kind of hope she had left, and after so many rings, how she kills the call.

Then Jane tells you about how a few seconds after killing the call, her grandmother is knocking at her door, visiting because she wants to play a board game. She tells you about how for the first time in her life, at that moment when she opens the door for her grandmother, that everything in her life is finally enough. The drugs and the lies to herself fell short for relieving the pain when compared to the rescue of her grandmother. That image in the doorway that would make well for a cherished painting and memory.

After the entire session is complete, Jane bumps into you, and being moved by her story, you talk to her. You find out her name is Julia and that she is desperately trying to change. This idea interests you, but you are not interested in her, and that is what ultimately causes your relationship to end.

I remember Lynne telling me that black roses are not natural, that they are created by botanists by manipulating the rose's genes. She also tells me that while a black rose may symbolize death, it can also symbolize rebirth. An end and a new beginning. But what sticks out the most to me is how they can represent the darkness of human nature.

After I get to know Julia, she tells me about how she was raped, and how her life spiraled out of control. She tells me how it wasn't just the rape, but that it was the rape that sent her over the edge, and that makes me assume that she had a terrible childhood, but I never find out if I was right or wrong about that.

After some time, she wanted to be more than just friends, she wanted someone she could go to when she needed, but after Maria I knew I wasn't what she was looking for. After I admitted to myself that I only liked her because I was interested in picking her brain, I kind of disappeared, and I haven't seen her until now. I'm guessing I didn't fully remember what happened between her and

I because in those days, one day just bled into the next and my mind was already half gone.

So how do you explain yourself to a girl, or woman, who probably hates you and feels that you betrayed her trust somehow? I try to tell her I'm sorry but she tells me to just forget about it, and then I leave. How the fuck am I suppose to go in there and buy groceries if she's working there now? I certainly don't feel like walking all the way over to the next store. Damn it.

Chapter 33:

THE HUMAN CONDITION

I'm a few yards away from Chase Mart's front entrance walking in the direction of my home thinking about how the clouds are beginning to separate so that the Sun's light might be visible once again, but what I don't know at the time is that our entire building won't have power for two days and two nights, and for such a short storm it definitely wasn't worth it.

I guess what I should be thinking about is how I mistreated Julia, and that I should be more considerate towards the ways other people may feel. I know what happened will stay in the back of my mind, but it will never make it to the front.

I walk up the stairs and when I reach the top, I see Mary in the distance entering an apartment. Mary does not live on this floor, but she is friends with one of the people who do. I head towards my apartment and open the door and then sit on my couch. This lovely couch.

Julia's facial expression echoes in my mind, and piece by piece I begin to remember the things we did together. In an effort to not fall asleep I grab my television remote and press the power button, but nothing happens. I forgot that the power was out, which reminds me why I went to the store in the first place.

I knock on Lynne's door, and this time it's Sarah who answers, this cute little kid. "Mommy, it's your flower friend." What is a flower friend? Lynne comes to the front door and I hand her the batteries and I let her know she doesn't have to pay me back. Lynne asks me if I'm busy, that if I'm not doing anything if I would like to come over. She tells me that since the power went out, her and her mother and kids are just sitting around talking, trying to pass the time and hoping that the power will be back on in an hour or two.

Even though I hate sitting around talking, I find it difficult to say no to her, and then she invites me in. She tells the kids that I brought over batteries for their games. They both run into their room and then run back out with these little devices, then Lynne puts batteries in them both, and then David and Sarah are instantly in another world.

Emily, Lynne's mother, says hello and I greet her back and Lynne tells me to sit down. Lynne almost looks nothing like her mom. Sometimes a trait might skip a generation due to the lack of genes necessary to create that combination for that trait, so there is a chance that Sarah might end up looking more like her grandmother than her mother. I kind of know Lynne and her behavioral properties, but I have no idea what Emily is like, but the question I have is if Sarah will behave more like her grandmother than her mother as well.

Someone told me once that many kids rebel against their parents and that they would try to become what their parents weren't, so in turn the kids that these kids would have in the future would also rebel against them therefore being what their grandparents were. Something tells me it's more complicated than that, though.

There have also been stories about identical twins who end up being separated from each other, but because of a sort of "genetic memory," they ended up behaving very similarly, sharing certain elements in life such as their hobbies, the type of friends they have and the career paths they chose.

All of this makes me wonder if there is a certain combination of which switches need to be on and which switches need to be off in the human body to achieve a genetic peace. This switch needs to be off, but this one needs to be on, and maybe if you can get the code one hundred percent correct, you will be at peace. Maybe the world is also capable of a genetic peace.

The three of us begin to converse, and then Lynne shows me a drawing that Sarah made for her a little while ago. On Mother's Day, to be more specific. It's the childish drawing of a smiling white rose with a smiling Sun in the background, and I immediately realize that this is what inspired Lynne's painting, a gift from her daughter. Sarah named her drawing "Happy Flower," Lynne named her painting "White Lights."

Emily makes a joke about how all Lynne got her for Mother's Day was a bunch of flowers and how that was so boring. All that was really on my mind was what I would say if either of them asked me what I got my mother for Mother's Day. I could always lie and say I got her flowers as well; people bring flowers to the graves of those that have passed away all the time.

The night that had already begun to fall long before has finally completely fallen, and the candles and flashlights come out. David and Sarah, who are now tired and bored of the other world come back to ours and are running around the apartment shining their flashlights. What was small talk turned into long talk and then became interrupted by flashlight talk.

After such a long time I start to get up and tell Lynne and her mother that it's getting late and that I should probably get home, but before I can really finish my sentence, the flashlight slips out of David's hands and hits me right on the side of the head. Lynne rushes to me as if I had just been shot and keeps asking me questions I can't really understand because the flashlight hit me so hard. After a few seconds of clenching my facial muscles and rubbing the side of my head, for some reason I begin to laugh.

As Lynne is looking at me confused, wondering if I'm okay, I put my hand on her shoulder and tell her I'm all right. I continue to laugh and then she smiles, and then the two little ones start to laugh. The only person who isn't laughing or smiling is Emily, probably because she thinks Lynne doesn't have the sense to tell her child to apologize to me, or maybe because David doesn't have the sense himself. Maybe both.

Lynne asks me again if I'm okay, and then asks me if I would rather stay instead and spend the night. She tells me that during a blackout, the more people you have the faster the time goes by. Unable to say no I sit back on the couch, and then Emily tells David to say sorry to me. David

apologizes, and I can tell he really feels bad. Either that or he is pretending to feel bad to fool Emily.

We all sit down, the children included, and there is an awkward silence that passes by until Lynne suggests that we play a game. She goes into the kids' room and then comes out with some board game I had never seen before, but it would be the new instrument that helped us kill time. Emily says she is too tired to play anything and that she was going to go lay down in the bedroom, so it's just Lynne and her two kids and I.

Throughout the game, while having a decent time with these people, I continue to think about Silvio and how he might split them apart. How he might do something to make every thing that is so right now so wrong later.

David and Sarah eventually fall asleep where they sit and only Lynne and I are awake in the apartment. Maybe in the entire building. Maybe not, I think Boris works a graveyard shift. Lynne gets up to go use the bathroom, and maybe six or seven seconds later I get up to look out the window to see how full that big white dot is. Before I can find the big white dot something else catches my eye. Far into the distance, way down the road in the middle of the road an entire tree has fallen from its roots. The entire tree has fallen across the street, from sidewalk to sidewalk, but has miraculously missed all of the cars. That's how it looks from here anyway. When Lynne gets out of the bathroom I tell her to come look at it and she says it's nothing she's ever seen before, that she wants to take a closer look.

Curiosity must be one of the oldest behaviors of humankind. Not too long ago, where I was staying then, I had an entire wall full of diagrams of what could possibly be beyond our universe. My curiosity for things surrounding the human condition was so severe that I let it get the best of me. Maybe I have changed, and maybe if I go back there again someday to the time where my mind was eaten up by fiction, I could do better, but then again the behaviors and instincts of people rarely change.

According to theories, things like fear, curiosity, self-preservation and conflict have been around since before the beginning of man and have not changed in the least. New people are born but the behaviors never die.

Lynne and I get into her car and she drives towards the fallen tree, the streets are completely empty from pedestrians. I ask her why we are driving such a short distance when we could have walked it, and she says because she would like to drive around and see what else the short but powerful storm did.

When we get to the tree, it's even more bizarre than we expected. We get out of the car and see how the root of the tree just completely exploded. I start to wonder how many red blood cells this tree is going to stop from doing their work.

After looking at the tree, we get back into the car and drive around for a bit, and we come to realize there are fallen trees throughout the town, and even more than that, many branches laying on the sidewalks. Some parts of the town are so dark because the street lights have no power. If I didn't

know any better I would say this is beginning to feel like an adventure. Fallen trees, dark streets.

Lynne turns on the radio and starts to flip through stations, and she passes by one that catches my attention so I tell her to flip back to it, and on a radio news station, three men are debating what the real solution to the war on drugs in America is.

Soon after they begin to talk about how the violence in the city has increased, and about how two cops were shot and killed earlier today because of drugs and violence. This makes me wonder where Derek is, and what he's doing right now.

Chapter 34:

PAGE 2 OF 8, "THE EIGHT DREAMS"

First year, May 4th, I had this dream. I'm sitting on a seat in a subway car. The car is overpopulated, filled to the max capacity and then some. The car makes a stop, the stop is named Main. Looking out the window of the car I see more people who expect to find a seat in this car, but all that happens is even more population is added to a place that is already overpopulated.

The next stop is Fifth, and even more people get on, and it feels like the pressure is building, or something is going to explode. I decide to get off at Center, which is the next stop after Fifth, and as the subway car is driving away, I turn around and see an advertisement claiming everything that I have said and done is both meaningless and purposeless, and the unexpectedness of this event causes me to become lucid.

After I realize that I am dreaming, I begin to think of Roach and the discussion we had, but I have a hard time remembering his face and the things he said, most likely because I hadn't yet dreamed page one, but there are so many factors to consider that I could be wrong.

I decide to search for this man, probably because subconsciously I have no idea who he is and my mind wants to gain a better understanding of anything it can't comprehend so that it may adapt and survive. The problem is the only thing I know is his name.

I go to the edge of the platform on Center and overlook the tracks, and in the distance I can see the next stop, State. I jump down and begin to walk, and when I get to State I see many people waiting for the next set of cars. Looking at these people, looking through them for Roach, literally, metaphorically and philosophically, I start to think about how most of us live our lives waiting for things.

Waiting for the right job, waiting for the right person, waiting for that right moment in your life where everything you have had to go through in your life all seems worth it now, but these things may never come. Those of us who aren't waiting are searching, but of course we will never find what we are looking for. Not usually, anyway. The jokes on us.

After a long time, I've checked Sixth, Park, Seventh and others but I can't find him, and eventually I give up and go above ground to find a city wrapped in bright lights and a mature night. To my right I see a bunch of kids skateboarding, and to my left I see more people waiting for a bus to come. I begin to walk towards the bus stop, and on my way when I'm almost there I feel a hand on

my left shoulder so I turn around and to my surprise it's Roach, who tells me he has been looking for me for quite some time.

His clothes are torn, and he has a cup in his hand filled with coins. I think to myself that this is the generic homeless person that I have come up with in my mind. "It all matters. Maybe not in the grand scheme of things, but all the little things you do when you're not waiting or searching, they bring you closer to sharing a part of your soul with others." After he says this to me, he walks towards the bus stop and sits next to a lady who is not really paying attention to her purse.

When the time is right, he slips a piece of paper, a note, into her purse, and then he walks away. As he is walking away, the bus comes and picks up all of the waiters, and then it passes by me, and through those large windows I can see the lady sitting down with her head against the side of the bus. Maybe she is tired from a hard day's work. I can only wonder what she will think when she gets Roach's note. Soon after, I wake up.

Lynne flips through the radio station after a few minutes because what's being said on the radio news depresses her, and she ends up landing on a classic rock station. I ask her if she likes this kind of music, and she says it's her favorite kind. She asks me what I like, and I tell her I like the same kind of stuff.

After some time I notice that we aren't going in the direction leading back to the apartment building. For a while it's just me, her and whatever song is playing on the radio. Everything outside of the car is so dark, however we are in a part of town that still has most of its power on. This blackout reminds me how when you have no light, time almost seems lost. It is almost irrelevant likewise to how time in dreams is irrelevant.

Lynne drives into an apartment complex and then finally stops the car in front of an apartment building and begins to stare at it. It feels like she is getting prepared to tell me something, and she's figuring it all out in her head.

I ask her if she knows somebody who lives here, but she says no. She says that this is where she lived when most of her adult life happened. She lived here when she lost her foot, when she had both Sarah and David, when she met Silvio, when she planted her first flower, when her brother died. She says she comes here every now and then to see if it's changed at all, or in an attempt to visit the past. This makes me think of my parents' home.

She tells me she always comes here alone at night, but wanted to show me. She says so much and it feels like she is sharing a part of her soul with me, but I don't want any part of her soul. I don't want another Julia. After a while she asks me if I like her, I say yes. How she will perceive that, I don't know. She then asks me why then haven't I shown her that I do, she asks me if I am with someone, I say no. Now she is giving me a hug, and doesn't give me a chance to answer why I don't show it. I thank God.

As she is hugging me, she says it's okay. Then she starts to talk about how I helped her move her television that one day. How she could tell we would be good friends. All this time I'm thinking she's a little bit crazy. I'm also thinking why she is doing this to a person who barely knows her.

What makes someone do something like this?

We drive back home and then part ways on the second floor of our apartment building. I go to sit on my couch and I grab the television remote and press the power button. The television won't turn on, so I press it again but I get the same result. I press it three more times but the damn thing is broken and it makes me so angry that I throw the remote at the wall and it shatters.

I know that I'm not mad at the remote or the television, I know that I'm mad at my life. Some kind of passive aggression that if I don't find a way to cope with, will end up causing me to do something I will regret.

I know that I fear that the clock is ticking away until I finally make my way around the entire circle and reach the dot again and completely lose my mind. I know that I fear that they will give me those pills again that affect my memory and cause me to forget my dreams. I know that I fear if I go back there again a switch might turn on and I may not be able to turn it off.

I try to sleep, but I never really fall asleep. I wake up even more tired than when I laid down my head. Later on in the day the delivery men deliver my new shelf; they say they tried calling to let me know that they were coming but they received no answer. I tell them the power went out in the building yesterday. After they leave, I move the shelf from the living room to the room that stores the notebooks, and I somehow end up getting a small superficial cut on my right thumb. I wipe the minimal blood on my shirt and begin to place the already categorized composition notebooks onto the shelf.

While I'm putting one of them up, it falls out of my hand and lands open on the ground and I see a page titled "Calm The Devil's Grin." I read a sentence about how giving something freewill will allow it to end its own existence, but before I can read anymore I hear a loud knock at my door. It's definitely not Lynne.

I open the door and standing in the doorway is a man who thinks that he is everyone's best friend. That he is so likeable and lovable that he can do and say as he pleases, and that is exactly what he does. He shows himself into my apartment and at the same time begins to talk about his trip to the other side of the world. His name is Tao and had been visiting his relatives in China for about six months, and now he's returned. It wouldn't be so bad if he didn't live right under me and was always coming over. If the opportunity ever strikes in the right place at the right time I will kill him.

Tao makes a joke about how he comes back home at the wrong time, with the power being out and all, and then he asks me how everyone in the building is doing, as if I were everyone's keeper. I tell him that Joe had an accident and is in a coma, but that doesn't seem to jar him.

Right after he asks me about who the new woman is right across the hall, and I ask him if he means the short lady with the two kids. He says yes, that one, but that he doesn't know about any kids. I tell him that her name is Lynne and that she is pretty cool, although a bit strange, and he tells me that he likes strange and then makes a facial expression that can't be expressed in words.

Then jumping onto the next subject as he likes to do so quickly, he starts to ask me about what's going on in the west side of the city, what's with all the dead bodies and cop killings he's been hearing about in his short time back. I think of Derek.

I tell him I have no idea, and then he says that we are probably past due for another riot like we had nine years ago. I didn't live around here then, so I didn't know what he was talking about, but he was probably right. Then he starts to talk about a cop that got shot and about how he knew one of the cops' friends. He says that he heard that five black kids were hanging out on the stairs in front of an apartment building talking, and then four white cops drove up and told them all to get against the wall.

The four white cops check the five black kids for drugs and weapons and anything else that is illegal to carry unless told otherwise. They don't have anything on them, but in an effort to prevent crime one of the four white cops taunts one of the five black kids, and that particular black kid at the time has had enough of all the unusual cop presence which was enforced because of a prior killing of two young innocent bystanders, so instead of taking the bullshit he pushes one of the cops back and is arrested.

After seeing their friend being put in handcuffs, another black kid begins to argue with one of the cops claiming it was bullshit and that the other cop acted first, and after this black kid has said his piece, and after he is ignored, he insults all four white cops and is then also arrested. The other three black kids who are not in handcuffs don't say a word, but they don't need to because there is an older black man across the street yelling and laughing at the actions of the law enforcement officers.

The older black man begins to shout about how cops don't have anything better to do than to make quality of life arrests which implies he is more knowledgeable about the inner workings of a police force than he looks. One of the white cops looks at him and threatens to take him to jail if he doesn't shut up, and now this event begins to draw a crowd. People are looking out of their windows, stopping on the sidewalks, crowding and talking with each other about what is going on.

Now the older black man has gone back inside his home, and the crowd that had gathered has taken his place and claim that the cops are never around when they are actually needed. A common claim. Frustrated, one of the white cops gets out of his black and white and tells the crowd to back up, but one of the individuals in the crowd attempts to spit at him and misses. As he is beginning to walk towards the person who tried to spit at him, the other officers look in his direction and notice what is going on.

At the same time that they are looking in his direction, the older black man walks out of his home with a model of a Smith & Wesson handgun and yells something in the direction of the officers, and then begins to shoot at them. You've walked so far and you are finally at the edge, and all it takes is one little push.

After everyone has scattered, and after all the rounds have been fired, there are four fatalities and two damaged police vehicles. The fatalities in question are two out of the four cops, one out of the two kids who were arrested and the man who initiated the shooting. One of the police vehicles had

a window shot out, and the other a tire popped.

People at the police department are looking into various things such as why there were four police officers roaming the same area. I realize that this is what the people on the radio station were talking about.

Tao starts to go into his racist mood, talking about how all the blacks are ruining the communities they reside in, but before he can begin to preach we both hear yelling just outside my door. I look through my peephole but I can't see far enough to the right to see what's going on, so I open my door and I see a woman standing behind a man who is trying to break down the door to Lynne's apartment. It's Claire and Silvio.

Claire turns around and for no logical reason starts to yell at me, and when Silvio realizes this, he too starts to yell at me, again for no logical reason that I can find. Claire starts to insult both her sister and her mother, and I can't help but remember the Claire that was so sweet and soft-spoken. What did Silvio do to turn her against her family? Is Claire some kind of crazy person who has crazy mood-swings? That whole damn family seems crazy.

Now Silvio is in my face telling me to stay away from his kids, and when I just stand there and don't react to him, he pushes me. After I laugh and tell him that he should just go home, he knocks me down and starts hitting me. I block all of his punches, but before I know it I see Tao standing there threatening to hit him with my metal baseball bat. I forgot I even still had that.

The threat might seem real if Tao didn't look so afraid. Claire and Silvio laugh at him, and the distraction allows me to trip Silvio and put him in a headlock. I always assumed a headlock was suppose to be more painful to the person in the headlock, but this particular one is causing me more pain because I have Claire hitting me in the back of the head with her damn purse.

After about six seconds, I can hear Lynne screaming, and her scream makes me realize what we are all doing. How we are all acting like animals. After Lynne's scream, Claire stops hitting me and I let go of Silvio, and surprisingly he doesn't retaliate. We are all just awkwardly calm, but waiting for any move another person might make. In my head, I laugh at Tao.

Right after, the police have arrived unusually quickly thanks to Emily, and they sort every thing out. Imagine if the response time was this quick in the city.

After I close my door, I look at Tao and I start laughing. All he can really do is shake his head, he is probably still wondering what just happened and what I had gotten myself into with these people. In the back of his mind I know he wants to ask me what all those composition notebooks are about. He had to have seen them because that metal bat was in the same room. After I stop laughing, I say "welcome back."

Chapter 35:

SOCIALIZATION

Tao apologizes to Kathleen as if it were his fault that Joe was in a coma, and then he says that it's unfortunate that he has to meet her under these circumstances. As arrogant as Tao may seem

sometimes, in an unfortunate situation he is always sociologically correct.

He is trying to show support any way he can, which I guess is what I did as well, even if he can't do much to help. Tao and I leave Kathleen the same way we found her and we exit the hospital. On the way to Tao's car my mind wonders and I ponder why I act differently when I'm in the presence of different people. I've thought of this before. When I'm alone I'm an angry and obsessive person, but when around others there is a switch that flips on and it makes me socially acceptable.

Sometimes the personality changes from person to person or from group of people to group of people; for instance who I am when I am with my mother is different than the personality of who I am when I am with my father. Both personalities differ slightly, but both still fall under the persona that is socially acceptable rather than the sociopathic demeanor.

Who I am when I'm with a bunch of strangers differs from who I am when I'm with a bunch of friends. Of course, pretty much everyone is like this, and these changes in behavior visualize social fragments. Social fragments of many masks that imply you are who you are depending on your environment.

When you really start to think about it, it's almost as if the people around you are the ones who determine who you are, or at least some large percentage of who you are. So now when I think of Joe, I start to wonder that if I know the people who he knows, if that could help in trying to figure out who Joe is. Will knowing his friends, family and enemies help me to know him and determine which social bracket he resides in? Discovering his social bracket and his social class might help define who he is.

Tao closes the car door, and he tells me that some people stay in a coma for years. There have been people who have stayed in a coma for over fifteen years, and some who actually wake up from the coma and proceed to live a normal life. Thinking about that makes you wonder if these people have lived a completely other life inside their coma. If they had dreamed of another life and actually lived it in all the time that they were in that coma. Everyone at many points in their lives daydream of another life, but these coma patients have taken it a step further.

The light is green. It's still green. Tao probably thinks he can make it, but at that very thought it turns yellow, then red, and he is forced to stop. After a few seconds of waiting Tao asks me about Silvio. I know how he works, he's breaking his way into asking me about my weird obsession. I tell him that Silvio is the ex-husband of the woman who just moved into the building. Lynne hasn't just moved into the building, but to Tao she has. Relativity.

He asks me why the guy has it in for me, and I actually have no idea. I have no idea why Silvio would attack me. Maybe Claire is putting ideas in his head. The light turns green.

Tao jokingly asks me a question, "Would you kill him if you had to?" I tell him to define the situation, and he says Silvio has a gun and is about to shoot me, but I have a chance to kill him first. I ask him if there are people around, if it's day or night, if the gun has a silencer. He looks at me strange, and I guess I sort of gave him the answer. If someone tried to rob me in broad daylight with people around and used a gun as incentive for me to give up my prized possessions and

currency, I'd say the chance of the person actually willing to pull the trigger and kill me is less than ten percent. Unless the person is crazy, then that number increases sharply. Otherwise, if a person is actually willing to kill you for an unknown amount of wealth, it might be because they have ice water in their circulatory system. Veins go towards the heart, arteries go away from the heart.

When observing the actions of Silvio, one might prefer to categorize him as a sociopath, or at least one on the verge to sociopathy. An antisocial person who is not completely aware of the sociological normalities of our society.

Instead of beating on a man who you have no evidence against, the correct procedure would be to obtain information from a certain party, in this case Lynne or I, regarding your assumptions that your ex-wife might be involved with someone. Instead, a sociopath might just submit to his primal urges.

The problem with being the person who is placing Silvio in this certain category is that judging someone, in the grand scheme of things, is pointless. Because we cannot define normal and abnormal realistically, normality is, just like everything in space is relative to one another, relative to the judgement of who is judging. Similarities will arise when judging good and evil. A cop has a clear shot on a known drug lord, but does not have the lawful right to shoot him. The cop knows if he doesn't take his shot now, the drug lord will simply continue to evade the attempts of a poor judicial system and ruin the city.

The cop takes the shot and kills the drug lord, but is convicted of murder. This suggests we should only do right or wrong within the boundaries of the law. Do not ever steal from the rich to give to the poor.

Our brains subconsciously try to differ things from each other. What is good, what is bad. There is an idea that will tell you that all matter is one. You are one with the person next to you, as well as the street you walk down every day. You are one with that bird flying in the sky, as well as the Sun that burns the back of your neck. But in order to survive, we must be able to define certain things, and differ them from one another. That is hot, that is cold. This separation is important in every thing.

Tao pulls up to his parking spot in front of the apartment building. The question never comes. He never asks me about my composition notebooks. The paper and pen that illustrate a distorted mind. Instead he asks me about a kid who is bouncing a basketball about a block away. He talks about how we see the basketball hit the ground first, then we hear it hit the ground second. He loves this kind of stuff. I'm not sure what you would call it; it's not a mirage or an optical illusion I don't think. Tao calls it a joke from God.

As Tao and I walk through the front entrance, he says how much better the flowers make the building seem. We split ways and I return to a home with no light. I sit down on my couch with a plan to fall asleep, but I never do. Why can't I fully fall asleep. Rhetorical question with no hint of curiosity implied by the lack of a question mark.

There is something in the back of my mind trying to push its way to the front. How can I fix the

wrong I've done to Julia. Did I ever really wrong her? What exactly did I do that was unlawful or socially unacceptable? The lights turn on.

The feeling I get seeing the lights turn on is indescribable. I guess it could only be associated with the dependence that all first-world countries place on electricity. When I look around the living room I see the smashed remote, and then laugh. Now I'm staring back up at the light. MAX 50 WATTS.

I turn on the television, but it's not on the channel I usually have it on. It must have reset. On the screen is an animated movie playing about a wolf that befriends a deer. It reminds me of a story about a woman who could tell apart one gorilla she had raised from other gorillas who looked exactly the same simply based on the behavior of her gorilla.

I eventually lose interest in the movie and go into that half-asleep mode. Not really sleeping, not really awake. Not really dead, not really alive. However, I do have a dream that takes place in a dystopian-apocalyptic setting. As if one or the other wasn't bad enough.

In the dream there is something wrong with one of my legs, and I'm trying to run away from something, but I'm not sure what it is exactly because I never see it. I have a radio attached to my hip, and on the radio I hear about people being arrested for crossing a certain property. I wonder to myself how there is still time for civilization when there is barely anything left to be civilized about.

There's a knock on my door. It's morning, and I don't feel like I was sleeping. At the door it's David and Sarah, with Lynne behind them. She's still mad at me for acting like a child. Sarah tells me they are going away with their grandmother, but that they will be back. As they begin to walk away I stop Lynne and I ask her if she is going as well. She says no, she says she has to work, she doesn't smile as she turns away. Man, what did I do.

For a second I feel humility, she doesn't even say goodbye. For some reason it reminds me of the one time I saw my father cry. He was a very strong person, so to see him cry meant something was disturbingly wrong. Like our planet not being in the correct orbit space or something. If you asked me, I'd tell you he was grieving for his wife and his young son, but that's just me and my assumption. He would never tell anyone anything.

And just like I remembered something from reality, I remembered something from fiction. The dream with the switches on the walls; I now remember seeing another popular list of words. The seven virtues. Chastity, temperance, charity, diligence, patience, kindness and humility. I grab the composition notebook from my bed and write down those words next to the other words I saw in that dream.

If I keep remembering words, eventually I will have them all, and I will be that much closer to having the master list of words that make a person who they are. Behaviorally, sociological, psychologically, genetically, biologically.

Chapter 36:

COMMON COMPLEX

Standing at the door of the life you choose to lead is a demon who is calling you over, ready to let you in. The demon gives you no warning that what comes next may be accompanied with addictions and obsessions. Physical compulsion. Psychological compulsion. This demon doesn't even open the door for you, this demon just simply stands there with a large grin. The demon doesn't open the door for you so that when you realize you've made a mistake, you have no one else to blame but yourself for opening that door.

Last night, I had a dream. I'm in my kitchen, and I notice that the garbage bag is full. I take it out to the trash bin outside and throw it inside the bin. As I turn around to go back inside a little girl who is riding her pink bicycle almost runs into me, but she panics and instead rides into the fence and falls off of her bicycle. I go to see if she is okay, and she is bleeding at her knees. I ask her if it hurts because she isn't crying. She says yes, and I tell her that I will go inside and get a bandage for her.

When I get inside my apartment I head for the bathroom and I find a box of bandages. On my way out, I go through the kitchen and I see that the garbage bag is full yet again. I look through the door that I opened to go throw out the trash, and I see the little girl still sitting there waiting for a bandage.

I look at the garbage bag one more time, it's still full, and then I go back outside and put the bandage on her knee. I tell her that her knee is as good as new, and then I watch as she walks her bicycle across the alley. I look back through the door that is still open and I see inside my apartment. I'm thinking about how I just threw out the trash, and how the trash was filled back up again. I walk a few feet and I open the garbage bin that I just threw the trash into, and it's empty, as if I had never actually thrown out the trash.

So I go back inside, take the trash bag back outside and throw it in the garbage bin. Now I know that I've thrown out the trash. However, when I go back inside my apartment, the garbage bag is full yet again. I go back outside to see if the garbage bin is empty. It is. I repeat the process one more time to see what happens, and when I come back inside to see if the garbage is finally thrown out, I see that not only is it not thrown out, but that there are now two garbage bags in the house; one in the trash can and one on the floor next to it. I think to myself, this must be a joke from God.

I pick up both garbage bags, and instead of going outside to the trash bin next to my apartment building, I go to the next one over and throw them in there, but it doesn't make a difference as when I return back home, there are five garbage bags resting on the floor of my living room. I start to laugh angrily.

As I'm laughing, I hear the engine of a large vehicle. When I look outside, it's the garbage truck collecting garbage from our neighborhood. I run outside and catch up to them and tell them that I have four more garbage bags to deliver as I throw the one I was carrying inside the back. Because they are patient and kind gentlemen, they wait as I throw the remaining four garbage bags into the truck, and not to your surprise, when I return home I can't see half of my living room because of the garbage bags that have magically appeared out of nowhere.

Two by two I fill up my car with as many garbage bags as I can, and then I drive down to the

downtown area of the city and find a city dump where I toss all twelve garbage bags over the fence. I drive back home, and to my surprise there are as many garbage bags in the living room as there were when I left, so it must be working. I take the remaining bags to the city dump and toss them over the fence, and then when I return home I find that I cannot open the door.

As I continue to try to open the door I feel something pushing back towards me until the door finally breaks and a mess of garbage bags come flowing through. My laugh becomes a bit more angry.

I kick one of the bags out of frustration, and then pick it up to take out to my car. After my car is filled with garbage bags, I start the engine, but the car won't accelerate. The car just sits there, parked, but running. I take one of the garbage bags out and decide to walk to the transfer station instead. Maybe I might see one of those garbage men and they might be able to help me with this problem.

I'm halfway there, walking across the city with this bag over my shoulder when the bottom completely rips open and the contents fall out. A mess of black and white notebooks. As I stare down at the composition notebooks, my knees begin to feel weak and I can stand no longer. I find a bench and sit down.

As I sit, reflecting on the path I have avoided, I see a familiar face. It's a man who lives on the first floor of my apartment building. Tall, skinny, middle aged white male who doesn't seem to notice the people around him. I have walked by him many times in the building but he has never acknowledged me. In some ways I am the same.

The first-floor man walks up to me and hands me a box of matches, and he tells me that I have to destroy it before it destroys me completely, because the next time I might not be so fortunate, and then he walks away. I look back at the mess of black and white, and I go to kneel before it, but I can't find the courage to set it on fire. If I'm not willing to destroy my problems, then I will have to carry the burdens where ever I may go. I cannot just simply pass them on to someone else for them to handle.

The dream ironically reminds me of the story about a man who constantly had nightmares for dreams when he slept. One day he visits a church in Africa at the request of a stranger, and he realizes that his dreams are not actually dreams, but memories of horrible things he'd done in the past. He hadn't really slept for years, not until he realized what he was carrying. In the same distorted context, the story reminds me about a quote that implies that "dreams are the answers to questions we don't yet know how to ask."

Chapter 37:

IN BETWEEN THE STORIES

Tao is in my kitchen complaining about how I have no good cereals. He is here often unless he is away on a trip or something, and he is the one reason why I would move out of this apartment building. Maybe I would find the courage to live in my parents' home, the one they left me. I guess I don't want to move now because of Lynne. Maybe because of her kids, too. David, he could probably care less if I moved away, but there is a feeling that I get when I make Sarah laugh or

smile. The same feeling makes me realize she will be just like her mother when she is older.

I tell Tao that if he wants good cereal, that he should go buy his own. He asks me to come with him to Chase Mart, the store I usually buy my food at, but I tell him that I don't shop there anymore. He asks me why, and I tell him that I had an argument with the owner of the store. He asks me what the argument was about and I tell him that it was something stupid, that it was my fault.

Tao leaves and then comes back about twenty minutes later. He comes back to my fucking apartment with some cereal, and I'm wondering why he doesn't just move in with me instead of blowing money on an apartment he doesn't stay in. Sarcasm.

As soon as he walks in, he starts to whisper to me, "Have you seen Mary lately?" I say no, and he continues to whisper, "I just ran into her outside, we were talking about how we haven't seen each other in a while." I tell him that that sounds cool, and he gives me that stupid look. "Anyway, have you noticed she put on a little weight?" No, I didn't.

Tao goes into my kitchen, takes out a spoon and a bowl and some milk, and makes himself some cereal, and then sits down to eat it. He stops talking. You notice when a person like Tao stops talking. For a second he reminds me of Kathleen, not because he has finally shut his mouth, but because I can tell he is here simply because he doesn't want to be alone in his own apartment.

A few years ago I had a dream. I'm sitting in the back area of a vehicle with a few other soldiers, playing a game of cards. I'm not sure what game we're playing, but what I know is that you either win or lose depending on which card you put down. One soldier puts down a card called a jack of spades, another puts down a card called a queen of clubs. After everyone has shown their card, I put down my card, called a two of hearts. The soldier to my right looks at me, and he tells me that I don't have any kind of luck. I guess I lost.

We play a few more rounds, I get a few more less than desirable cards, and then the vehicle comes to a stop. The back door is open, and we all get out. The Sun is bright and the grass is green. I notice that I'm in a village, and from the looks of the people walking around, maybe somewhere in Vietnam.

I have never been to war, and why I would dream about being in the Vietnam war, I don't know, but what I know is that being in this place calms my nerves. A village where there is silence and the people walk slowly because they know that they will eventually get to where they are going, and when they do finally get there, there will be others just like them.

Maybe I wasn't lucky at card games, but I was lucky enough to make decisions that would lead me up to that point to see a place that many people may never have the good fortune of seeing. What plagues me is that I know when I have this dream where I'm in the military again, things might not be the same. Thinking of things like this makes me realize that even the wildest tales of fiction have some truth to them.

Tao is now yelling out my name, and it takes a few yells for me to realize. What? "You're always stuck inside your head." I know. Tao was calling me to tell me he was going to go to work, so I tell

him I'll see him later and he leaves. Always stuck inside my head. Can't find a way out of this mess.

A few hours pass, and I'm wondering what Lynne is up to. Wondering what she meant by she has work to do. Before I know it, Tao is back from work, knocking on my door. I have to let him in. As soon as he walks in he starts talking about how a black guy has been parked down the street at all hours of the day for the past few days. I put it in the back of my mind and pay no attention to it because I know he is going to jump to the next subject soon.

To my surprise, soon after he ends up leaving because he has to work on something, or be somewhere, one of those two. I can't read in between the lines. After he leaves, like many other things in the back of my mind, the idea of the black guy sitting out in a car waiting for so long tries to push itself to the front and unlike so many other things it succeeds.

My curiosity causes me to go out my back door, walk across the alley and attempt to find this man. I eventually find him, and I am surprised for the second time today. That's not true, earlier today I was surprised when I realized that the superficial cut on my right thumb was getting worse. I'm surprised because the man in the car is the same man that came to pick up Derek. The same man who told me that Jamal had died, but in only so many words.

I begin to ask myself why he would still be around here, in this neighborhood. I question my safety. I question Lynne's safety. For some reason, even Tao's. After I come to my senses, and logic finally prevails, I assume that if he were going to do any harmful acts to me, they would have been done already. I also helped out one of his associates, why would he do me harm? We all know life doesn't work that way, though. You help someone out and they still find some way to justify screwing you over.

The only other conclusion I could come to is that the people Jamal and Derek were hiding from found out they were staying with me and now this man is sitting on my apartment so he can be there when they decide to do me harm, if they ever do decide to. The question is though, who dedicates this much time to help protect someone you hardly know? My guess is Jamal was well-connected and the leader of his organization has sent this man out to help me out for helping out Jamal. Back when I first met Jamal, he made it so obvious that he was part of something big. Something illegal.

Or maybe it's as simple as something like Jamal's people are waiting for their enemies to attack me so they can attack them unexpectedly and kill a few of their people. Appear to be resting. I would just be a casualty of war.

After a while I find that I am not taking this situation seriously enough, because my life may actually be in danger. I knew it was a bad idea to take them in.

I go back home and go to the room that houses the composition notebooks and pick a random notebook. Which one is going to be lucky enough to be chosen. I end up looking through about twenty of them in the span of two hours trying to forget that I could die soon. I guess it was just my luck that they knocked on my door. Maybe I'm overreacting now. Never could seem to find that balance.

While looking through all these notebooks I start to see that the chapters get longer and longer. When I first started writing down my dreams, my memory wasn't that great, so I couldn't remember many details which resulted in a short paraphrasing of the dream. As my memory improved, the chapters got longer and more detailed. As they got more detailed, the more of a story you could find in them.

Chapter 38:

30 PIECES OF GOLD

A long time ago, someone had a nightmare. Imagine a dark basement where the only light that is visible is the light that is coming in from the top of the stairs because that door up there is cracked open. Now imagine the who are two people, one man standing in front of another man who is tied to a chair. The standing man knows there is a man sitting before him, but the sitting man has no idea there is a man standing before him.

Not until the standing man pulls on a piece of string that causes a light bulb to turn on. The sitting man's eyes begin to hurt as they adjust to the light, but they hurt even more when he finally sees the standing man before him who intends to do him harm.

I'm standing there, watching this man as his nightmares come true. In some kind of unexplainable narcissistic view I am looking at myself, seeing only a man who has matured into a being capable of controlling his compulsions. A man who once could not control his obsessions but now has the confidence to do so. A man who once could not understand why he was the way he was, but has now accepted that he was meant to be this way.

I take a dull pocketknife out of the sitting man's pocket, and as his eyes widen and his attempts to yell fail, I begin to hack away at the top of his nose and make my way down. These things use to terrify me, but I have gone through a sort of therapy that allows me to control my fear.

Sometimes I wonder if anything will ever go wrong. Maybe someone will get the edge on me before I get it on them, maybe someone will find out what I do, maybe a law enforcement agent will catch me. The thing is I only wonder, I never fear these things actually happening. I know that since I have chosen to commit these murders in a state that enforces the death penalty, if I ever do get caught I'll be killed myself instead of having to live the rest of my life in a small cage. If you ask me, I believe there are a lot of people who would much rather die than serve a life-sentence.

Now imagine a bright basement where the door at the top of the stairs is now shut so that no light is coming in. The who is a man who has been murdered and left to rot. On the cold floor beside him are two ears, two eyes, two lips, a nose and some hair. The appearance of the person's head is only something you can imagine.

Now going through these notebooks under the same category as the one with a serial killer, I find a few dreams with a detective who is searching for a serial killer with the same modus operandi. The same M.O., the same mode of operating. As I read and read I find that at the end of the serial killer and the detective's speechless discourse, the detective catches him and the serial killer is put to death. The last words of the serial killer are "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they

do." The serial killer who seems to be suffering from megalomania paraphrases his life in one last sentence to be compared to that of Jesus Christ's life. He compares how they both are executed by a body of government.

Thinking of these two men now, the killer and the messiah, I can't help but remember the dream I had with Satan on the airplane where he told me that the christ and the antichrist look similar in appearance.

Is it possible that the man on the subway who gave me his shoes wasn't the christ, but actually the antichrist? Is that why he told me he will be whoever I decide to call him? I quickly realize that these ideas are trivial since these are all just dreams, but even the trivial things in life have a way of making us tick.

Attempting to move on from the subject of murder and personal salvation, I find the dream where I see a billboard of Maria, and how it is telling me that she is missing. I guess I must have forgotten it when I woke up, but that page reminds me that I recently had a dream about Maria. It was maybe a few weeks ago. In the dream Jesus told me that she had died and was eventually judged and separated from this place. After I wake up from that dream I start to think about her, and I wonder where she is. What are the chances that she is actually dead? Thinking of the people you are no longer in contact with always bring along a fury of questions.

Is she married. Does she have children. Does she have a good job. Is she happy. Is she sad. Is she still angry at me?

"One teacher killed." That comes out of the television in the living room and it grabs my attention. I put the notebooks back in their order and I go see what this news piece is about this time. Today, in a city school there was a shooting that has resulted in an unknown amount of deaths. All they can really confirm is that one teacher had died on the way to the hospital.

What everyone is waiting for is to see if the shooting was motivated by anything drug related. If the constant decline of the quality of this city hasn't been noticed yet, it will be noticed now as this story is going to be reported nationally eventually.

Somewhere in the middle of the report there is a knocking at my door. It's Kathleen, who is asking me if I can help her move some of Joe's things out of his apartment. I finally get to see what his possessions are.

Along with her are her two nephews who seem to be about twenty five even. Kathleen opens the door to his apartment, and for the first time, I walk in. I've glanced inside maybe two or three times, but I had never had the front row seat.

After the four of us walk in, and after we've wiped off the confused looks on our faces, we quickly realized that Joe had stopped living here. It was completely empty as if someone had just moved out. Kathleen goes into the bedroom, the only thing there is a bed. In the bathroom there is a bar of soap, a tooth brush but no tooth paste and a box of cotton swabs. Maybe Joe only slept and showered here, and was living somewhere else most of the time. So much for me finding out what

type of person he is.

I am relieved of duty early because the two nephews are able to handle the bed by themselves, and after about ten minutes I watch from my window as they drive off in a moving truck with Joe's possessions. So little in so much space. It almost makes you terrified of living a long but meaningless life.

The truck is no longer visible, but what does come into vision is a person named Mary. She gets out of a car and begins to yell at the driver. After a few seconds the driver drives off. "She needs to relax more," I think to myself. As she gets closer to the building I begin to see the added weight Tao mentioned, and I wonder where it all came from. Maybe stress from her job? Maybe from the men in her life? Maybe life itself.

After she has entered the building I go to the kitchen to get food, and not more than five minutes have passed before I hear her yelling outside again. When I go to the window I see the same car I saw before, but this time I see the man who she is yelling at. The man doesn't have much to say, but Mary is going on and on about how he is suppose to buy her things. I'm guessing he forgot her birthday.

After some time the man says something that gets him a slap across the face and causes Mary to walk away. While she is walking away he yells something at her, and then gets into his car and drives away. The efforts that humans make at romantic relationships are sometimes comical.

Chapter 39:

HEADS, TAILS, CALL IT IN THE AIR

"yo its derek how have you been? jus sendin this letter to let you know whats up... and to say thanks for havin our back. i been thinkin about them short stories you wrote, and i been tryin to write one myself but i cant think of anything to write about. anyway ima keep tryin and maybe ill send you something so you can tell me if its good or not. besides all that im guessin you heard about what happened to jamal, but if you didnt hear he got shot over some bullshit. it aint have nothin to do with the beef over that drug shit, spider said he died because he never listened. anyway jamal and the main guy here were tight so hes lookin after me i guess, he gave me a job but im smart enough to know that i cant be around these people because they will influence who i beco me. learned that from one of your stories. aight so ill probly send you another message sometime... ill be sure to send the story to. peace. ps: spider is the guy who came and got me forgot to mention that."

The line that continues to repeat itself in my head is "he got shot over some bullshit." Derek's demeanor seems to represent a person who has been around so long that death is just another part of life to them. Even if it's the death of a close one.

There is no return address on the envelope, so I assume he didn't want me to reply. Or maybe he didn't expect one. I also notice that the address on the envelope only has a street number and a street name. I put the letter back in the envelope and place the envelope next to a desk near my shelf of composition notebooks, and then I go outside, walk through the alley behind my apartment building, and turn the corner to see that Spider is still there.

I debate whether I should engage him or not, but seeing as my survival rate will dramatically increase if I know the details of what's going on, I decide to do so. I slowly walk up to his car and knock on the window of the passenger seat. It turns out he was sleeping.

He wakes up with all types of paranoia, and when he realizes who I am, he tells me to get in the car. After I get in he starts to drive away. He asks me how I knew he was watching me, but I tell him that I didn't. I tell him I was just walking home and happened to see him in the car. He makes a right turn.

He tells me that I need to be more careful, that there may be people watching me. I ask him who would be watching me, and he tells me that I don't really have to worry about that anymore. He says he's been sitting on my house for weeks waiting for the other crew to pop out, but they still haven't done so, and because they haven't done so they probably never knew that Jamal and Derek were hiding out here in the first place. He makes a left turn.

He takes a glance at the rear-view mirror and then says, "You still gotta be careful though." He tells me about how a few days into the sitting, two cops started to follow him. He makes another left turn, and shortly after I see what he means when an unmarked but obvious police vehicle makes the same left turn. Damn you Jamal.

Spider tells me that if the cops knew about Jamal, and if they were following him, then they might know about me as well. If they didn't know about me then, they certainly know about me now since I just got into the fucking car of someone who is probably a suspect in something. I ask him about Derek. "Derek? Derek's a strong kid. You don't gotta worry about him. We'll take care of him." That's what he tells me. I ask him about Jamal. The driver looks at the passenger, but the driver does not say anything.

I ask him if he's doing this for me because I helped out his friends, and he says he's doing it "because the main motherfucker has this thing about respect." I'm guessing he means something along the lines of if you show him decency, he will show you decency, and because I showed Jamal and Derek decency he is showing me that decency back. Then Spider tells me about how he isn't doing this because he believes in the same thing, he's doing it because he pissed off the main guy and the main guy is forcing him to do it. He tells me about how when the main dude tells you to do something, you have to do it, because if no one listens to the head, to the man who has the experience, there will be no order. Not exactly in those words.

After a few more left and right turns, we are back in my neighborhood and Spider decides to drop me off a few blocks from my apartment building. Before we depart, he tells me that if those cops decide to drop by, not to tell them shit. I tell him that I don't really know shit, and that I would like to keep it that way.

For the next three days, Spider continues to sit on my location and then on the fourth day he disappears, but that doesn't matter because by now I'm already in the system. Now I find myself turning on my television and putting it on my favorite channel. It's been almost a week and there is still coverage on the school shooting. One teacher killed, one student killed, one security guard

injured and a jogger who seems to have had nothing to do with anything injured.

Now my phone is ringing, and when I pick it up I hear Kathleen's voice. Looks like she's back into my life. She talks about how they are going to do a massive prayer at church tomorrow for her son, and if I would like to come. I guess it's nice to know that the fact that he is her son comes before the fact that he is a homosexual. The next morning I find myself wearing clothes I haven't worn for so long around the type of people I haven't talked to in so long in a place I haven't been to in so long.

Chapter 40:

THE LOST CARPENTER

Last night, I had a strange dream. I'm standing in front of the apartment building with a blueprint in my hand. The thing is the apartment building doesn't look like the apartment building that I know. It looks unfinished; it looks like there is still work needed to be done on it.

Before I know it I have a hammer in one hand and a nail in the other, and I'm forcing a nail into the wall. After I see that the building is good and finished, I rest for a little while. Then I go back into the building and walk through each of the three floors to make sure the names on the doors match the names on the blueprint.

They are all correct, however there are a few that are replaced with question marks. You can't know everyone in your life. While I'm on the second floor, I get to Lynne's apartment but I realize that the name Lynnette Parker is not on the blueprint. The name that is on the blueprint in the place of Lynne is George Johnson, which was the person who lived here before she moved in. Because dreams don't have timestamps I often have to figure out when a dream had taken place by considering the people I knew, the places I'd been and the things I'd done.

I go into Johnson's apartment, and I feel that the apartment is not completely done well enough. I fix a few things in an effort to stop Lynne from losing her foot, and then I go on to the next apartment who has the tenant name of Joseph White. The last apartment I check is under the name Boris, with a last name that I can't read properly, and then I go back outside for another break after debating whether or not I should check the basement of the building.

When I get outside I see Jesus and Moses sitting on a bench. I sit next to them, and Jesus says to me, "So you're going to build an entire city?" I don't answer him. He tells me that carpentry and engineering is hard work, then Moses cuts in and says "but it will not save you." Moses then gets up and he hands me two nails. They are much bigger than the ones I used on the building. Moses tells me that separate paths are what will save me.

Composition 1, Part 5

Chapter 41:

CALM THE DEVIL'S GRIN

She tells you that second-person narration is when you use words like "you" and "your." At first you want to disagree with her, you want to see her reaction, but you know that she was the one who took all those courses on writing in college. So then the nameless narrator asks Julia what exactly

third-person narration is defined as, and she tells the nameless narrator that third-person is when a narrator uses words like "he," "she," "they," "them" and "it" to refer to the other characters. She says words like "I," "us," and "we" are never used. She looks at the nameless narrator and watches as the narrator thinks about what she just said, and she says "Please don't tell me you are going to ask me what first-person is." I look back at her and laugh, and I tell her that I'm pretty sure I know what a first-person narrative is. The truth is I already knew the definition of all three perspectives. I guess back then I just wanted to hear her speak sometimes.

The night has fallen as it has done so many times before and I ponder how many people didn't live long enough today to see it fall.

Tao wants to prank call his cousin, but I tell him not to because I don't want my phone number on someone's caller identification. I don't want them calling back. He tells me not to worry, that he will do star sixty-seven so that the caller's information is blocked. How many times I'd like to star sixty-seven my life. He makes the call and for the duration I feel like I am a child again.

Going on to the next subject, Tao asks me if I've ever seen that effect light has on the Sun when it's just above the horizon, how it looks like a square. I tell him that I don't care about the Sun or about his stupid illusions. Fuck you then. No fuck you, get out of my apartment. It's cool just give me the remote. No you really have to go I have to pray. Pray? You're not even religious. Did you find Jesus or something?

I didn't find Jesus but I did find myself pushing him out of my apartment. At the very end, with only half of his body inside the apartment, he finally gives up and goes to his own home. Farewell motherfucker, don't come back. A social fragment.

Lynne's door opens, she asks me where all the noise is coming from. She's not wearing the yellow dress, but she is wearing a yellow dress. She has make-up on, and perfume. In the words of whoever said it first because I'm sure I'm not the first person to ever say this about a woman, "she was a beautiful sight."

I tell her that Tao fell down the stairs, and Tao who is standing at the top of the stairs about to go home gives me that stupid look and then opens his mouth to speak.

Lynne told me that a green rose, while it is rare, is a beautiful thing to see. That it represents mostly life and nature. All I can think about when I go back into my apartment is how pretty she looked, how nice she smelled. Then I hear two booms.

I quickly realize that it's Tao hitting his ceiling, which is my floor, with a broom. Probably still sour about me kicking him out. I think about how one thing to me is the complete opposite to him. The thoughts bring me back to a dream I had where I am in Las Vegas, The Sin City. How I overheard two entities who looked to be that of children talking about a point which could be perceived as either perception A or perception B, but the truth of the matter was that they were both one in the same.

Now I'm remembering a dream I had several years ago where I am talking to Satan in what looks to

be Hell. I think he was giving me the tour. I asked Satan if he knew God as a child, and he says yes, he did, that they were practically born on the same day at the same time in the same place. He goes on to tell me about how good and evil are one in the same. That nothing is purely good, and nothing is purely evil. That every thing is purely perception. That we were designed to feel we needed to distinguish the two.

Sometime later he's telling me a story from his childhood, one that included God. He's telling me about how they had just received responsibility on a new project, and they had come to their first big decision. Child Satan and Child God have to decide whether to set the universe on six or to set the universe on seven. Or to set the universe on both six and seven, however doing such a thing may cause later complications.

Child Satan wants to set the universe on both six and seven as a means to endure trial and error so that the final project may be one hundred percent perfect. He wants all the details. Child Satan wants to witness any possible complications that may arise, however Child God explains that they have limited time to complete the project and that going through all the possible complications would simply be impossible.

Child Satan, submitting himself to logic, agrees to what Child God has said, and they decide to set the universe on seven to maintain an order, some type of peace. Much time passes, and much work and effort has gone into the project, and by now Child Satan and Child God are now referred to as Adult Satan and Adult God.

As they continue to work on the project they come across a part of the project that involves actually creating the life forms that would inhabit the universe they have created. Eventually they get stuck when they have to figure out how, what we know as DNA now, will work in these life forms. Because life forms can only be set on six, and because they have already set the universe on seven, Adult Satan and Adult God spend centuries attempting to find a solution. Eventually Old God would suggest free will to Old Satan, but Old Satan would not agree. Old Satan's first argument is that giving the life forms free will will allow them to end their own existence. One might think twice upon hearing Satan argue for the safety of humans and all things that live, but as it has been said before, "one seldom recognizes the devil when he has his hand on your shoulder."

"Knock knock," the apartment door says. I open the door and it's Mary. She hands me an envelope, it was mail that was accidentally put in her mailbox. I look up and say thanks, and I can't help but notice how sick she looks. She gives me a look as if it were my fault and walks away; I am almost positive that as soon as she gets in her apartment she is going straight to the bathroom for purposes of vomiting and diarrhea.

The mail is from some Abraham Lincoln fundraiser thing. Lincoln has always interested me in many ways, but I'm not big on charity. I throw the envelope in the garbage and then begin to think about a story that has been told about Lincoln for many years. How one week before his death, he had a dream of someone crying in the White House because someone had died, and when he asked that person who it was who had passed away, the person told him that it was the president. Lincoln walked over to the coffin, and when he looked inside, it was his own face that he saw.

"Shut," says the car door. When I look outside I see Silvio standing next to a car in a nice suit, and I see Lynne approaching him. I'm assuming she looked so nice today because she was going to go out with Silvio. Silvio must be very charming and very manipulating if he can come back from beating on his wife. It almost pains me to see her make that long slightly limped walk back into the past to relive those moments, but thinking about the time when she brought me to where she used to live, that might actually be what she wants.

Chapter 42:

THE BROOKLYN TOWER

I put one of the pins down on a specific part of the map. I tell my partner that we'll wait on that side of the street until he comes out of the house and starts his day. We had been following a law enforcement officer around because we were positive that he was crooked. Corrupted. He played the role of a detective for the local police department, but he was much more than that.

"We know that he walks his dog over to the newspaper stand every morning, but we can't risk taking him then because of the noise that damn dog might make." So instead my partner says we wait until he goes in for work. "But what if he's off that day?" My partner says that we keep sitting on his house until the day he has work.

What we realized after the first few days of following him was that the police department isn't necessarily where he works. Because he works in the homicide department, the entire city is potentially his work location, and because the entire city may be his work location, we found ourselves following a man who has no pattern. There were some nights when he didn't even go home to his wife and kid.

"We will have to take him at night when he is in a place where there is no one around. Probably a crime scene that he is revisiting." My partner looks at the map and says, "Let's hope the crime scene he is revisiting was a good enough place to commit a crime."

The alarm clock strikes four a.m. and I tell him it's almost time to go, to make sure he knows where his mask is. We drive out to where the law enforcement officer lives and wait on the side of the street we agreed on.

There are probably more good people in the world than there are bad, but these good people may only be good because they fear the consequences of being bad. If the consequences to our actions were nonexistent, how many people do you think would still be considered good people? All that is left is the idea of decency. That anyone who still does good and refuses to do bad is doing so because the instinct to be a decent person still lives with them. The question is, seeing as how we are human beings, while you are still a good person and every one else is now running around being bad, who wins in the end? You for having morals, or them for taking advantage. Is there even a winner, or do we all just lose regardless.

What if you can't tell if the law enforcement officer is good or bad even after you've questioned him for just a little over two hours? That even after you've threatened to throw him off the tower he still implies that he is a good man.

So many times in life we get it wrong. We can find disgust in someone we've never even met, or someone we don't even truly know. In tales of fiction there are always purpose characters who are meant to make you feel a certain way. They may only appear when they need to serve their purpose in the tale, but what if the person telling you the tale is wrong about them. What if they aren't as bad as you are told, or what if they aren't as good.

We end up leaving the law enforcement officer alive at the top of the tower, but we leave behind much more than that. We attempted to take him during the night while he was walking away from someone's house. We assume he was questioning a witness of a recent double homicide he was assigned.

As we grab him, a vehicle drives up and two men get out demanding us to let him go. It appears as though we weren't the only ones watching this officer.

Shots are fired, the two unidentified men are killed, and we drive away with the law enforcement officer. In the pursuit of a man who we now have found innocent, we had killed two men we didn't know. Two men who may have been officers of the law, who may have also been some of the few remaining good. On the drive back I ponder what side of the line I fall on.

"As soon as we grabbed him, they started firing shots at us." "No, we grabbed him, then they drove up and told us to let him go. Then you started firing like an idiot." "I only unloaded because they were shooting at me." "Did you even see where they came from?" "They were either watching us, or they were watching him, but either way they were already there." "Did you see anything that identified them as police officers?" "No, and they sure as hell didn't say anything about it either." "I would feel a lot better knowing we just killed two guys who were maybe going to kill a police officer." "Yeah well we won't know until tomorrow."

I didn't say that was a dream because of the events that took place and the characters that were mentioned. Knowing these things always helped me separate reality from fiction when it was hard to tell the difference. When dissecting a memory and trying to figure out if it happened in this world or another.

Often times I have dreams of Maria coming back, but I wake up to find that it was a dream. If one day she does really come back, I won't know if I'm awake or if I'm asleep. Things like this are what make you go crazy. She comes back, and even after days I'll still be questioning if I'm dreaming or not. As for right now I know that I am awake because I've never been so irritated in my life. There is a bug flying around in my apartment and I've been chasing it for the past ten minutes.

I'm wrestling with it now in my bedroom, and I close the door shut behind me so it has less places to go. "Spray spray," says the can of bug-spray, but I miss both times. I lose the bug, so I stand still and wait for it to make its next move. When it does it goes for the window ledge, the ledge of the window that I opened earlier to let fresh air in. I probably should have kept it open, but then I would be risking more bugs flying in.

I slowly walk up to it, and I spray again but I miss again. It starts to fly now, and I spray once more and I hit it. The impact of the spray causes it to fly backwards into the glass of the window, and

then I spray it again and it falls back down on that ledge. I spray it two more times, and now it's on its back and is incapable of flipping itself over. I keep spraying it over and over again until it appears to be caught in some kind of web because of all the spray. For about ten seconds, after I stop spraying, all I can see is it kicking its feet, trying to get out. Each kick is weaker than the last, until it stops kicking completely. That's when the noise coming from the living room becomes more noticeable to me.

Soft knocking on my door that seems to belong to Lynne, except it's not Lynne. It's her sister, Claire, who as soon as I open the door makes her way in. It reminds me of Tao.

We are both sitting down on the couch, and she is trying to convince me to tell Lynne that she is making a mistake. That Silvio is a bad person. Not in those words.

It looks like Silvio's hold on Claire has worn out, and she has opened her eyes, but unfortunately he has his hold on Lynne now. For the second time. I ask Claire why she came to me of all people, that Lynne and I don't even really know each other that well. Claire says that when her and Lynne were on speaking terms, all Lynne would ever talk about was me. I tell her that even so, I wouldn't want to intrude on something I'm not welcomed to intrude on. The way Claire looks at me after I say that makes me think that this is Lynne's cry for help to me. That she wants me to come and save her, but I'm not a superhero.

I ask Claire why she doesn't ask some of Lynne's friends, and she laughs. She's not laughing at me, she's laughing at what I said. She tells me that Lynne isn't exactly the type of person who has many friends. How about some? Some maybe, if she's doing good. Doing good? "It's not something I can explain in words," Claire says.

Claire tells me about how Lynne just moved here from the inner city and probably hasn't made any friends. She tells me about how Lynne isn't the weirdest person, but also isn't the most sociable. She will dress up all pretty and nice so that she is noticed, but when someone finally notices her she will push them away. One of her psychological fragments.

Claire asks me one last time to talk to her, and I say I'll think about it. That's a lie. Then she leaves through the back door. As I show Claire the door, I see Mary throwing out her garbage. She still looks sick. I think to myself that I hadn't seen her around this much since she first moved in. Maybe she's dying. That would certainly get her to put her priorities in order.

Chapter 43:

"265 DEAD"

It's early September now, and on my favorite television channel they are reporting that since the beginning of the year, two-hundred and sixty-five people have been killed at the hands of another person. They normally don't report this number, but because it is so high someone has to take notice. I continue to watch, and as a special they have a section on one of their reporters going into the inner city and interviewing the residents that live in the places where the homicide rate is so high. As I watch these people talk, I slowly realize how sometimes when we try to remember our dreams, they appear to us in the presentation of a movie or a television show in the sense that we aren't exactly in the piece, but looking at it from an undisclosed perspective. A front-row seat to the

showing of our own mind at work.

Rock puts down his gun and says to his two peers, "Remember that these niggas put thirteen of our people in a building that had bugs crawling on the walls." Someone opens the door to the room where Rock and his peers are loading their guns, weaponry which will be used to attack the people they call their enemies, and informs the three that everything is in place, that the targets are returning to the corner.

Rock takes his gun and as many clips as he can store on his person, as do his two peers, and they get in their designated vehicle and begin to drive towards their destination.

Eight minutes prior to the departure of Rock and his two peers, an elementary school had just ended its school-day and the teachers were sending their students home. Among the students are two sisters who live about five blocks away from their school. The sisters begin to walk down a street that they could paint even with their eyes closed.

On the other side of the city, a man named Spider is pulling into a parking spot. After he parks, he gets out of his car and begins to walk down an alley that leads to the backside of the storyteller's apartment building. Near the backside of the building, hidden deep inside a bush, Spider finds the bag of money that Jamal had left there for the enemy. Soon after, Spider enters the apartment building to deposit Derek's letter with the help of a mailman, and then leaves.

In a police department somewhere in between the location of these two stories, there are two cops who are arguing with each other in front of their superior officer. One white cop who is concerned with the amount of drugs in the city, and one black cop who is concerned with the increasing number of homicides in the city. They argue because the police department doesn't have enough resources to be committed to both.

Rock parks the vehicle a few blocks away from the shooting spot, and the three of them split up to surround the enemy. Rock becomes doubtful as he sees there are pedestrians around, but proceeds despite this fact.

Malcolm and Marcus, who are standing on a street corner selling drugs to those who desire them, are completely unaware of what is going to happen next. The two sisters who are now not too far away from the corner that Malcolm and Marcus are standing on know of this corner, which is why they always walk through an alley to get to the other side of the street.

Rock walks slowly towards the enemy, crushing an empty vial that once housed heroin. Rock, who is to be the first attacker, reveals himself and begins to shoot at Malcolm and Marcus. All nearby pedestrians scatter and all those who hear the shots from their homes begin to hide. Malcolm quickly dives towards a nearby vehicle, one where he has placed a gun of his own on the top of the front right tire. Malcolm quickly returns fire, as does Marcus after he has found cover. Coming up behind them and on the side of them are Rock's two peers, who are also now firing at Malcolm and Marcus. Because of the lack of training, the rounds that are being fired are hitting just about everything except their intended targets.

After Malcolm and Marcus see that they are being closed in, they both decide to run separate ways in an effort to force the enemy to delay in making a decision. There are now empty streets and silent homes. Marcus runs into an alley, the same alley that the two sisters were walking through, but by that time the sisters had run across the street in a desperation attempt to make it home after hearing shots.

However, the street that the sisters ran across was directly in the path of where Malcolm chose to run, and the shots that are intended for Malcolm from Rock's gun hits one of the sisters. When Rock sees this, he stops shooting, but one of his peers continues to shoot, one that he would later on find out has a trigger-happy problem. This peer hits the other sister, but unlike the first sister who was hit and died instantly, the second sister dies slowly, and even after she falls this peer continues to shoot, attempting to hit Malcolm. Rock yells out at him, and tells him to stop shooting, and the both of them run back to their vehicle and find that the other peer had already been waiting there.

Rock asks that peer if he got Marcus, and he says no. Nothing was accomplished. Rock drives back home angrily, realizing that this is going to cause a shitstorm in all types of places.

Somewhere in between the first bullet and the last bullet, a phone rings at the police department; someone has reported a drive-by shooting. Black and whites appear at the scene of the shooting in minutes but are left only with the ending of the tale. There is blinking from the police car lights and from the traffic lights. The entire police department also sees the shitstorm that is coming their way. They can tell from the surrounding clues around the death of these two girls that this happened because of the lack of concern to what drugs is doing to their city. A couple of days after this incident, it would be decided that the two cops who were arguing before would be partnered up, even though one was from homicide and one was from narcotics.

The car door says "Shut" again, and when I look out my window I see Lynne getting into that same damn car she got in last time to go away with Silvio. Does Silvio make her happy.

I've heard that womens' hearts beat faster than mens', probably because women tend to be less powerful physically, but regardless of if that is true or not, one might like to think that a woman's heart beats faster because, in a metaphorical sense, the search for love tends to be more powerful in women than in men. Seeing Lynne drive off with Silvio, it makes me believe that she is capable of doing anything for love, even if it means being psychologically and physically abused. I only hope she doesn't become number two-hundred and sixty-six.

Suddenly my door opens and I see Tao making his way in, a bit slower than he usually does. "Your door was a bit opened."

Make yourself at home, my place of residence is your place of residence. "I love this couch." So do I. What do you want? Tao is now talking, telling me why he came here, and it appears as if he is saying that he knows how much of an annoyance he can be, and that he will stop coming to my place of residence unannounced. That he will be the polite neighbor that he should have always been.

"Yeah blah blah blah. Why don't you start by paying me back for all the food you've eaten here."

Tao begins to laugh, "I'm serious, man." Now he's noticing that my right thumb is red, and he asks me if I cut myself. I look down at my thumb and realize it's beginning to bleed again. This damn superficial cut that won't heal.

"It somewhat healed a while back, but it never fully heals." Tao tells me that he bets the cut has turned into the shape of a circle. I look at it, and notice that he is right. "Circles are common throughout nature," he tells me. Tao begins to say "Did you know that" but I stop him mid-sentence because as interested as I may be, I know he will be here for thirty more minutes if I let him continue. Tao goes back to his apartment, but before he leaves he says "dictum meum pactum." He claims to me that his word is his bond.

About fifteen minutes later I leave my apartment, go down the first flight of stairs and then down the second flight that leads into the basement of the apartment building where my clothes are being washed. There I find Mary, who is also washing her clothes. She looks in my direction but doesn't entirely look directly at me. I go to the washer that houses my clothes, and there is nothing but silence from either of us.

I notice that she has gained even more weight than the last time Tao mentioned it. Maybe she just doesn't care anymore. Maybe she got fired and said "fuck it." She finishes putting all her clothes in her basket and begins to walk away, and while she's walking away I watch her, and I can't help but wonder how her brain works. How anyone's brain works.

The triune brain model consists of three parts, the neomammalian complex which deals with language and perception, the paleomammalian complex which deals with reproductive and parental behavior, and the reptilian complex which deals with aggression and dominance displays. Now what I'm wondering is if our brain is trained to use a specific part of its makeup more-so than others in accordance to a specific environment. Like social fragments, how we are different versions of ourselves around different people, I wonder if there are psychologically fragments, where a part of our brain dominates usage over all others depending on who or what the subject is.

Mary's social fragment towards me probably tends to stray towards the "you are just another useless person" personality, and her psychological fragment probably tends to stray towards the "full of contempt for you" complex. The funny thing is I know I feel the same way about her. Not in those words.

Chapter 44:

THE ROSE CITY

Several months ago, I had a dream. I'm in an office room watching a presentation on a big screen. Who exactly is giving the presentation I am not sure, it was simply a white shade in the shape of a human body. The white shade tells me that there was a man who once said that there is nothing in the dark that isn't there when the lights are on, and then he points to a photograph of a man covered in darkness.

"This man, like you, has realized that no one ever truly dies." That's what he says to me, and I try to ask him what he means but I can't talk because of the bandage over my mouth. Regardless, he tells me that what he means is that there is no such thing as birth and death here. That nothing here is

real. Now he's taking the bandage off.

The white shade hands me a pistol and tells me to try and kill myself. In the back of my mind I have a severe desire to die, but as I press the pistol against my brain, I can't force myself to pull the trigger. "Remember, this is just a dream." That's what he says to me, but he's not the one with the gun pressed against his head.

"Kill yourself, and you will see that I am telling you the truth." I still can't pull the trigger. After the white shade realizes that I need a bigger push if I'm going to pull this trigger, he starts to talk about the beginning of the universe.

The white shade asks me if I believe it's possible to create something from nothing. I tell him that I do not believe that it's possible. Then he says, "So in order for something to exist, there must have been something before it." Then he goes on to say that I must be one of the people who believes that a higher being or beings created all that we see and know.

The white shade says if you cannot create something from nothing, and we consider this fact, then many will argue the impossible origin of the higher being or beings in the first place. When you think about it, these ideas in conjunction are in error.

"So now we consider that the existence of a higher being or beings is impossible. How can we be here? Did everything and anything we know and see come into place on its own? Maybe nothing is real. Or, maybe everything and anything that we know and see are as real or as fake to us as we think. Maybe if a person simply believes there is a God, then God will simply exist, and if a person doesn't believe there is a God, then God will simply not exist. Maybe it's that simple."

I think about what he says, then I ask the white shade, "Doesn't this mean that there is no fact or fiction? If I believe there is no gravity, will there or will there not be gravity?"

"In this place, there is gravity and there is no gravity. Depending on what you believe, you will witness one or the other."

At this point, in my mind I'm debating and comparing the real world to the dream world and trying to understand what this person is saying. The white shade tells me that I'm on the right track but going in the wrong direction, that I should be thinking about how similar these two worlds truly are.

"Now you need to pick up the gun, and then ask yourself where you will go when you are done with this life, and then you will or will not be able to pull the trigger."

I think about the question before I pick up the gun. I always believed that our bodies and our minds were separate, and that when our bodies died, our minds would live on. That we created our own afterlives. That what we truly believed in the unconscious brain is what would happen after we have passed. Those who believed in Heaven and Hell would go to Heaven or Hell. Those who believed in reincarnation would be reincarnated. Those who believed in a place where there is unlimited candy would go to a place where there was unlimited candy.

So I picked up the gun, and I tried again. This time I pulled the trigger, and I could almost feel the metal in my brain. After it was done, I was still there, in the same office with the same white shade and the same man who was covered in darkness on a big screen. "Don't be afraid." That's what the white shade says to me.

A few seconds later, the white shade begins to explain to me that this man who is covered in darkness in this photograph is a bad person, but that the real problem is that he can't die because of what he knows. He murders, he steals, he rapes. "All that bad guy stuff."

So I ask it what this has to do with me. The white shade says that I have to stop him. "But you just told me that he can't be stopped." The white shade then tells me that I have to convince him that what he is doing is wrong. That he cannot take advantage of a life with no consequences. That I need to show him that "every action has an equal and opposite reaction."

I ask the white shade why it can't try to convince him itself, and it says that it's for a personal reason. The white shade then says that it's not forcing me to do anything, that I have to want to do the right thing of my own free will. I look down and begin to think about what the white shade is saying and realize that there is a piece of paper before me. On it there is a small stamp that says "Welcome to the rose city." Portland.

Right now it's two a.m. and I can't sleep. This happens every once in a while. So instead of sleeping I find myself staring outside my window into a vision wrapped in street lights. A part of me ponders the vast amount of dreams going on right now in the world, or at least on this side of the world. Not three seconds later after the thought is born someone pulls into the parking lot.

After they park, and after one of the street lights cast a white light on the car, I can see the color of the car and I realize that the owner of the car is Lynne. Where do people go at two a.m.? What do they do?

I'd have to say about ten minutes have passed by and I'm still looking at this car and Lynne still has not gotten out of it. Did I miss that part. I'm tired, but I don't think I did. Ten more minutes go by and nothing has changed. Lynne is sitting in her car but I have no idea why. Is she asleep? Maybe she's too tired to get out. Maybe she is thinking. Or, maybe it's not her.

Five minutes, and now I'm falling in and out of a daydream. In the daydream Lynne walks pass me and she smiles along the way. I'm getting tired of seeing that damn smile. For a second I want to punch her in the face in hopes of never having to see it again. When I realize I'm daydreaming, after I find myself staring at the same car I've been watching for the past thirty minutes, I ask myself if I'm bitter towards Lynne because I'm jealous of Silvio, or if it's because I'm angry at her for being so stupid. For falling into a trap that is clearly labeled "Trap."

Now the car door finally opens, it's Lynne. She walks towards the building. That slight limp due to a foot that has said goodbye. Before she enters the building, she admires her flowers. For the rest of the night, I'm left thinking about why she could have possibly spent that much time in her car.

After the darkness of the night begins to lift, I hear arguing from my window in another apartment building. It's a little after six a.m. and I can't tell if I had slept or not, the only thing I knew was that I was awake now.

The arguing continues until one of them leaves and then there is finally silence. This is not the first time and I'm certain it will not be the last.

The frustration of not being able to sleep properly, it prompts me to go outside for a walk in an effort to tire myself. It has worked before. As soon as I hit the first sidewalk, that's when I hear it. Real silence. No cars, no birds, no Sun. No people, no wind. Everything is still. I stand there and admire the scene because I cannot believe it's past six a.m. and the world has not yet gone to work. I must be dreaming.

On the walk, along the way, I think about the dream I had several months ago and how I'm still convinced that the white shade was some kind of representation of God. Was God speaking to me?

There are some who will claim to hear the voice of God, or in other instances claim that God interacted with them in some way. It seems to me like, considering the stories from the Old Testament of the Bible, God use to speak to its creation time and time again, but as its creation began to multiply it became very difficult to keep moderate social levels with every single human being, so maybe he stopped trying. Maybe now he only speaks to the people who need to hear his voice. The people that need to know he is still out there somewhere. Of course these sentences may implicate that God is not all-powerful and that it is possible for him to give up.

Without the presence of a higher being or someone to hear our words and answer our questions, life becomes a mystery, and because of this I believe it is possible that even the wisest person can spend their entire life searching for something they will never find while the most foolish person dwells in a lifetime of prosperity. Sooner or later we will all have to learn to fend for ourselves when there is no one there to guide us. We will have to find our own way.

Somewhere in the pages of the composition notebooks there is a story of guidance. Dreams about a society that is now, depending on which side of the line you stand on, completely run by a corrupt government. In the same dreams I am part of a group of outsiders, and somewhere along the way this group searches for a leader. Someone to guide them while they continue to evade the efforts of such an evil civilization. A civilization that barely seems civil.

After such a long time of running, we all begin to see these "civilians" as monsters, and when you come across any of them, it's better to run than to fight because they will certainly not welcome your ideas and beliefs. That's the mistake that Gary made. He thought he could convince them that they should be friends rather than enemies, and their reply was to imprison him simply because of the way he looked. They could not understand our language. I mean they could, but philosophically, our perceptions were not in tune. We may have spoken the same language, but we were two entirely different species.

Because Gary had gone and got himself caught by the civilians, for Stephanie's sake, we had to get him out, and where there is a plan, there has to be a person to mastermind it. As much as I didn't

want it, the outsiders looked to me for leadership in hard times because of the things I had done before, and because of this, the rest of Gary's life was in my hands. Metaphorically.

By the time I get back home, the world had begun its day. Cars on the street, people and their dogs on the sidewalks. School buses eating children one by one as their parents watch with that distasteful smile and that redundant wave goodbye.

I wish someone could give me mathematic or scientific formulas to apply to these things that I see so I could figure out why people are always smiling when there are few things to smile about in life. Maybe I don't understand because I don't smile enough myself. Maybe I don't have the right people in my life who can tell me why smiling is so popular or important. People do it all over the world. It's one of the few words that share the same meaning in the perception of a civilian versus the perception of an outsider.

Why do these human tendencies plague me so much. No question mark. I accepted who I am a long time ago, but I'm starting to think that maybe accepting who you are and knowing you are this way simply because you are this way and you might never change may be the first sign that you should not accept yourself. That is, of course, only if you despise the pain you receive for being this way. Some people don't.

Chapter 45:

BLOODTHINNER

You can keep pretending to live these lives that are not yours, believe you are these people that you are not, but the fact of the matter is your dreams will not save you. They will not fulfill your desire to live. These are the words of a therapist I was suggested to see many years ago. "Everything is an illusion." Those are the last words of a woman before her execution.

Depending on who you ask, dreams may be many things, which is why it is almost pointless to ultimately define them. This notion that a certain thing may mean one thing to you while it means something completely different to me does not only apply to dreams but to many other things. You know this because you've been in at least one debate or argument in your life.

The therapist doesn't tell me what dreams are, but he does tell me what they are not. Of all the sentences he's said to me, the ones I've previously mentioned were the only ones that stayed with me. Even though I chose to argue with him, even though that was my last visit, in the end I knew he was right. "Your dreams will not save you."

Never "my" therapist, using such a pronoun would implicate my submission to the idea that I actually needed to see one. I never agreed with Maria, but I did it for her. Instead, I often use the definite article "the" when referring to him. The therapist. Just another proper nounless character in a story within a story. The aim with the whole therapist idea was to help me more easily and socially express myself, to not seem so indifferent on every subject and so cold to the people who loved me. To escape the stoicism.

My question then was, how can I function in a society that is constantly clotting my blood. A society that all too often disappoints; where the stories of redemption are much too few and too far

between. How can one who suffers from misanthropy find a cure to stop the clotting. Eventually, one can die from such a disease.

There was a Winter night where I had a dream in which I was interrogating someone while my father watched. I couldn't see him because the darkness of the shadows hid him well, but I knew he was there. The son of a bitch who I am questioning doesn't believe that I am willing to go as far as shooting him to get what I need to know out of him. So now he's taunting me, telling me that I don't have it in me. He's right, I don't. At least not yet.

He keeps talking, and I'm thinking of something I could do to shut him up and get him saying the words that I actually want to hear out of his mouth. Now I'm taking a pocketknife out of my pocket. "Oh, now you're going to cut me?" He laughs. No, I'm not going to cut him.

I put my hand on a table, and now he's quiet. I start to hack away at my one of my fingers, and I know I have his respect and attention now. After a while he is completely silent. I pick up my now unattached finger and wave it in his face. Then I put the gun to his heart and give him a cold stare that you could only get from someone who has ice-water in their veins. Someone so cold and so far gone that any attempt to save them would only further progress their destruction. Something like a therapist who fuels the part of you that needs therapy and ultimately is successful in doing the complete opposite of what is listed in his job description.

Not a second later, I have him believe that I actually am insane and now he's telling me more than I needed to know. My father comes out of the darkness and tells me that we need to go now. We leave the man there and walk through a hidden door, and the next thing I know, I'm sitting somewhere with my father and he's trying to tell me something but I can't hear him. After we both get up and start walking down a dark hallway, his voice reaches me and I can finally hear him.

On the news they say the police department has made the biggest drug bust this year last night when they raided a home that sits on the corner of a street. With fifty kilograms of heroin seized, it makes it one of the more notable drug busts since the biggest drug bust this city has ever seen back in the 1980s.

Along with the drugs, they found money and weapons, and of course a few people to put in handcuffs and question later. At a press conference, there is a man who I'm assuming has some kind of dominating rank who addresses the people and answers their questions. Lieutenant Scott Merils. He talks about how this accomplishment would not have been possible had it not been for the recent initiation of a new task force with the help of the mayor designed to improve the quality of life in the city.

I start to think about Derek and wonder if he is anywhere near all of this. For some reason the thought reminds me of when Tao asked me if I had ever wondered if I read a book written by a criminal who had never been caught. "Just imagine, you're reading a book by a serial killer who never got caught and you never even knew." I can only hope that when I looked at Derek, I wasn't looking at a person who had it in his nature to become a criminal.

I open my apartment door and head down the flight of stairs to check my mail. What kind of junk

mail will I get today. When I get to the most bottom step, I notice that someone is entering the building. The first-floor man. Think of the most mysterious person you've ever known in your life; the first-floor man is at least two to three times more mysterious than that person. Not because he has the look of a mysterious man; tall, skinny, always wearing a long dark coat, but because he never speaks. In fact the only time I hear him speak are in my dreams. Otherwise, he's just another character without a proper noun.

He is also in the mood for mail-checking, and when I take a glance at his preferred type of junk mail, I notice he is holding some kind of science magazine. One of the taglines is "The secret to eternal life is perfect cell regeneration."

He finishes before me and then disappears. Not a moment later, another tenant is attempting to open the stubborn front building door with too many grocery bags in his hands. I help him open the door, but I don't ask if he needs help with the bags. Anyone attempting to do what he is doing must also believe he can achieve the impossible without any help from anyone else.

I'm back at my door and I can hear the phone ringing on the other side. Who is it now. I debate whether I should just let it ring or if I should answer it. Sarcastically, I think to myself, "but what if it's Kathleen, she may need my help." She hasn't spoken to me in a while, and I've never felt so free.

I decide to answer the phone, and after I say "Hello," on the other side of the phone is a soft-spoken voice of a young girl. I find out it's Sarah, but what I can't figure out while I'm talking to her is how she knows my phone number. "Mom told me to call you if she doesn't answer her phone." Fucking emergency contact forms.

I must have told Lynne my phone number and then forgotten about it. "Why are you calling me?" That's what I would have asked her if I didn't have a soft spot for children. "How are you?" She tells me that she is good today. I ask about David, he is good as well but misses his toys. She asks me if I could see if her mother was home, and because she is such a little princess, I do.

Lynne opens her door and I tell her that I have her daughter on my phone. After she expresses a look of someone who has made a mistake, we go back into my apartment and she begins to talk to her daughter. The conversation that they have, or at least the words that come out of Lynne's mouth, they imply that Sarah simply missed her mother and wanted to hear her voice.

While they are talking, I notice that Lynne unknowingly brought along a book of some sort, except this book seems to be overly designed yet has no title whatsoever. I also notice that it has some kind of belt around it, or perhaps a locking device. What kind of an author would write a book in which they do not want you to read the contents inside? Or at least want you to struggle a little bit before you finally manage to open it? I'm actually still sitting here baffled by the lack of no title.

When she hangs up the phone, I ask her what book that is, and she laughs. I must be missing something. She tells me that it's not a book, and before she finishes I realize it's her diary. I forgot people still keep those. Whenever I think of a diary I picture it being owned by a teenage girl who has a hard time controlling her hormones, but I suppose even adults of either gender need a way to

reflect on these days of darkness.

Lynne apologizes about the hassle, but I tell her it's no problem. She explains to me how she just wanted some peace and quiet so she unplugged her phone and turned off her cellular phone, completely forgetting that her children or mother may need to contact her. I planned on asking her about how Sarah knew my phone number, but I decided not to, to avoid any implication that I am not as aware as I seem to present myself as.

After she leaves I begin to wonder if she is anything like me considering she keeps a log of some sort. I do it with dreams, she does it with whatever she does it with, but at the end of the day it's the same idea. Write this down so you don't forget. Maybe one day, when you're older and you've forgotten, you can open up these pages and relive the experiences. Your bloodthinner. The only thing is, unlike me, she probably throws away old diaries.

Moments later I hear yelling in the apartment next to mine. That familiar voice that seems to have a soft-spoken inferior counter-part. I don't have to guess that it's Mary because she always seems to find the strength to be angry. A door slams shut and now her angry words have translated into loud footsteps. Stomps, almost. Give them a few seconds to grow up.

As the angry footsteps begin to drown out, the sound of my television becomes louder and louder as I hear a news reporter speak about another homicide and how the case was solved less than three hours after the homicide because the perpetrator was an idiot. Not in those words. Even though the idea of having stupid criminals may sound great as first, the police that chase them should often find a challenge as to keep themselves from being just as stupid as the criminal.

There will be police officers who praise an intelligent criminal simply because the criminal made them a better cop. If a police officer is lucky, they will chase a criminal their entire career, and regardless of whether they catch the criminal or not, they may thank the criminal under their breath for giving their life a purpose. Or at least keeping them busy.

The reporter begins to speak to a female police officer and she makes some mention of sentencing. You could almost say a prison sentence is determined based on the average of the crime's frequency, and of course the crime itself. If it was statistically correct that each person would kill at least one other person in their lifetime, then the severity of the punishment for a homicide would go down. One, because the crime happens so often, it would not seem as heinous, and two, because there would be too many people in prison and there simply isn't enough money to keep them all there.

Imagine the punishment of a homicide if there was only one homicide every ten years. Someone might call that murderer Satan himself. It should also be noted that the crime itself holds a large amount of value towards determining the punishment as well. You won't get a hundred years in prison for stealing a radio from a radio store even if a radio is only stolen once every one thousand years.

There was a man who said that political and religious authorities will often try to confuse the people with over-complicated moral systems so that the people might actually believe that certain

things are more complex than they really are. To get people in a state of mind where they are vulnerable and realize that they may need guidance. Sometimes you wake up and assume that you didn't have a dream, but I've heard some people say that no matter what, you will dream about something each night, even if you can swear that you didn't have a dream. You keep trying to remember what it is you could have possibly dreamed about until you start to make stuff up.

My memory, for the most part, is above average, but sometimes I forget the smallest things. Sometimes I forget what it is I've done, sometimes it's what I've said. It was worse as a child than it is now as an adult, but I can only wonder if it will get worse as I age. If it will return back to "normal." Does your blood get thinner as you age? You want to avoid blood clotting, but you also wouldn't want your blood to get too thin. You already know that many things in life require a happy medium to function properly.

Chapter 46:

OPERA OMNIA

A few years going in the opposite direction, I had a dream which mainly dealt with sanity and survival. After a large percentage of the world population had been defined as "civilized," I had run into very few others who were considered outsiders, or "uncivilized," and who were also hiding from the firm grip of the civilians.

Among one of the strangers I'd meet who would later become an ally was a young boy named Sterling. No more than seventeen years old, no less than six and half feet tall. On his own after his entire family had been taken by civilians, he looks for guidance, he looks for someone not to show him where to go in life but where to find good fruit to eat.

Normally I would travel alone, but on a particular day in a particular place which used to be known as the city of Cape Town, Sterling saves me, as well as two others, from being captured by civilians.

If you are living the life of an outsider in the eyes of the civilians, the first rule of that life for the outsider is to run whenever he or she sees a civilian, we all know that, but Sterling doesn't run. Sterling, he laughs as he taunts the civilians as if this were all just a game. As if he doesn't fully comprehend what is going on. Sometimes a lack of sanity can be the most powerful weapon, and Sterling proves that as he tears the civilians limb from limb, one by one.

A few seconds after the last limb is torn, there is a cry for help from another outsider in the area. Sterling and I rush over, and we find a woman kneeling over a man. Unfortunately the man's life is lost, but Stephanie's must go on. Sterling extends his hand to her, and he helps her up. "You can come with us."

Not only does Sterling invite himself to travel along with me, but he invites another person who is another stranger to me as well. Things get a lot more merrier when Stephanie asks if we can help her find her brother. Sometimes the word "civilian" can be used to describe someone as "not belonging." For a while I feel as if I am a civilian when I travel with the both of them.

There's a knock on my door, and as firmly as I believe it will be Tao, I find my beliefs are incorrect

when it is Lynne instead. Lynne tells me about how Kathleen told her she's been diagnosed with diabetes. I ask her what type, but she says Kathleen never mentioned it over the phone.

Now Lynne is laughing while she looks at the ceiling. I ask her why she is laughing and she pauses. It was a nervous laugh.

Lynne says that Kathleen didn't call me and tell me herself because she thinks I find her to be annoying. Kathleen is more observant than I've given her credit for. Lynne looks at a small device she is holding in her hand and realizes that it is beyond time for her to go, and she says goodbye. After she walks away I am left with the visualization of what used to be Joe's door. A truly empty home for a man who is truly undefined.

I get a feel of nostalgia and decide to go to the hospital to see how he is doing, or maybe I'm actually hoping that Kathleen is there and I can pretend that she isn't annoying. I get on a bus that is almost completely empty except for one young man who looks as if he is coming from school. As I pass him by he looks up at me and gives me a light greeting.

As far as I travel, I still end up getting off before him and once again he is a lone traveler. The night will do that to you sometimes.

When I get to the hospital, Joe is still in the same room and looks exactly as I last saw him when I visited with Tao. Kathleen is not present, but considering she has just been diagnosed with diabetes, type unknown, there's always a chance she's not too far from here. For a moment I want to ask one of people who works there if they have a Kathleen White in the building, but I quickly come back to my senses.

Clothes. I haven't seen Joe in clothes that he has chosen himself in a long time. Appearances may be deceiving, but they might also play a role in discovering the type of person someone is. The way a person styles their hair, or even the way they don't bother with it. The colors they prefer, the colors that they don't. The kind of smell they want to give off, the size of their shirt or pants, the shoes they wear in a certain situation. Some people try to appear pleasing one hundred percent of the time because they never know who they might meet, others only try to appear pleasing when they are trying to meet someone, otherwise it's not as big of a deal.

A nurse walks by and asks me if I am family or a friend. I lie and tell her that I'm a friend. Either answer would be a lie I guess.

She tells me how he's been here for a long time, then I ask if he is getting any better. She tells me that he hasn't really changed at all, for better or for worse, then goes on to tell me that it's really up to him if he wants to get out of it or not, then she gets a call and is needed elsewhere. Not to say she was needed here.

What she says gets me thinking, thinking if a person's will to live plays a role in their identity, but enough of that. I need to go back home. I make my way out of the room and then make my way to the first floor of the hospital. I begin to walk down a hallway which leads to the building's exit, but along the way there will be a woman named Julia sitting in one of the hospital's many waiting

rooms. She will be reading, waiting to hear about a dear friend who was mildly injured.

I will have to walk pass her without her noticing me in an effort to avoid any type of communication. If that fails, I will either have to run, or pretend I am someone else. I get closer and closer to her and try to stay in a position where I can see her but she can't fully see me. At the end of it all, I manage to get pass her, but as I'm at the exit door, I begin to think about shopping at the Chase Mart. How I haven't been there in so long and how if I don't confront her eventually I will never be able to go there again. How I hate going to that huge grocery store two miles away with the lousy employees.

"Hey Julia." She looks up at me surprised. After she completely recognizes me, there is no anger or anything of the like in her expression. Maybe the events that brought her here made her too tired to be angry.

I realize that it's safe to converse and that any ill feelings or wills she has towards me are temporarily suspended, so I ask her what she's reading. She tells me it's a collection of all the works by her favorite author. Interesting.

I sit down and she begins to tell me about how her boyfriend injured himself at work, and how she is waiting to hear about his condition. She asks me how I've been and I tell her that I'm the same as I've ever been.

I ask her about her job, and she tells me she hates it. She talks about how she hates computers, how she hates her boss, how she hates all the paperwork. I try to imagine what computers and paperwork would have to do with being a clerk at a convenient store, but I can make no connection. I guess she must have detected the confusion in my face because she then says that she doesn't work at that store anymore, that she got a new job. This is some of the best information I have received in a long time.

Just before visiting hours end, a doctor speaks with Julia, and then we continue our conversation outside as the Moon watches us.

Her first words catch me off-guard as she begins to talk about how losing me forced her to become stronger. How she had to stop herself from using drugs and making bad friends. Ultimately, she says losing me played a large part in her getting to where she is now; not exactly having her dream life but having a life that she can accept and call her own.

I, on the other hand, am not full of words, so the conversation ends and we part ways. That is until we realize we are going to be taking the same bus. There are a few people on the bus we get on, but we manage to sit near each other and end up talking about trivial matters the entire way. She gets off before me and after she leaves the thought of definition comes back into my mind. Most of the time, the audience of a book defines the book itself. If Joe ever wrote a book, is it possible that the people who end up reading his book are like him? I need to stop thinking about this.

I get off the bus and begin to walk home. As I'm crossing the parking lot for my apartment building, I see that Lynne is in her car, exactly like how she was some nights ago, and she is just

sitting there looking down as if she is doing something with her hands. After a second she notices me and waves, I wave back and then go inside. On my way in I see one of the other tenants who is on his way out.

Sarah's grandmother tells her that moving isn't so bad, that she will go to a new school and make new friends. Emily's attempt to comfort Sarah seems to work a little bit, but the same attempt has no effect on David at all. He cannot be reached.

Across the hall, in the kitchen, is Lynne who is making Sarah and David lunch. Desirable sandwiches. After she finishes, she walks into the living room and gives them both the food she has prepared, and just like her own mother, she attempts to relieve the children of any discomfort they have about moving to a new home.

Moments later the children are eating and watching television while the two elder women speak about how a life without Silvio will be better for everyone. After the night has fallen and after the children are sleeping, Lynne sits down on her bed and takes off her prosthetic foot, and then lays down to sleep, thinking about how the next coming days are a chance for her to start over.

After days of packing, the moving truck arrives and is ready to be filled with possessions. The truck driver is a long time friend of Lynne who says yes to her when she asks if her and the kids can ride in the front for the trip to the new home.

During the drive, the truck driver says that a pair of jeans and a t-shirt are more comfortable for moving, especially when you have to walk a lot. Lynne says that she will be fine, and then notices that they are driving pass Chase street and tells the driver that they are nearly there. When they get there they began to unload, and after a certain amount of time the moving process is complete. Due to an emergency, the movers had to leave a bit early which resulted in them bringing in the last few possessions less professionally than usual, one of them being a television that was left in the middle of the living room.

Lynne, with only one foot, does not attempt to move the television alone, but instead eventually gets help from one of her new neighbors who she hopes would become a long-time companion.

Chapter 47:

AN APPETITE FOR DARKNESS

I've had a dream where I'm walking through a forest, and along my travel, in the distance, I see the Lord sitting on a large rock. I watch the Lord, wondering what he's done and what he will do next. Where's he's been and where he plans to go.

Moments later Satan appears, who looks to be tired from a long journey of his own. The two had been working on a project and were still in the early phases. Satan had decided to test the set of rules they had decided for the project, rules we would later name "the laws of physics."

Satan approaches the Lord, and the Lord says to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Satan answers the Lord, "From roaming through the Earth and going back and forth in it."

As a child I remember someone telling me that Satan was at one time one of God's angels, but I guess something happened between them and they went their separate ways. Most people would say Satan went from being good to being evil. Funny how quickly one thing can become the exact opposite.

Most people might also say that you must try your best to cleanse yourself of evil, but the meaning of that advice is relative. Few people might say you must cleanse yourself of good. The first piece of advice, because it is more common, people will always associate cleansing one's self with the act of ridding one's self from any kind of evil, but in a place with no influence, no commonality, cleansing one's self will mean to either become all good or become all evil, and there will be no judgment on which path you choose because either or is one in the same and the words "most" and "few" are simply made-up words from a book of fiction.

The Sun is rising, but not everyone rises along with it. There is one woman who has risen before even the Sun because today is her first day working with others who are considered to be the best in their fields.

She lives alone, but she is not lonely. She has not yet developed an appetite for darkness, though she will after the life she chooses leaves her in turmoil. Serving the police department, she will learn that the will to do good sometimes needs to be fed by bad or rotten roots.

"You're early, detective Jackson." She looks at her commanding officer and wonders what being early may imply. Her commanding officer continues to speak, "You're early but there is one person you will never beat to the station." The person he is referring to is detective Mainor. While Lieutenant Merils means to imply that Mainor is always the first person to show up, that's simply not true. What he actually means is that in his heart, Mainor never really stops doing the job, and because of this he never really leaves the station. Mainor is the type of detective who even when he's at home he is working on catching his victim's killer. "If you can put as much devotion to the job as Mainor, you won't need talent or luck." Detective Mya Jackson thinks on those words.

Frank Mainor walks into the large room. "Are you talking about me again?" Merils tells Mainor about the new addition to his squad, Mya Jackson. Mainor looks at Jackson and then walks up to her to shake her hand and welcomes her aboard. Jackson catches a glimpse of a whiteboard with a list of names. These are a list of names of people who have been murdered in the current year. She looks at Mainor's name, all of the names are in black except two. Next to Mainor's name is Wilson who has more than thirteen names in red. It doesn't take long for Jackson to realize that Wilson was the one who had to solve the "abandoned apartment murders."

About thirty minutes later, Mainor and Merils are in Merils's office and Mainor is giving him his opinion on the new officer. Mainor, as he has warned Merils before, says that adding people to the team is unnecessary, especially if the person doesn't have any experience. Merils says that more man-power means the quicker they will bring down the drug kingpin and the quicker they can all get back to their regular jobs and lives.

Mainor walks out of the office and tells a deskless Jackson that they are going for a drive. The two get outside to see the Sun is out and the darkness is gone. If you asked him, Mainor would tell you

that the darkness is the only place an evil person could hide. He would also tell you that you could find good people hiding in the same darkness. He might make you wonder if he is one of those good people who hides in said darkness, and if he might pass on his appetite for darkness to a young Mya Jackson.

In the car, while they are driving, Mainor asks Jackson about where she was before she came here. Jackson was a patrol officer who was in the right place at the right time while a convenient store robbery was in progress. She was right near the location when she got the call and was able to stop the criminal before he could get away. What she didn't know at the time is that she had just arrested a man who was wanted for several murders. The assassins that these large drug operations have, he was one of them.

Mainor slows down and pulls up to a curb. About a block down, on the other side of the street, there is a man nicknamed "Rock" who is talking to a few of his associates. Mainor tells Jackson to look up far ahead, and when he sees that she sees Rock, he says, "These are the people we are going after. Not these guys specifically, but they will get us the bigger fish."

Jackson asks if they are drug dealers. Mainor tells her that the one who looks like he's explaining something to the others, that he's a "lieutenant" in the organization, however Mainor is incorrect. Rock, whose real name is Terrell Bell, has slowly begun to separate himself from the organization after what he believes what a betrayal on his superiors' parts.

Mainor tells Jackson not to worry, that they have Ryan and others on their side. Weeks before, Mainor and Ryan were given permission to lead a unit that would help decrease crime, mainly homicides and drug trafficking, after the murder of two young children. The last thing Mainor says to Jackson before he starts the car to go back to the station is that she doesn't have to dress so nice. "We're only stopping bad people, nothing else."

I had a dream, but now I'm awake. At first, I can't remember what the dream was about, but after a few seconds it all comes crashing down. In the dream I'm in some kind of jazz club. On the stage there are performers performing a song. I'm sitting way in the back watching them. The only person I pay attention to is the female singer, who after a while I realize is Lynne.

She's singing softly, what about I can't remember, but her appearance, even more than her voice, is what's most appealing to me. White dress, a light in her eyes. For a moment I block everything else out and the only thing that I know for sure that is real is her beauty. Despite the fact that it's a dream, and despite the fact that beauty is simply an idea and perception, for that moment I feel as if I could hold the beauty she possesses. That I could find it somewhere and keep it safe.

There's a knock at my door and when I answer it, it's the large woman who lives on the third floor. She hands me an envelope and tells me it was accidentally put in her mailbox.

It looks like more junk mail so I throw it in the trash. I put on my shoes and start my travels to my parents' home. Walking across the parking lot I notice Lynne's car. It's empty. I walk up to it and look in the driver's seat to see what she may have been doing the last time I saw her. There's nothing there of any significance, but as I'm walking away I notice she is sleeping in the back seat.

I wonder what she is doing there, but I don't wake her up. I continue what short distance I have traveled so far.

It is said that in his heart a man plans his course, but it is the Lord who determines his steps. If you were alive centuries ago you might have met a philosopher who believed that each person is responsible for giving their own lives meaning and purpose. In a dream connected to the thieves from New York, I'm at a point where I can't figure out what to do with my life because my partner has died and the anger I felt has begun to fade away. After some time, I find myself in a third world country attempting to find peace and help those who cross my path in my search to find fulfillment in life again, but not the kind of fulfillment that required anger.

Sometimes I'm locked and it's hard to get in without a key. That doesn't stop everyone though, some people like to force me open by kicking me down. Sometimes I'm not locked, however, and people just simply walk in.

I used to get annoyed with people knocking on me, but that doesn't happen anymore because no one lives here now. I also used to hate when people would look right through me to see what's on the other side.

Here comes the narrator. You probably know this person as the storyteller. Opening the gate. Climbing the steps. Now the storyteller's hand is on my doorknob, and now I'm open for everyone to see what's inside. The storyteller walks into the parents' home and now the storyteller's hand is on the other doorknob and is now closing me and eventually I will say "shut."

Chapter 48:

NAMELESS IDENTITY

Overhead, the street light hangs motionless upon the air, and across the parking lot, inside apartment 2C, the echo of a distant sob comes willowing across the living room and every thing is green and submarine.

There is not a single light on in the apartment, and if you go past the living room and open the door on the left, you would see Lynne sitting down on the floor with her back against the wall. You would hear her crying but you wouldn't be able to see the blood and the bruises. Eventually she would get tired, and she would fall asleep.

Sometimes our dreams can turn into nightmares. Plans we saw so clearly become blurry, and for some of us, the blurriness causes us to forget what the dream originally was. The dead dreams may stay dead, but some of them might turn into nightmares to drag you down, and if you die before you wake...

Watching the news I see a national story about several men with influence who were found dead in their homes. Not too many details as it's an ongoing investigation, but it's nice to know that there are other cities out there that also suffer from the wrath of mankind. That it's not just ours and it's not just us.

I turn off the television and now my entire apartment is dark. Many nights I'll find myself sitting in

a dark apartment left alone with my thoughts. You watch as your eyes adjust to the lack of light. There is someone inside of you. You battle them often, and sometimes you don't even realize it. There's someone in my head, but it's not me.

Derek turns the corner and makes a motion to Wallace that lets him know that there are police officers in sight. Wallace passes on the message to the others as Derek disappears into an alley. A police vehicle pulls up to where three men are standing.

Frank Mainor and Tim Ryan get out of the police vehicle and walk up to the three men, one of the three men being the one who shot and killed one of the two sisters. About a block away, Rock is sitting in a parked car watching the event, and somewhere in the other direction, Mya Jackson exits her vehicle and is now following Derek on foot hoping that he will either lead her somewhere or she will have the chance to talk to him in hopes of flipping him, the latter being influenced by his age.

Rock takes out a phone and begins to call his boss. Not the person in charge of the organization, but the one who talks directly to that man. "Yo, they back."

The man who is second in command who just received a phone call from Rock then calls his boss, and the two discuss how the constant appearances of these two cops is not good for business. Things were a lot easier when the city accepted that crime would never go away, but now there is an entire unit dedicated to stopping these crimes. The man in charge begins to explain why you only take the shot when the enemy is the only one in the cross-hair. If you take enough innocent lives, people will notice.

Mainor, taking a bite out of his sandwich, asks one of the three men what they think about their city's basketball team. One of the three men begins to explain how the roster was too imbalanced, which then prompts Ryan to agree and move the conversation over to the critiquing of those who manage the team. The owner, the coaching staff.

Mya, who is still following Derek, watches as Derek begins to enter a run-down apartment building. As he puts his hands on the doorknob, there is a car honk that grabs his attention. Derek recognizes the car and begins to walk towards it. Mya remembers the license plate number and would later try to look it up but she would find bad information. If she would have seen who was in the car, she would see that it was Spider.

After the car drives off, Mya goes to the building that Derek was about to enter and writes down the address. Mya would tell her associates what she had found out, but they would all joke about how following a kid is not the job. Merils, who sees what Jackson can become provided she is under the right wing, tries to save her by explaining to the others that the entire investigation could be in that building, that in this line of duty you never know what the key may be to unwrapping a crime. In his heart, however, Merils knows that Jackson wasted her time.

Mainor and Ryan, after having a thorough discussion about sports with three men who they suspect were involved in the killing of a police officer, get back in their vehicle after realizing Mya is not around and head towards the station. On the way there, Ryan says, "We got nothing."

Mainor, "What?"

"We got nothing on anyone. The big fish, the guy running this whole thing, we don't know his name, we don't know what he looks like. He's a fucking ghost, and if he ain't, we might as well be chasing one." Mainor replies, "Don't worry, we're smarter than them." After a few seconds of silence Ryan says, "You know it wasn't smarts, we just got lucky." Mainor replies, "I know." The drugs they had previously seized should have been credited to random luck as opposed to talent.

Mainor says, "Even if we don't know much about him, we know what he does and we know who he associates himself with. All we gotta do is climb that ladder and we will eventually get to him." Ryan replies, "Only thing is we won't stop these guys with just dumb luck."

One of the three men says, "Why you still got that gun? They can match that shit up if they get it." The killer replies, "You really think they could take this shit off me? Them cops too dumb to even notice what is going on around here." One of the three men who has not spoken yet finally says, "Yeah that was them other cops. These niggas that just rolled up just now ain't dumb."

The killer asks him what makes him so sure they aren't dumb, to which he replies, "When two white cops roll up you know they do it because they just hate us niggas, when two black cops show up you know they do it because they look down on us and expect better, but when a black and a white cop shows up, and they are as cool with each other as them two were, and they ain't all up in our business hittin' us and shit for no reason, and they fucking actually respect us and talk about sports, that's when you know somethin' ain't right. Them bitches are plannin' something and they ain't dumb enough to let little shit come between them and the job."

Chapter 49:
1947

And then I woke up. I just had a dream where inside the dream I had a memory. A friend and I are hammering nails into a wall when he asks me if I remember that one time Jason accidentally nailed his index finger to the wall. I laughed and told him that I did, because I actually did. The thing is, while I remember Jason, there was never actually a time when he nailed his own index finger to the wall in this reality.

What this dream suggests is dream memory, that we can have thoughts of memories that never happened in our reality in the dreams that we have. This idea is the very first thing that propelled me to believe that our dreams are simply other versions of our lives.

As I'm writing down this dream, I run out of space and realize that I am writing on the last page of this particular composition notebook. Marked number five-hundred, this means I have five-hundred composition notebooks completely filled. Five-hundred notebooks each with two-hundred pages, give or take due to the fact that I've ripped some pages out and have added some from quickly scribbled-down notes.

I start to look for a new composition notebook to continue writing down my dream but can't seem to find one, however, I am positive there is at least one around here somewhere as I always have an extra.

In the bedroom, I go to the drawer near the window, nothing. I go to the closet near the door, nothing. I look under the bed on the other side of the room, nothing. Nothing except a penny. I reach for the penny and take it, and then I look at the year the penny was created. Every time I see a coin I look at the year and understand that I am holding something that was around before me. If it's old enough, of course.

This penny was created in 1947, one of the years that I've traveled back in time to visit. Not literally, it was in a dream. In the dream I knew I was in a time that I didn't belong, which made it even weirder. Looking around in 1947, I would have to say that the area I was in was one of the most comforting places I had ever seen or visited. The only way I could explain it is by having you compare a world that is full of toxins in the air versus a world that has virtually no toxins at all.

The clearness of the life. We will never be as wise and perceptive as we were when we were children because we can no longer see things as clearly as we used to be able to. Decay slowly consumed this life.

One thing that is all too common now is the destruction of perception by certain medical agents. You take a pill, and it might fix certain things, but it might also break others. Some of the pills I took destroyed my memory. Not to say I couldn't have dreams, but I couldn't remember them. A sort of Dreamer's Block. Before that, there was a time when I actually believed there were things that no one could ever take from us.

I take a quick glance into the bathroom. Pointless place to look but we all do it. I don't see any books but I notice there is a fly sitting on the window. I walk up to the door and close it and continue my search in the living room.

It's been eight minutes and I have searched the entire apartment and have not found a single new composition notebook. That's when it hits me. Thoughts of Julia explaining what an epiphany is in the use of literature, or writing. The thought of Julia reminds me that she no longer works at the store, and that I could just purchase some notebooks there now. As I take a smiling step forward, I have another sudden realization.

After I had found out she was working there, a few days after I went a few miles further to a different store and bought fifteen composition notebooks that I later stored down in the basement storage.

I open my front door and make my way down the first flight of stairs, and then down the second that lead to the basement. As soon as I open the door I hear a box fall, and when I look inside I see the first-floor man. Tall skinny fellow who does not talk much. I notice he is putting something into his storage section and as I pass by I see something that looks like a fragment of a bone, but I can't be certain.

I open up my storage, the combination number is 31, 17, 16, just in case you ever needed something, and then I take out one of the composition notebooks. That fresh smell. By that time the first-floor man is gone and as much as I want to look inside his storage, I don't. He is strange

enough.

As I'm walking back up the first flight of stairs I see the mailman putting mail in the mailboxes. I nod, he nods, and then I make my way up the next flight and enter my apartment to finish writing down the dream.

When I'm done, I grab a bottle of bug spray and walk towards the bathroom and open the door then close it shut behind me. This fly is bigger than the previous one. I go to the window and open it in an effort to let this fly fly outside and continue its days, but even after five minutes it decides that its home is here.

I start attempting to spray the little thing but it's quick. However, its luck runs out even quicker and I hit it right above the bathroom sink, to which it falls in. It lands on its back, legs kicking just like the previous fly that entered my chambers.

I watch it for a few seconds as it kicks, and then I pull up the knob of that thing that stops water from draining. Then I turn on the hot water. I watch as the sink fills and the fly begins to rise, but it's still kicking and won't drown. After a while I start to spray it again, and with each spray, the kicking becomes weaker and weaker until it's gone. Who made such a creature, and creatures like it? Was it a mistake?

In a dream I've had, it's been long since God and Satan have died, and after spending time with both of them I learn that they are both capable of mistakes. Fallible. It makes me wonder if it's possible for a human being to be incorrectly judged and sent to the wrong place in their afterlife. Someone who was suppose to go to Heaven goes to Hell, and someone who was suppose to go to Hell goes to Heaven.

Is there a way from Heaven to Hell? Hell to Heaven? Are they physical places in our universe? Such a journey would have much to entail, I'm sure. If you are in Heaven, or in Hell, and for the sake of the discussion, say someone wants to kill you, do you defend yourself? If you defend yourself, that means you either don't like getting hurt or you want to live, but how could one want to continue living when they are dead? One might then ponder the meaning of true death. Is true death when you completely cease to exist. Is it the death that atheists believe in? If I were to try to kill you now, would you fight me?

The tombstones of both God and Satan stand next to each other, each with a message to the world, or in their perspectives, a message to their seemingly complex creation. On the bottom of God's tombstone is a list of words. The seven virtues; chastity, temperance, charity, diligence, patience, kindness, and humility. And of course, at the bottom of Satan's, the seven vices, the same list I've seen before in a dream I've had not too long ago.

Suddenly I begin to hear my name. It's coming from across the living room, and when I get to the living room it's coming from the other side of the door. I can tell it's Lynne, but she sounds different. Tired. When I open the door, I see why she sounds the way she sounds.

Bruises on her eye and on her mouth, not to mention the body bruises. She looks up at me as if she

almost wants to laugh, but instead there is a tear.

Another tear, and then a smile. Is that strength? For the moment I want to take back what I said about punching her in the face because she smiles too much. I ask her who did this to her but I already know who. She can't even say his name.

She leans forward and hugs my body and begins to cry. I maybe should have told her that this shirt hadn't been washed in a while, but I suppose we are even considering she makes it worse. That and the fact that she doesn't seem to notice.

Battered person syndrome. If Lynne were to one day murder Silvio, her lawyer could use the "battered person syndrome" as a defense. The defense has been used in cases where physically and psychologically abused women kill their abusers. One of the symptoms of this condition is the fear of endangerment to the person's own life or the lives of their children. David and Sarah can be the only reasons why she would even tolerate him in her life.

Lynne eventually tells me that she was attempting another relationship with Silvio but soon realized that it could never work. When she finally told him that herself, and asked him if he could stop trying to see the kids, he snapped and beat her. Lynne could call the police and have him arrested. Maybe even make sure that he legally cannot visit the kids now because of what he's done. The problem is that she won't, and it makes no sense to me. Why do some people stay in destructive relationships.

Another symptom of the battered person syndrome is the belief that the abuser is omniscient and omnipresent. I'm guessing this plays a part in her psychology towards Silvio and also plays a large role in why she doesn't make sense.

There are a lot of things that make me angry, people who prey on the weak is one of them. Wine-drinking narcissist. Fancy-suit wearing unbalancers. Million-dollar ring wearing frauds. Fucking manipulating businessmen. Goddamn disease invoking masterminds. Little fucking politicians and puppet-masters running their own fucking little world. If I could get my hands on any of them, I swear to both God and Satan and all of their angels and demons that their last breath would slowly speak my name.

"Give me your car keys." She asks me why, and I tell her because I need to talk to Silvio. "What are you going to do?" She came here because she wants me to save her, but I can't. All I can do is help. "If I don't talk to him he's going to keep hurting you." She thinks for a few seconds and then goes for the front door, then comes back with her car keys.

I drive her to my parents' home and tell her that she has to stay there. When she asks me why, I ask her if she planned on asking me if she could stay in my apartment. She admits she was going to ask if she could stay there for a few days just in case Silvio decided to show up. No woman takes a beating that bad and then waits for the abuser to show up again.

She agrees to stay in my parents' home as long as I promise to come back, which I do. Before she gets out of the car I ask her if Silvio knows where any of her family lives. She says Claire is out of

the state and that even if Silvio found out where her grandmother lived, he wouldn't dare go there unless she was there and he found out.

I tell her the door to the house is unlocked and we part. "Wait, wait," I yell to Lynne. "What's his address?" She writes it down on a piece of paper, and I begin driving in that direction. The one thing I'm hoping for is that I don't get stopped by a police officer because I don't have a valid driver's license.

On the way there, as I get closer and closer, I feel more and more alive. I can feel my blood boil. I have strong sensations in my dreams, but they are uncommon in real life. Silvio, Silvio, Silvio, thank you. I haven't felt like this since 1947.

Chapter 50:

EVERY DOG HAS ITS DAY

Derek and Wallace, two young and upcoming co-workers in a newly realized drug organization, are arguing about the female anatomy. Wallace, who is nearly two years older, continues to support his claim as he says, "That shit comes out the pussy, man, I'm telling you."

Derek replies, "I seen my moms use the bathroom and when she pees she sits down." Wallace replies, "So? You expect her to stand? Do you know how close they both are to each other?" Derek pauses.

Wallace continues to speak, "Look why would God make the piss and the shit come out of the same place? We got two different places right? Why would they be different?" Another pause. "And why the fuck you be seeing your mom use the bathroom for?" Derek quickly replies, "Chill man, it's cause she don't be closing the door."

After the two come to the realization of what they are discussing, they are able to interpret how truly bored they are. "There ain't shit to do around here," Derek says as he throws an empty can of soda at the wall. Wallace gives Derek an unidentifiable look, as to which Derek replies, "What?..."

Moments later the two find themselves huddled over Wallace's backpack as Wallace pulls out a handgun. It is the first time Derek has ever seen a gun up close. Derek asks Wallace where and how he got it. Wallace explains to Derek how Rock told him he might need help protecting the stash from enemies and thieves.

Derek asks Wallace if he could see it. "You seein' it right now ain't you?" "Naw man, I mean can I hold it?" After pulling the trigger back a few times and hearing the sound of the click, Wallace asks him how it feels. Derek replies, "It doesn't feel right."

"What you mean it doesn't feel right?" Derek replies, "I'm not staying here forever." There is one last pause between the two, but the silence is broken as Wallace puts the handgun back in his backpack and says, "Remember, that's the kind of talk that got your brother killed."

As I'm driving down to where Silvio resides, the quote "the best revenge is living well" continues to echo and ring in my thoughts.

I'm about half of a block away from the building Silvio lives in when I see him standing outside with two other people. At first I want to call the whole thing off and continue driving, but I think of Lynne and her bruises. Her fucked up psychology.

I park the car, get out and begin to walk towards them. Halfway in between day and night, I maybe should have came a bit earlier.

"You like hitting women?" Silvio turns around, as do his friends. "Did she tip over from the first hit because she can barely stand with that fake foot?" Silvio attempts to talk but I cut him off, "How do you hit an amputee?"

After I stop talking Silvio replies, "This has nothing to do with you." I tell him that when Lynne becomes bothersome to me because of his actions, that it then does indeed have something to do with me. He turns his back on me, so I give him a shove.

He turns around and takes a good swing. The bruises on Lynne's face were on her right side, so when he tries to strike with his left arm, I put up my right arm to block it, and then give him another shove, but unfortunately one of his punk friends that I hadn't seen before grabs me from behind and Silvio gets off an even better punch that actually lands this time, but he only swings once.

As I'm a little bit dazed, the guy who grabbed me throws me on to the sidewalk and holds me down. Silvio says, "Do you have anything else to say?" For some reason I start laughing, and as much as I want to stop so I don't get a kick to the gut, I can't. I actually don't stop laughing until one of Silvio's friends lifts up his shirt so I can see the reflection of a nearby light on his gun. Then I shut up completely.

Not a second later I hear a police siren. I don't need to go to jail tonight, not for this. One of the cops is pointing a gun at Silvio's friend. The one who had a gun on him. The officer tells him to take out his gun and place it on the ground, he complies, and as he's doing it, he slowly says "Fuck."

It turns out the man with the gun was on parole and was more than likely going right back to prison. My only hope is that he wasn't too close to Silvio, because if he was, then the blame of his going back to prison will be placed on me, which will inadvertently be placed on Lynne who will ultimately suffer the consequences because I am here in her name. Fuck.

The officer slowly walks up to the man with the gun, smiling as he does it, and says to him, "Told you you'd be coming back." Some kind of personal thing between the two I guess. The officer then says, as he is heading back to his car with Silvio's friend in handcuffs, "The rest of you can go the fuck home and do whatever it is that you do."

I quickly walk towards Lynne's car, and as I drive away, Silvio watches me. Yeah yeah, fuck you too bitch. Fragments.

Driving down the same street but in the opposite direction is a detective named Steve Jefferson

who now has Dante Mac in custody for possession of a concealed deadly weapon and violating parole. Steve says to Dante, "Have fun serving your full sentence and then some."

Steve walks into the police station with Dante and begins processing him for jail. Steve also makes a call to Frank Mainor and tells him he has Dante Mac in custody. Mainor tells Ryan and they both rush back to the station to question him before his lawyer arrives.

Mainor and Ryan attempt to explain how cooperating with them will reduce the sentence and provide other benefits, but Mac never says a word. It's nothing he hasn't heard before.

Mac's lawyer shows up and the show is now over. The two cops and the lawyer exchange frightening words and then part from one another. Ryan says to Mainor as they are walking out of the station, "One step further away from catching a ghost."

I drive back to my parents' home and find Lynne. I should just call the police for her, but somehow I feel that will anger her because she won't do it herself. She'll probably think I'm risking the well-being of Sarah and David.

She asks me what happened, and I tell her that it would be best if she just stayed here for a while. I tell her that I may have angered Silvio even more, and I now realize that you never want to make a sociopath more angry than they already are because their reactions are unpredictable and unparalleled.

She asks me if I will stay here with her, and I say no. She pauses, and then says that she can't stay here alone. It's too unfamiliar. That she will just go to her grandmother's house. I ask her if that's a good idea, that if Silvio can find her then he will cause trouble. She asks me why I can't just stay, and I just look at her. I don't have a reason, I just don't want to.

After we talk about it for five minutes she decides to stay at her grandmother's house instead, claiming she feels too uncomfortable staying here alone. Is she afraid of something? She doesn't even know that there was a murder-suicide here. Imagine if she did.

She drives me back to my apartment and then drives to her grandmother's home, hoping Silvio won't show up there. I really tried to help her. Protect her. But it wasn't enough. Oh well.

I lay down on my couch to reflect the day's events but it's really just a task I use as a prelude to falling asleep, the only problem is I can't fall asleep. Like so many times before I become a victim to a brain with too much energy left to spare, but this becomes more beneficial than tragic.

Because my apartment is so close to the building stairs, when Mary begins to walk down them as she groans from the pains of her pregnancy, I can hear her.

At first the sounds that come from her because she is in labor confuses me, and when I open my door I see her slowly walking down to the next step holding on to the railing with a firm grip while she gently holds the bottom of her belly. The scene is extremely bizarre. Not because of the literal picture I am seeing, but because she is doing this alone.

I could choose to just watch her, and see if she can get to the hospital on her own. Maybe she could, I'm not sure how much the pain hurts, but there are always times in our lives when we have to throw social and psychological fragments out of the window. Times where we don't have the benefit of picking and choosing which one we want to use. Which one we want to present to others.

Instead we are left with the instinctive fragments; who we are in the heat of the moment. Some might argue that these fragments depict who we truly are. The ones that are not governed by any external influence which in turn allows it to maintain its integrity.

I run up to her and grab her and put her arm around my shoulder. Tao and I are idiots for not recognizing that she was pregnant, not gaining weight. The thing is, Mary is a bit taller than the average woman and is normally very thin, so she isn't really showing like the average pregnant woman normally does.

Step by step, we slowly go down each step. Wisdom is much too slow and much too graceful to catch up with you when you're running.

When we get to the second floor, the front apartment door opens and someone begins to walk up the stairs. It's Boris, who just like me, is immediately confused. When he realizes that we need help, he puts her other arm around his shoulder. I think to myself that this would go by much smoother if we had a wheelchair.

We get to the parking lot and to her car, and once again I find myself behind the wheel of another vehicle. There has been too much excitement for one day.

Boris stays in the back with Mary as I drive to the hospital. The groaning doesn't get any lower, but it also doesn't get any worse. She tells me that I have to call her family and gives me her phone, and I tell her that I will do so after we get her to the doctors. Boris doesn't really talk much, probably because if he tried we would have a hard time understanding his broken English.

We get to the hospital and hand her off to the doctors who get busy with her quickly, and for the moment, Boris and I are on the sidelines. We sit in a waiting area and don't say much to each other, save a few facial expressions. I look through Mary's phone and find a contact named Sister who I then call and tell about what has happened.

After a little bit, a doctor tells us that Mary is only twenty-one weeks pregnant, which as he explains is a very premature birth. The doctor says they will be performing a Caesarean section, and that the survival of the baby, given the degree of prematurity, is entirely up to fate. Not in those words.

After he departs from us, Boris says he cannot stay, that he has an important appointment. Definitely not in those words. Not even in that grammar.

About ten minutes after he leaves, Mary's sister shows up with another woman who I later find out is also Mary's sister. I should have fucking left with Boris.

We go through all the motions and then they leave to go find out more about their sister. Neither of them had any idea she was pregnant and had even less of an idea who may have gotten her pregnant, which is to say they pretty much didn't know anything about anything.

After they leave, I walk to where Joe resides so peacefully. What I would give to sleep like that. Sure, I've slept, but I haven't really slept like a baby on my own terms for probably over a decade. Okay, that's a lie, every once in a while I do sleep like a baby, but it's rare. That is not a foreshadowing of the baby's tragic death.

I go back to where I had been waiting and the time from the clock begins to tick again. Mary's sisters are no where to be found. I sit there, in a way trying to fall asleep, but also trying to stay awake. At the same time I'm wondering why I don't just leave.

Sometime later Mary's sisters come out and tell me it's all done but the baby is having complications of his own. It's a he.

They show me the way to where Mary is, and when I finally see her she looks different. Literally and philosophically. It is reported that there are about thirty thousand genes in the human body. These are one of the findings from the Human Genome Project; a project started in 1989 by human beings to try and understand the makeup of life more clearly. The project itself trying to understand God and Satan's project. Trying to figure out what they are. I've had many dreams before where I see God and Satan in a room that is painted with white walls and they are walking about the room flipping switches on and off. Some of the switches go up and down, others go left and right, and the remaining few are actually dials. What they are trying to accomplish, I am not sure, but it takes them a very long time to get it right.

Mary. After spending fifteen minutes with her after her son has been born, I notice that she's made a transformation, but to be honest, she had been making the transformation for as long as I've known her.

It's like a force has come along, a force such as love, and has changed her. Changed her mathematical formula. Her genetic makeup. The paleomammalian complex. She's not angry, but she is scared. Scared because she doesn't know what will happen to her son.

I leave, and I take her car back to the apartment building as she requests, and her sisters stay with her as her son decides whether he wants to stay in this world or not. I have to say, it will be a tough decision if he happens to see what goes on in the inner city.

As I walk into the apartment building and as the Sun is falling, I take a look at some flowers I haven't seen in a while. I have become so used to them that I forget they are there. They seem full, complete, but it's a shame their creator is not here to see them with me. I'm just glad that they are normal. At least I think they are. It's all very subjective.

I lay down on my couch. Mr. Nosleep is still here, ruining my day. I turn on the television and find the news channel. A story about a recall. Something bad with some eggs. Interesting. After a few

hours, I finally fall asleep.

A few days later, Mary comes home with her son. Her sisters accompany her, along with her father. One of her sisters comes to my apartment to let me know that everything went fine and asks if I want to come up to see Anthony. I tell her that I would love to. I actually do want to.

I get up there and greet everyone, and then I see Mary holding her son, Anthony. She holds him out to me and gives me the chance to hold him. I take him, and I swear I have no idea what's going on. Everyone is just smiling, the baby is just silent. It's like one of my bizarre silent dreams.

Even though Anthony fought to stay alive, there is a good chance he will have developmental problems. Holding Anthony reminds me of a dream I had where I learn that you don't need religion to be a good person. You just simply need to come face to face with the evil in the world. Think of it as Newton's third law, for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. A lady gets raped and a year later she opens up a support group for women who have been raped.

After a while I leave her apartment and go back to mine. I go to my bedroom and go to the window and look down the street, thinking of Mary and her transformation. Wondering if the light of Anthony can keep her warm and calm. Now the Sun has my attention and I stare at it through the window for a while. I'm staring at the Sun, mom. I lift up my window and get rid of the glass that protects my eyes from the Sun, and then I really stare it.

As I'm staring at it, I think of my childhood and how every time I'd look up at the sky my mother would tell me not to stare at the Sun. I listened and looked back down even if I was actually staring at the clouds and not the Sun.

You find yourself staring at the Sun for too long and you start to compare where you are mentally now as opposed to where you were mentally as a child. You slowly begin to realize that the Sun is the same, in a relative way, but you're older. Shorter of breath, and one day closer to death.