

William M. Brandon III

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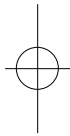
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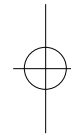
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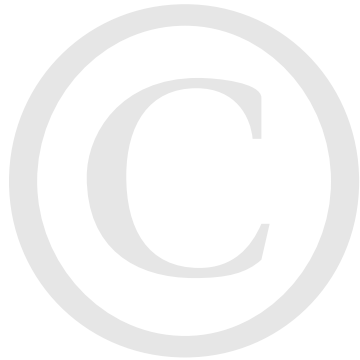


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for
William Jr.
Rachel
and
Shirley

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Severing Ties

One minute, fifty seconds. Hurry up guys, please hurry up! Gunshot. O, Christ this is it! I step inside to witness the boys mowing down everyone in sight. I step back outside and cock my 9mm. I'm the point man. I see all things at all times. I am an observer. I pick out details like a hawk spots a rodent rustling grass at one thousand feet. This is my part in the insidious plan. But today everything has gone wrong. The boys made a pact before we began pulling gigs together that if one civilian gets shot, every civilian dies. Once someone gets capped, it is no longer just a bank robbery, it becomes murder one. There can be no witnesses. "Let's GO! GO, GO, GO!" Into the car, the force of acceleration makes it impossible to fasten my safety restraint right away. "What happened, what caused all the chaos?"

"Some John Wayne motherfucker went for the alarm, so I dealt with him. What was I supposed to do, if it's between the Family going to prison, and some worthless lard-ass rent-a-cop getting waxed, I say bon voyage Tubby!" Mike always struck me as the type whose finger was poised on the trigger because he was dying for a reason to squeeze. Shut the Fuck UP! We're not in the clear yet. You ladies sit back and try to look like the rest of the zombies in this city. Got it?" Jake

was our efficient, and somewhat unstable head honcho. The phrase “nerves of steel” never had a clear-cut definition until Jake walked the Earth. We drove down Sunset Blvd. to UCLA and ditched the getaway car. We continued from there in four different vehicles, North, South, East, and West. I traveled south on the 405 Freeway in my black 51”Mercury. I must have smoked an entire pack of Pall-Malls on the way to Costa Mesa. The world was spinning, and a sudden realization struck me. I was indirectly responsible for the deaths of twenty innocent people. My stomach cramped, and I wondered if the money I would receive in three weeks would compensate for the guilt. I loosened my necktie, in hopes that this oppression would subside. It didn’t. I felt as if the pinstripes were a felonious precursor. My God, incarceration was not an option. When the pigs darken my doorstep, I pray they are packing Kevlar, because Dean O’Leary will not go quietly into that gentle night. No ifs, ands, or buts, I go out shooting. The 405 FWY started backing up around Long Beach, so I jetted down to PCH. What was I doing? This was my third gig with the boys and I wondered when it would be enough. We were already monetarily set for life, but with our obsession came a built in obsession with the actual acquisition of money...forcefully making it change hands. It was in our blood. But my blood was beginning to thin after the fiasco I witnessed this afternoon. Was I losing my edge?

Possibly...probably. Maybe I should pack it up and head out to Vegas where I belong. What if we were all thinking the same damn thing, but none of us had the guts to say a word? I certainly hope so.

Exactly three weeks later I strutted into the Knight at the brazenly early hour of 10PM with a fresh shave, fresh haircut, and a new suit. When I walked in, the boys were seated at our booth in the back. The trademark cloud of cigarette and cigar smoke obscured my vision of Mike, Jake, and Stretch. I walked up to the bar and gave Tony the Barkeep a firm handshake and ordered a beer.

“Where ‘ya’ been Dean-o?”

“You know, here and there. It’s good to see you Tony. So what do you charge for a beer these days?”

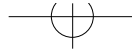
“It’s on the house Dean-o, it’s good to have the boys back in the old dive! You boys hear about those hoods that robbed that piggy bank in LA? Got away scot-free! Lucky bastards!”

“On the house you say? Make that straight Gin. Wait, make that a double.”

“You’re a real bastard Dean!” “That’s what I hear Tony...that’s what I hear.”

I joined the boys at the booth, exchanged how-do-you-does, and had a seat. We sat around and had a bullshit session for about an hour, and then Jake stood to commence the meeting.

“Okay Chaps, everyone’s here, let’s get down to business. Everyone’s cut is one million flat.



Dean, yours is in a locker at LAX, here's the key and number. Mike, yours is in a post office box in Santa Ana, here's the key and number. Stretch, yours is in a locker at Ports O'Call in San Pedro, here's the number and key. Gentleman, job well done! The police have no leads, except eyewitness accounts that four men in pinstripe suits and black masks sped away in a beaten up '52 Chevy. Lucky for us, every idiot Ska fan in Orange County owns a pinstripe suit!"

"No descriptions?"

"None." This relieved me, because as point man I don't wear a mask. Looks a little suspicious—man standing outside a bank with a black mask. If anyone were going to be fingered by a description, it would be my paranoid ass. We all sat around telling stories about the past three weeks, and what we were going to do with the money. I felt a soft hand on my shoulder.

"Are you Jake?" Dear God it had been awhile since I had heard a voice that sultry. Jake stood up. "That would be me. Ladies, please have a seat." Jake leaned over to me, "Two- grand a piece, but worth every penny!"

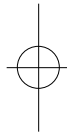
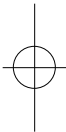
"Whores, Jake? I swear your libido has no discerning thought process. "Gentlemen...Ladies, it's been a lovely evening, but I'm swinging" out early."

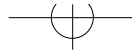
"Where the hell are you going?!" "Watch your tone Jake, I'm meeting someone. Besides, you

know tricks aren't my style."

"All right man, I'll catch you later. The plan still holds. Barring tonight, no contact with each other for three more weeks. Got that 'ya' jerks?" The stunning brunette who had situated herself next to me grabbed my hand and asked me to stay. "I'm sorry ladies, I don't mean to be rude. You're all very lovely, and I'm certain your company is something to be experienced, but it's just not my cup of tea. With that said, I glided to my Mercury, and disappeared into the coastal mist.

I just don't understand Jake. He's a very handsome man, and women practically throw themselves at him, but he has some sort of compulsion for prostitutes. Never really interested me, I mean what precisely do you talk about? Do you open the door, exchange money, and get to business? Is there any mutual foreplay? Do you have to pay extra for compassion and tenderness? How do you know if they are truly enjoying themselves? The situation just seems like it would be too uncomfortable to be conducive to that type of activity. Especially knowing that you're paying someone to pretend that they are so consumed by you that they are willing to surrender their entire existence. It just seems more detrimental than enjoyable and would probably render me impotent from all the anxiety. But to each their own. Far be it from me to look down on anyone for his or her weaknesses, God knows I have mine.





Speaking of which, where's my little darling? Well, Dean it's entirely possible that you're being stood up. Drats, this is a horrible feeling. I've already sold myself out by being here. Now I've sold my friends out as well, and she's not coming. I sat in my car watching the stars give their million year old light and remembered how clearly you can see the stars on the road to Las Vegas. I thought about my absent lady friend. The young lady I had discussed galaxies with, enveloped in the warmth of a blazing fire. She was so alive, so desirable. I wished I could be charming enough to convince her to leave her man and run away with me to Vegas. We could gaze into the onyx sky and discuss the universe as if it were in the room with us. But, I said nothing of what I felt and He's still holding her tonight. If only I could say all the words I desire to, if only my tongue wasn't bound by incriminating shyness. I would tell her not to beat herself in the head over a decision that is best made by her heart. Alas, I am not that brave, and besides, I can't, in good conscience, bring such a lovely young woman into my world. What was I thinking? I should go.

That night clenched it. I have nothing left here. I put on my black suit, white shirt, black suspenders, my black wingtips, and a fire engine red tie from the vault of a 1940's tailor. I was ready for Vegas. I stepped out the front door with one suitcase, and a black hat. I took one more good look around my apartment, and left.

"Where 'ya' headed Dean-o?" Jake was leaning on the hood of my car.

"Vegas."

"How long will you be gone?"

"I don't know, probably forever."

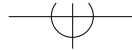
"What about the family? What will the boys do without their point man?"

"I'm through Jake. That last gig in LA gave me the creeps, and I'm pulling out. I've got enough dough to write for the rest of my life, or drink myself into oblivion, whichever comes first. Besides, you know I'm far too paranoid to keep going after I get that "feeling" about gigs."

"It pains me to see you go, I thought I'd always have the Deanster covering my ass, but if it's what you have to do, then damn it, do it to the fullest extent! How about havin' a beer with me before you jet, lad?"

"Anything for you Jake, let's swing."

As is always the case, we ended up in the Knight and began reminiscing about women, gigs, and our younger days, especially our obsession with Betty Page. I would miss Jake a great deal, but most of all I was worried. Jake would go from gig to gig and finally the fuzz would catch up with him, they always do. I was worried Jake wouldn't call it quits, and one day it would be too late. "Jake, I'm going to be serious for a moment. After this last gig, have you considered calling it quits?" "Hell no! I'll be robbing banks, smoking cigarettes, nailing hookers, and drinking whiskey until the day they lay

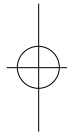
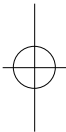


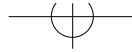
me in the ground. That's who I am Dean, I don't know anything else." "Well, I hope it's enough to make you happy." It finally hit me that leaving Jake would be one of the hardest things I had ever done. "Now Dean-o, on a serious note, if you pull out of the Family, that's it. We have to sever communication." "Why?" "Think about it lad, you'll be John Q. Public again. It would be far too easy to make a connection with us. That would ruin whatever you happen to build out in Vegas. Who knows, maybe you'll find the girl that'll finally whip you pathetic ass into shape. It's just better this way." We sat in silence for what seemed like a small eternity. "Well, I don't want you maiming a school bus of children 'cause you're too drunk to drive. Let's get this good-bye shit out of the way so you can hop on the 15 and got the hell out of Dodge. I'll explain everything to the boys, hell maybe some of them are feeling soft now. Don't worry, we won't completely lose touch. I'm planning on coming out to Vegas and settling down right before my luck runs out."

I never saw Jake again. Gunshot wound to the stomach. Some rent-a-cop tagged him as he was backing out the door with a measly twenty grand on a solo gig. He bled to death on an anonymous sidewalk.

Here I go, 110mph down Interstate 15, Pall Mall in one hand, my lucky silver whiskey flask in the other, Eddie Cochran blasting on the

radio, and my trusty left knee doing all the steering. It wasn't long before I lost the shirt and drained the flask. I cannot wait to feel the 100% moisture free oppressive desert heat. For some inane reason there was a traffic jam halfway out of Victorville, so I slipped out to Route 66 and took the nostalgic path to Barstow. It always makes the trip so much more interesting. When I reached Stateline, I felt a very intense sense of urgency to start fresh, begin again. A new chapter for Dean O'Leary. New lives, new adventures, and most of all more money than I could ever possibly spend. As I crested the edge of the Vegas valley, I thought to myself, Yeah cat, you're finally going to be happy.

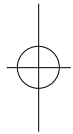
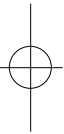


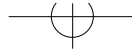


Gnawing Cold

It happened in late August. When else does love strike with more potency?

The wind is bitter; the Vegas floor is cracked with the pain of extreme cold, and a wretched dislike for moisture. The sands of the meadows separate and bleed the cries of centuries marred by bitter, tasteless decadence and primitive Hedonism. The sagital crest and the earth-bound knuckle have long since passed, but Cro-Magnon mentality still expels its venomous odor into the neon palaces and envelops those who dare tread where addictions run deeper than steel needles under Tangiers' stars. Windshield factors gnaw at my joints making me fear life past forty (though I have never thought of life past thirty as anything but the inevitable deterioration of all that is precious-all that is matter). These winds swept my darling Audene across deserts and into my tragedy. The incision was made in six weeks time. Side by side inhaling carcinogens. She was a vision. Not a woman that would cause the legions of Rome to wage war, but a woman who's eyes told of the pain that such spontaneous men of ignorance leave in their wake. A woman who had been murdered by passion. A woman who saw the world as a Spaniard's chamber of horrors in an endless Inquisition. She felt the pain I felt, but without

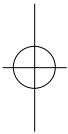




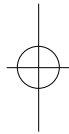
my tempered logic. We began speaking to each other strangely. Unlike the beginning of any acquaintance, ever. I, quite by accident, stepped on her wonderfully delicate feet and she instinctively delivered a shot to my midriff that rivaled Jake's high school uppercut. Such intensity should never have been hidden behind such cold earth-colored eyes. But who am I to deny the beauty of Gaia as a disguise for ill-tempered logic and razor like instinctive tendencies.

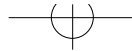
She was like a serpent that finds its spine against an impenetrable barrier. Striking out is the only option and death of opposition is the only acceptable end result. I was fascinated by her strength, and began a conversation with her that ended in the lobby of the Golden Gate café, where I offered her an early breakfast. It must be incredible to make love to you. Was all she said in response. She handed me a slip of paper with her number scribbled in mad tension and anxiety...turned on her heel...and silently walked out into the early morning darkness.

I was suspicious—I was afraid for my heart I was afraid for my life—I was afraid for my mind, but as I watched her strut out of the door, I knew I could not walk away, not now. The next time I saw Audene, we ate lunch at the same spot, and she asked me to marry her. I was shocked. I kissed her for the first time, and it was terribly confusing. I simultaneously felt elation



tion beyond my expectations and a fear in the back of my mind that this woman was somehow manipulating my emotions and it was completely unrecognizable to the naked eye. I lost this moment when she kissed me. "Yes, yes, I will." For the very first time I saw her smile, truly smile. It broke through the storm cloud chagrin, and I saw what I had only hypothesized about...happiness. I brought this woman happiness. I could see it in her eyes, when I touched her, when she laid her head on my chest. Something about me made her complete. More accurately, there was something in me that completed her reflection. Now I was petrified. I had said yes to her proposal with an extreme degree of flippancy, but she was dead serious, perhaps as serious as she had ever been in her entire life, but how? How could she know me enough to be that certain over the course of three days? My god, I feel enormous walls shooting up all around me, I am at the bottom looking up at the sun from a cavernous trap. However, I felt helpless to even check the walls to see if they were scalable. I just stood looking up as if in a trance, wondering if this was it. Is this the way it will end up for Dean O'Leary? Slowly I became more frightened of her frenzy, her compulsiveness, and her obsession with me. I wrote this off as cold feet, and we continued to plan the big day. This is wrong...this is wrong...this is wrong. These words gnawed at my brain stem. Gnawing slowly, surely, never caressing with the





teeth to get the point across, just a slow doubt inducing chew. Then, the ripping of flesh began. The tearing of sinew and bone and tendon. Severed arteries, collapsing hearts and exploding synapses. Death from within meeting Death from without. A battle fought on two fronts, with no escape. A fetish for inhaling elaborate chemicals into her nasal passages created the frame for her portrait of agony. This is the battle without end. This is a war with no victors. Her pain was only temporarily numbed by her addiction, the rage she kept subjective grew with each dose, each inhalation, each unkind word between us. We began communicating only at the top of our lungs. Our pain swelled together, and as a result of one another.

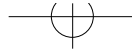
I walked into our apartment late on a Tuesday evening. I thought she was out dancing as usual. The lights were out, and although I could smell their sweet aroma, all of the candles had been put out. As I crossed the threshold and hung up my coat and hat, a sense of foreboding came over me. Death was with me in the room. He caressed the hairs on my neck. Where was she, the angel of death, the pain, and the torture—SHIVA? I felt the wind whip past my face before I heard the crack of my 9mm or smelled the burnt powder. I fell backwards to the floor and gazed blindly into the darkness. A bullet pierced my right shoulder. There she was! I lunged towards her and wrapped my hands

around hers. I gained control of my weapon and stood silent and stoic with my arm stretched taut, the barrel pressed firmly to her forehead. I flipped a nearby switch and saw my Audene. I wanted to hold her, forgive her, and let her finish me off bite by bite. I saw a tear run down her cheek and mingle delicately with the destructive white powder that laced her nose and lips. I felt a warm tear spill over my eyelash, and off the edge of my lips. "It is better this way. Set me free...please my love, set me free." She held my hand in place, and pushed my index finger against the trigger.

She's dead. I didn't try to stop her. She slumped over onto the floor face down. I was never able to stop her.

There's a small silver rock in the desert near Hesperia I cast my shadow over once a year. I beg forgiveness and sprinkle the fine white dust that almost killed me, and delivered my wife into the ground, over the severed earth. And like my love's destroyed mind, this land takes the powder and devours it as a child devours his mother's milk. No remorse...only hunger.

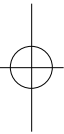
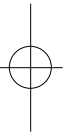


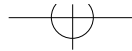


The End of Reality as We Know It

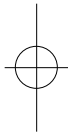
Gaelin Gilbrausen. What can you say about a chap who wants to take over the world on the off chance that it might be interesting? His plan was as follows: Take over the world (how? Who cares, details always clutter higher thinking and obscures one's original vision. Details are what the Drones are for), and then take a select few into an impenetrable fortress, and rule, as supreme leader until this became boring. When this occurred he planned to set humanity free and observe what the human race would do given the opportunity to completely start again from square one... Worldwide Anarchy. What would evolve if we had the chance to re-create civilization? All, just because it might be interesting.

I met Gaelin in a hole-in-the-wall restaurant on Sahara. The Cuban cuisine was only mediocre, but there was an awe-inspiring painting above booth 13 that very abstractly depicted the Bolshevik Revolution. I loved to sit for hours sipping extraordinary whiskey until the hues swirled together and my numbing spinal cord spasmed and sent me to my fine automobile. The paint leapt from the canvas and forced passion and guilt and pain and hope coursing



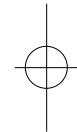


through your body with such intensity that you were forced to gasp to remain a recipient of oxygen. On this eve I heard a familiar gasp. A young man with chaotic dark hair and deep mahogany eyes was peering over my head at this painting, and I could tell by the look in his eyes that he saw what I did. He felt the magnitude of the artist's emotion. I gave a nod of appreciation for what he was feeling, saying telepathically, I know, I understand. I dropped on the dark wood table and sauntered toward the door. I assumed we'd never meet again, but somehow I knew that this strange man would change the world...forever.



The blistering desert heat had thrust the mercury to a slow simmer at 110 degrees, and our father Sol was punishing me for my decades-late flair for style. I guess it's my fault, but there's something terribly romantic and charming about strutting into a lounge in a Las Vegas hotel smelling of whiskey and carcinogens, wrapped in a suit your grandfather had tailor made in 1948. I was past the point of inebriation as I lit a Pall Mall. I suddenly felt like raising a little hell at the wee hour of 3 o'clock PM. I wrestled a stool into position and let the cool air, sultry jazz, lack of light, and a frigid glass of gin erase my memory of the oppressive heat. Some puppet on the television was reporting a story about three chaps in L.A. that pulled off a multi-million dollar bank-heist and disappeared, literally. "Hello Jake,

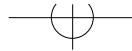
looks like your luck is still holding up," I muttered under my breath. As soon as the words rolled off my tongue I heard, "Starvation, and not evil, is the parent of modern crime," in my right ear. I raised from my position, hunched over yet another blessed glass of gin, to see who in this mindless lounge had quoted the flamboyant Oscar Wilde, using the voices of a legion of angels. What I saw was supernatural. Soft ebony curls framed her gleaming emerald eyes; looking past these oceans of pulchritude would be a crime against one's self. Her velvet lips quivered slightly, as if she were on the verge of explaining to me everything poignant in this world, but didn't want to take the chance that I didn't care. I was absolutely stunned, and for one brief, shining, moment I cared. I needed to know what went on behind the glassy expanse of her jade eyes. All I could think about was how amazing it would be to caress her skin as she whispered in my ear all the words she ever wished she had spoken. This is the type of moment we all wish we could seal in a bottle and cast out to sea, returning endlessly with the tide to remind us that death is a truly tragic end to the lavish experience that is Life.



This is where I cry.

This is where my mistress alcohol rears her jealous head and lashes my tongue until it is subservient and ambiguous. All I could squeak out





was
 “You’re incredible.” This goddess peered into my tortured eyes tenderly searching for the right words to say.

“I need to know you, but not like this.” was all she said. She kissed my cheek and it burned with subtle passion and a very vivid fear that we had simply crossed paths at the wrong time, and that the beauty we should have shared together was destroyed in the space of sixty seconds. I turned back to my glass as she slipped away and traced “THAT’S TRAGEDY” in the condensation on the bar.

Seven hours flew by and my need to be left alone with my mistress was intensifying. Drinking alone was my last resort, but solitude and alcohol called to me in unison all too often. I handed the barkeep my monetary compensation and began to swing out. A flash of electricity leapt through my spinal column and exploded in my mind as excitement. A real sense of connection with another human being washed over me. I spun in every direction to see him, but he was gone. I sat back down and decided to order another drink, “Make it a screwdriver,” I need my spirits lifted. The drink came and I lamented over the vicious behavior of the stranger, and the goddess I had let go without a fight; my loss of her is a pain I shall always deny.

The next time, I caught Gaelin. I was playing

poker in Caesar’s Palace when a hand came to rest on my shoulder. “Hello friend.” It was the mysterious art lover. I gestured for him to take the seat next to me. I was too drunk too notice that there was already someone sitting there. “Beat it pal,” were the first words out of my mouth. I assume I said this with conviction, because the man picked up his chips and left. “I’m Dean, who are you?” My manners tend to diminish when I’m going on my fifth hour of drinking and gambling. “It’s a pleasure to make your acquaintance, I’m Gaelin.” “What brings you to Vegas?” “I live here. I’ve always been a hedonist at heart, and when the rest of my body caught up, I ended up here. How about yourself?” “It’s an incredibly long, involved story of self-loathing, not acceptable for the opening of a friendship. You see...you and I are destined to alter reality. I’m not sure what that is yet, but our meeting is the beginning of the end for reality as we know it.” He had no idea what I was desperately trying to convey, but as a gesture of faith bet \$1000 on the next hand. Cards slid swiftly to land within his gaze. He peered at his hand and gave no sign of victory or defeat. “Full house, number of the Beast over Kings.” Dealer has three aces. “So Dean, when do we begin?”

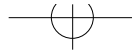




The Necessity of Adversity I

Jesus, it's cold! Gaelin and I walk out of the casino into the frigid desert evening air. The strip lies glowing before us, actually for me it's more fuzzy than glowing. Seven hours of drinking and gambling really put a damper on my sense of sight. I staggered a bit, and began falling toward oncoming traffic. In the blink of an eye, Gaelin had his arm around my waist and had restored me to an upright position. "You're a real asshole when you're drunk, you know that?" "That's what I hear, that's what I..." I stopped for a moment. Call it the one and only moment of clarity I've ever had. Everyone I have cared enough about to speak more than two sentences to had said something to that effect. Most said a lot more. Was I in trouble? Did I dominate my mistress alcohol, or was I the bound and gagged recipient of her lashings? Why did it matter? I went to the bottle because I wanted to—because she made me forget—because I loved her—because I needed to—damn. "Are you okay? Looks like I'm losing you." "Yeah, I'm fine. I'm just working through some things with my head, we fight a lot, especially when we're drunk." "Let's grab something to eat. My treat, the last three hands paid exceptionally." "How much did you make?" "About ten grand after the dealer's tip." "How much did you tip him?" "A





grand.” “You gave that jack-ass a thousand dollars for doing his job?” “Trust me, he earned it.” “How do you figure?” “Let’s just say that when you have a reputation as a big tipper, certain things are revealed to you.” “Like what?” “Nothing concrete, just a change in attitude, or position. A slight change in facial gestures lets you know when to bet big, and when to lay low.” “You mean they cheat for you?” “Not entirely. They’re dealing the cards the exact same way, but dealers develop the ability to count cards. They know all of the probabilities; it’s their job. So they have instincts like any other gambler, perhaps a little more based in scientific fact, but instincts nonetheless. When sweet cards are swinging around, they’ll let me know.” “So that full house was a hint?” “No, that guy’s a straight shooter, he doesn’t fool around. That’s why I smiled like such an asshole as he handed me my chips. He’s a tough guy to beat, which is why I suggested we move to another table after I took him for that last three grand.” “You’re a sly one alright. So what sounds good for eats?” “I don’t know, how about...oh shit.” “What’s the matter?” I felt the cold barrel of a handgun on my neck. “Oh shit.” We were ushered into a side alley near a service entrance of a casino. I was slammed into a wall face first. “Where’s your cash asshole?” “What do you mean?” Gaelin asked unconvincingly. “Don’t fuck with me, I have a firearm pressed firmly against your spinal

cord. If I twitch, you lose your head and I find the money on your corpse anyway. It’s your choice.” “Judging by the feel of the barrel against my neck, I’d say that neither of you chaps has a silencer handy. We are approximately fifteen feet away from prying ears, perhaps even a cop. Not to mention about twenty cooks and busboys right inside this door. Do you want to walk out of this alley freemen, or do you want to spend the rest of your teenage years wondering if your grip on the soap is tight enough? It’s *your* choice.” I couldn’t believe the way I was talking to this hoodlum. I can’t dodge bullets any more than the next guy. There was a long pause; I think he agreed with my logic. The barrel left my neck, and I heard the air moving around the gun as it struck the back of my head.

Darkness...

God and baby Jesus. My head hasn’t hurt like this since Chuck and I abused a lethal amount of Goldschlager and ended up in the middle of the desert firing a 9mm into the darkness. Ahh those were the days. I sat up and took a look around. Gaelin was on the ground next to me. I checked his pulse. He was alive, but if he felt anything like I did, he’ll wish he wasn’t. Everything looked dirtier to me for some reason. Almost dying at the hands of teenage thugs puts a tint of filth on the world that one doesn’t recognize until they are a victim. I slapped Gaelin’s face.

“Wake up. They’re gone. We must have been unconscious all night, it’s 1pm already.” “At least we’re not dead.” “Well, I have ten bucks, do you still want breakfast...well, looks like they found my ten bucks.” “Don’t worry about it, those punks didn’t get my money.” “They didn’t?” “Hell no, I have a pocket sewn into my hat that is impossible to see.” “My, my, my, you ARE a sly one.” “Golden Gate Café?” “Sounds lovely.”

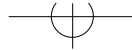
One great thing about the Golden Gate Café is that you can walk through their doors in forty years and still recognize every dish on the menu. When something’s not broken, don’t bother trying to fix it. “What can I get for you gentlemen?”

“Steak and eggs, well done.” “Ditto, make mine medium rare.”

“Say, is Jennifer working today?” “Sorry I don’t know of a Jennifer waitressing here.” “She worked yesterday.” “Sorry buddy, I’ve been here for two years and the last Jennifer that worked here was fired about a year and a half ago.” Our waitress left. “That’s very odd. Jennifer served me my usual last night before I hit the casino. As a matter of fact,” I reached into the pocket of my jacket, and pulled out a piece of paper that read: Give me a call sometime, I’d like to gaze into those eyes over a glass of red wine-Jennifer-867-5309.

(Why did that number sound so familiar...?) “I

need to make a quick phone call man, I’ll be right back.” Of course I had a nice shiny quarter in my pocket and the payphone was one of those blasted \$1 phones. Wait...\$1? When did that happen? I’ve seen 35cents, even 45cents in extreme cases, but never an entire dollar. This is ludicrous. I pulled 75 additional cents from my pocket and gave it up; I needed to know what all the confusion was. The number rang six times... “Hello,” it was a man’s voice, desperately trying to hide the fact that he had run to the phone. “Is Jennifer home?” “Who the hell is this?” the man demanded. “Who the hell is this?” I retaliated. “I’m her husband...”-I felt a spasm in my nervous system- “Is this Dean O’Leary?” Wait, I didn’t know Jennifer was married, and how the hell does this guy know my name? This was beginning to disturb me. “I can tell it’s you! How dare you call this house you bastard?!” “Now hold on mister, I don’t know you, and besides knowing my name, I’m positive you don’t know me.” “Oh, I know you, you’re the scumbag that was fucking my wife sixteen years ago and wrecked my family!” “You’ve got the wrong guy pal, I met Jennifer yesterday, she gave me this number.” Okay, now I was feeling like a person might right before they realize that they have lost their marbles for good. “What? You got some sort of Rip Van Winkle complex? Look pal, the kids have moved out, Jennifer and I have been separated for two years, that hooker is all yours! I hope it was worth it.” He hung up.



This was turning out to be a VERY strange day.

“Did you find her?” “No, wrong number.” I didn’t understand what had just taken place, and figured hearing it second hand would be that much more confusing. “Where the hell is our food?” “I think they had to send someone to Wisconsin to get a fresh cow. I’m going to grab a paper, I’ll be right back.”

What the hell was going on—who the hell was that guy on the phone—what the hell was his damage—where the hell was Jennifer—how the hell did she get fired a year ago as of yesterday—why the hell am I saying hell so much?

A shadow fell over my cup of coffee. Gaelin stood with white knuckles clutching the morning edition of the Las Vegas Journal as if it were his last faltering piece of reality. I’ve never seen a human being look that terrified. I’ve seen men with guns pressed to their temples, their eyes darting back and forth waiting to die; I’ve seen men’s faces as they opened their bedroom door to witness their loving wife straddling their best friend and whooping like a cowboy on ecstasy. But I have never seen terror like I saw in his eyes at that moment. “I’m positive that I don’t want the answer to this question, but what’s wrong Gaelin?” He couldn’t speak; he dropped

the paper in front of me and pointed to the upper right hand corner.

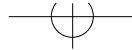
-July1, 2013-

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Gaelin and I had lost sixteen years in the blink of an eye, sprawled out on cold, cold concrete traveling through time in a catatonic state (reminded me of a theory I concocted while experimenting with LSD, involving a state of human catatonia that would be conducive to time travel). We lost our consciousness and our wallets in 1997, and regained our consciousness in 2013 (unfortunately the wallets were still gone).

“What does this mean?” Gaelin finally broke the silence. “It means nothing. It means everything. It means that we live in 2013, I don’t know.” “What are we going to do?” “Well, I don’t recall doing anything out of the ordinary that might trigger time travel, so I am assuming that this was not instigated. Perhaps more like a strange twist of fate. I am also assuming that it logically follows that if we did not instigate this occurrence, than we cannot instigate a reversal. If this is the case, we should make ourselves comfortable and enjoy the rest of our lives.” “How can you be so calm about this? We just lost sixteen years. We aren’t the same people anymore. We’re specters, the real Dean O’Leary is thirty-





nine years old, and walking around Las Vegas right now.” “If I survived to that age.” “Knock on wood Dean, if you didn’t believe in the supernatural before, you should now.” I rapped the table thrice with my knuckles. Once for Love and twice for Luck. “I have \$10 million in a secret island account. I should still be able to access it. Let’s find a place to live, and do what we can to come to grips with what’s going on and get on with our lives.” “Okay, but I’m still having a problem dealing with the fact that we’re walking around somewhere in this world on the verge of our forties.” I laughed out loud. “We should find ourselves, just for kicks.” “Hell no! Didn’t you see “Back To the Future” Dean? Even accidentally seeing ourselves on the street could alter reality, as we know it! We may go back to a world ruled by puppy dogs.” “That’s complete rubbish. If anything altered, it would be 2013. I ‘d venture a guess that we are not existing in two planes of reality simultaneously. Then again, time travel is theoretically impossible.” I pondered my last statement for a moment. “I’ve got a pretty strong feeling that this is our new home. This is the hand we’ve been dealt, let’s play...to win.”

We took care of the shelter issue, and soon we were living very comfortably in the 21st century. Life plugged on as usual, time is only an indication of decay. No time period is universally worse than another. All of the difference lies in

who’s written the History book. The down trodden will paint a painful picture, and the victorious will sing the century’s praises. Gaelin and I were inseparable. We were the only two people in the entire universe who could discuss what had happened to us. Anyone else would surely turn us into the nearest constable for a smack with the ol’nightstick and a 5150. We were simultaneously thrust into this new world with no one but each other to depend on. We became brothers and everything we thought, we thought together.

“Wake up asshole, get dressed, it’s time to celebrate!” “Whuh? Whuh’s going on?” Waking up has always been traumatic for me. “What are we celebrating?” “You’re birthday idiot. Get the hell up it’s almost 10:30pm.” “Okay, okay, I’m up. How old am I?”

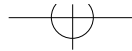
“Two martinis please. Well you’re a quarter of a century old, living in the not-so-distant future with a guy you knew previously for about six days. Bet you didn’t fathom life could take a twist like this.” “Could anyone?” I sarcastically retorted. “Honestly Dean, do you ever hope we’ll make it back?” “Do you?” “I don’t know, part of me does. If for nothing else, just to feel like a part of the Human Race again. We exist outside of reality now, and although it feeds my ego gluttonously, I do miss the mortal coil.” Gaelin hadn’t successfully detached from 1997



yet. It didn't take me long. I looked at it like someone would look at moving to another state. You're still you, people are still imbeciles, the rich still run things. The only difference is you pay way too much money for rent. On a different patch of dirt than before. This was new territory, and as usual I adapted quickly. One thing still plagued my mind. I needed to know what happened to Dean O'Leary. In the event that we accidentally stumbled back into 1997, I'd like to know how to prevent any misfortune that should have befallen me. Please don't take this as optimism, I am simply the most paranoid individual you are likely to cross...ever.

The barkeep walked over to me and handed me a Newcastle. "You single?" "Who's asking?" The bartender was definitely not my type. "Answer the question smart guy." "Yes, very." "In that case this is for you, regards of the young lady at the table." I suddenly felt the pangs of shyness and insecurity that have kept me from connecting with women most of my life. I couldn't even turn to see who she was. "Tell her thank you very much, this is a first for me, and I am flattered beyond words." "Aren't you going to go talk to her?" Gaelin prodded. "No, I'm not good at barroom wit. Besides she's sitting with someone." "Don't be an asshole Dean, the woman's not going to send you a drink and ask if you're single if that's her man." "Shut-up, I'm justifying my fear. Drink up, let's

get out of here." "At least look at her!" I turned to see the woman whose theatrics were turning my birthday into an antacid commercial. "My god." She was mesmerizing. I could look into those icy eyes for centuries and never feel the bitter sting of life around me. I was absorbed. The connection of our eyes rendered me paralyzed. I could feel her thoughts pass into mine over and over. I lived lifetimes in that one moment, and turned away. "I can't." "You can't what?" "I can't talk to her, I'll ruin it. I'm still pining over...I've never been entangled in a gaze like that. Danger is afoot; this woman could change my life forever. I'm not ready, not now." "I think you might be over reacting, Dean." "Listen Gaelin, by looking over my shoulder at this woman I have been stricken with fear. Until now I have been quite comfortable with the idea that I will grow old alone. The way our eyes met, we spoke to each other on another plane, I know I could give it all to her and thank her for crushing my heart. I can't do it. Drink your beer and let's go." Gaelin didn't understand. I felt intense permanence with her even as I continued to shyly glance over my shoulder and *accidentally* make eye contact. I could lose myself to this woman and that scared me. However, it made me nauseous to think I may never see her again. "Okay you big baby, let's go, we've got more drinking to do." "Wait I'll meet you out there." I didn't wait for Gaelin's response; I made my way over to this



mysterious goddess. I reached for her hand and felt intense passion in her flesh. I was consumed; there was no hope for me.

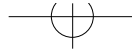
“Thank you, I am flattered beyond words.”

“That’s what I heard.” That voice could say the simplest words and transform them into a symphony of beauty. “I must leave, I’m drowning. Goodnight.” I turned and broke our gaze. Razors slashed my flesh as I pulled my hand from hers, the pain was undeniable. I spun back to face her, “I must see you again, my eternal happiness depends on it.” “You will Mr. Miller, you will.” I whispered, “My sweet, delicate, Anais.” She smiled sensuously as I touched my lips to her hand. After all this pain perhaps I had finally found Her. A tear crept from my eye. I turned so that she wouldn’t see.

“Good morning Sunshine!” “Fuck you Gaelin. Why are you waking me up?” “Because I need to give you your presents.” What could I say? I wanted to sleep so badly, but the man wanted to shower me with gifts, and he was as giddy as a catholic schoolgirl at a Boy Scout convention. “All right, all right, I’m up.” I walked into the living room. “There’s Number one.” Against the wall was a beautiful black antique bookcase. All four shelves were filled with books. “I went to every side street—corporate—and mail order—bookstore in this time zone and retrieved everything William Burroughs had ever written, thought, inspired, or lived. There’s also quite a

bit of Kerouac and a little Bukowski to encourage diversity. Do you like it?” “My god man, I adore it! I am silent because the words “thank you” seem so trivial and one-dimensional. They do not do justice to the amount of thanks I would like to award you! It’s beautiful, it’s perfect, thank you.”

“Okay, enough melodramatic dribble, here’s number two. You lost consciousness around 3am, and you kept muttering Anais, Anais, I love You, I NEED YOU!” “Don’t mock me!” “Sorry Mr. Touchy, anyway, I drove back to the Double-Down and spoke to the young lady who purchased your Newcastle. She came by this morning and left this.” Gaelin handed me a brown parchment envelope. My heart leapt with excitement. I opened the envelope. “What is this goddess” name?” “She wouldn’t tell me, and she wouldn’t give me her number either.” “Why not?” “She said that the two of each other were destined for each other and that she knew you would find her if it took centuries. Sounds like she’s playing games.” “No Gaelin, don’t you see, she feels the same way I do, and she doesn’t want to give herself unless she knows I desire her as she desires me. She’s right, I would swim oceans of Time and Pain to embrace her for one moment before I leave this Earth.” My fingers found a piece of paper deep inside the envelope.



Dearest Mr. H. Miller;

I am caught in the immense jaws of your desire, I feel myself dissolving, ripping open to your descent. I feel myself yielding to your dark hunger, my feelings smoldering, rising from me like smoke from a black mass. Take me; take my gifts and my words, and my body. And my cries and my joys and my terror and my abandon. Take all that you desire. Take me as if I were something you want to possess, inside your body like a fuel. Take me as if I were a food needed for daily sustenance. I throw everything into the jaws of your desire and hunger. I throw all I have known, experienced, and given before now.

*Love,
Anais N.*

How could she be anymore perfect? She moves me on so many levels. I am enamored by her beauty, I adore her sense of style I am thrust into ecstatic pleasure by her mystery, I am in awe of her mind...She embodies perfection in Womanhood. She is mine, and I am hers... "I must find her. Gaelin you are the most wonderful person. I consider it an honor to call you my friend." I showered and shaved with the ferocity of a hurricane, and threw on my best suit. "I'm going to find my eternal love Gaelin, if I don't return, smile always, and know that I am forever in bliss. Thank you my friend." I think I sur-

prised Gaelin. He had never seen me this way. I could tell that he couldn't be happier for me. I wandered Las Vegas Blvd. for hours, on a hunch. Searching for my love. Praying for a glimpse. A glimpse of perfection. Knowing full well that I could not be satisfied until I possessed this woman completely, as she now possessed me. The sun began setting but my intensity did not wane. Then out of the corner of my eye I saw silken ivory legs crossed sensuously under a magnificent, knee-length, navy skirt. I flung my head around; she was staring directly at me over a steaming cup of coffee. I rushed to her side and wrapped my arms around her waist and lifted her out of her chair. She dropped her cup and our lips embraced to the sound of delicate smashing porcelain. The very molecules of the universe stood still and silent in reverence of our lovers' embrace. I was right, this union was perfect, I had no doubts, and I had no questions that were unanswered. Her lips were sweeter than the lover's wine Cleopatra shared with Antony, more permanent than the poison Juliet drew from Romeo's lips, and more perfect than a full moon's light cast on a dark sea. Our lips parted, I whispered in her ear, "I never want to be apart from you, I want you to be my lover, my friend, and my wife for all eternity." "Yes, yes, a thousand times yes! Take me from this darkness and envelop me in your love." We lost all sense of the world around us. I pulled her into a side corridor of the café and began to



cover her body with the caress of my lips and my pleading hands. I pressed her against the wall and dove into her flesh needing to be deeper, to be closer, to be inside her, to be a part of her. She whined and wrapped her long, sensuous leg around my waist as her hand began unbuttoning my trousers. She moaned as she felt me growing in my desire for her. She guided me toward her, between her thighs, and clasped her hands around my hips and I plunged deep into her silken flesh. She swayed rhythmically against me and wrapped her arms around my neck. I placed my hands firmly on my obsession's smooth, enticing hips and thrust deeper and deeper. I felt her clenching me, never wanted to let me remove myself from her. I felt her fingernails digging passionately into my neck as she begged me not to stop. Her body quivered as she released her grip. I leaned my head back and felt my body shake as a sensual tidal wave rushed through my body. We were barely able to breathe as we held each other against gravity's forces.

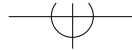
"Get out of here before I alert the police...perverts!" The world came sharply into focus. We giggled like children. I buttoned my trousers and darted with my love on my arm out into the cool evening air. All was perfect, all was right.....

Schizophrenia

Bill-
What are you running, a secret society?
Who want to know everything?
Give me direct instruction
Side-track the hallucination-
I query.
Bill's getting his motto-
"Cut out and paste up in Wall"
[I]-still have to go through feeling strange-
"Now We take a trip"-
Back to the West-I am annoyed-
As we go back-
—the bottom layer has some dust on it-
"But it's up to you"

Cooperative to me.
But ambiguous
And sure of their facts.

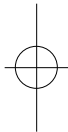
Days of passion and reckless abandon. Give myself completely or lose my Love forever? Lose my Love completely or give myself forever? Hours of contemplation on her eyes and none on myself. Hours of pining for her scent, for her flesh against mine, inside of me, around me, occupying my whole person. It's maddening the power she has over me. I'm the one who has



all the answers, the one who never skips a beat, the one who never sells himself out. Never. Well, I have. I let her in. She reached her love into my throat and gripped my very being and ripped it from this broken vessel and surrounded it with warmth, emotion, happiness, and most of all Love. The most pressing question is why? Why?

Why? Why? She deserves a man who sees only beauty in this vile world. A man who cannot fathom the pain of faithlessness. A man who does not ponder constantly the intricacies of betrayal and feel its aftermath. I don't deserve her, and one day she will realize this. I will be left with my heart in my hand. Can I keep my tortured head above water long enough to show her how much I love her, or will I drown before we can look each other in the eye?

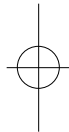
Questions. Questions. Questions. You can ask me questions for the rest of your life and you'll never find what you're looking for until you look into my eyes. I've felt every pain, every joy, every disappointment, every betrayal, and every spiteful word that could ever pass your lips. I've heard it again and again, and my resilience is gone. It's completely gone. I don't bounce back like I used to. I want to be alone. I want no eyes on me. I want everyone in this world to forget that I exist. Stop judging me, stop questioning me, I'm above that, and so are you. It all fades, it all leaves. People leave,

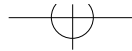


love leaves, health runs, women leave, men leave, music leaves, joy is gone. The simple things are gone. They have come, ripped my heart out, and walked away slowly. Very slowly with feet that move at the pace of years per step, dragging the ground, making the horrible sound of EXIT.

The sound of the stream is deafening. Who says you can't hear erosion? I feel erosion. Your warmth has eroded the ice and stone I've so carefully built around my love. You claw at my defenses to reach my soul, to feel connected, truly connected with me. You're saving me. I see forever in your eyes and for once I'm not afraid. It breathes fire into my veins. It inspires me. You inspire me to no end. My god, I needed you last night. I needed to feel you, to touch your porcelain skin. I needed to caress the flesh that so binds me to this earth, the flesh that addicted me, that trapped me in your arms. I'm helpless. I hope one day I'll have the strength to show you that. To whisk you away where nobody can hurt us anymore. Where we can simply be in love without outside intervention. I want evenings that don't end despite the inevitable sunrise. I want to conquer your heart, and submit my heart and my will to you.

He is a good man, who has a hard time showing it. Caught up in the -nothing can hurt me because I've already been destroyed-





mentality. Supernova waiting to happen—a bright shining star—in a hurry—to burn-out.

I'm more in love than I have ever thought possible. She consumes me. Positively consumes me. An improper blink of an eye or furrow of the brow, or pulling away of her lips from mine sends me into convulsions of paranoia. Instantaneous fear that her love will someday wane.

Segue to destruction—the end of a century—the beginning of the end—the beginning of the Little One's century—three years cannot claim a time frame—the little one of the 21st century—dear Sator, alive and dead in the 20th—can the 21st be any different? —and the twenty-fourth day of March he enters his 23rd—eighty years over twenty-three years—intertwined.

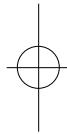
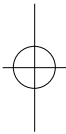
I've lived my life and now I only exist. Observing painfully, Life around and throughout. It's a free feeling of disassociation. But I have connected with two. One my eternal lover and one a love I will never acknowledge. Today has been lovely, absolutely lovely. My pen chases page after page and my inspiration is seemingly infinite. This is what happens when you ascend and look at the world from distant stars—DETACHMENT—such negative connotations to such perfection. Detach and be free, choose to adhere and lose your chance to choose. Draw

close to the human race, and the ignorant masses will destroy your Life with obsessions.

Consume-Consume-Destroy-
Must Create-Must Earn-Must Give-Fuck-Sleep-
Live-Communicate
The worst of these, communication.

Disengage now...for your own sake.

DAMNED NONSENSE! Rubbish. I'm so violently ill and disturbed by all the fucking nonsense. The last pages of the book meant to save your literary soul are nonsense. No intelligent, cohesive thought, nothing to gain, all is lost, time, love, interest, money. I'm frustrated. I feel an abysmal emptiness as I turn the last page, as my eyes peruse the last words, give me something, please, I beg of you, give me something to cling to, something to identify with, allow me to identify with you. It never happens. Why can't I identify with something tangible? Most of the people I truly identify with are below the ground. No chance for verbal discourse, no chance for examination of thoughts, interpretation is all one-sided—dead end. I met a person once who spoke my language. I felt so close; I felt a strange shyness when we spoke, when our gazes met. We knew each other's thoughts and we were unified on a mental plane that cannot be reached by most humans. Now we are as distant with each other as we are with the majority



of the human race. The connection has faded, and I will regret it forever. Perhaps more than my own birth.

—Nonsense.Rubbish—

Can I feel a connection when I am so devoutly individual? Why do I desire a connection? What weakness exists in my mind that begs for someone to say-yes, I understand-yes I love you-the real you-I won't ask anything of you-you are my perfection-I need you! This has never happened, it probably never will; all expect my soul to alter to fulfill their needs.

- *misery loves company.* *i know she feels the same* —

The Necessity of Adversity II

We were married the next day before the honorable Judge Andrea Deamos. She smiled and gave us her personal blessing based on the testimony. We glowed. People's face's twisted in jealousy and disgust when they saw how repulsively smitten we were with each other. We spent our days roaming the city drinking fine wine, dining in exquisite restaurants, and making love in public places. We spent our evenings in each other's arms, by candlelight gazing into each other's eyes and speaking about everything that crossed our minds. We stopped briefly only to smoke cigarettes between intense lovemaking and uninspired searches for sustenance, but never seemed to quench our thirsts for each other's flesh. We were all any human could ask for from love, and much more. I never thought it possible for two individuals to be such a perfect union, to be one person, to be truly and eternally in Love. Our nights lasted beyond the rising sun and we did not sleep for fear we may be wasting our last precious moments together. "My god." "What's the matter dearest?" "I should call Gaelin and let him know I'm alive."

I hadn't spoken to Gaelin since my birthday...two weeks ago. "Hello?" "Gaelin, it's Dean." "Dean! Thank you so much

for calling, I thought you were dead for certain.”
 “I am. Dead to the world I knew before, and reborn into the arms of Love.” “Wow, that’s an epic statement, even for you. I’m ecstatic for you Dean; I wish you the world. I’ve begun writing again, and a well of inspiration has sprung up inside of me.” “What is this project about?” “I don’t know, I’ll let you know when I’m finished.” “Superb, I can’t wait.” “Are you leaving Las Vegas?” “No, not that I know of, why?” “Just curious. I would love to take the two of you to dinner so that I can meet this mysterious woman whose charms have wooed this century’s best candidate for -bitter, lonely, old man. Ms. Nin is it?” he asked in jest. “Mrs. O’Leary.”
 “You’re married? Congratulations Dean! It is settled we’re having dinner tonight, be here at 9pm, I’ll take care of the rest.” “We graciously accept.”
 “Fabulous, then I’ll see you tonight.” He hung up. I couldn’t explain to Gaelin how important it was to me that he was so happy for Corinne and I. I had feared that he might be bitter towards my love, but once again he had shown himself as a true friend.

We met Gaelin at his home. “I’ll drive,” Gaelin insisted. “I have a surprise for you!” We drove up Sahara and stopped in front of an enormous supermarket. “We’re here.” “We’re eating at a supermarket?” “Calm down honey, I don’t think

Gaelin would take us to a supermarket for dinner.”
 “Thank you Corinne,” Gaelin kissed her delicate hand, “I barely know you, and already I swear that if Dean betrays you I shall take care of you without blinking an eye.” “Easy there Casanova!” I struck back. We all laughed aloud. We walked through the grocery store to the meat cutter’s stand and Gaelin muttered something in Spanish to the attendant. The attendant motioned for a young man to his left to cover the counter for him, and asked that we follow him. We walked through a series of locked doors and staircases. We emerged into a large, dimly lit, smoky room. “Oh my god.” “What is it darling?” My lovely wife asked. “This is the restaurant Gaelin and I met in. I thought it was torn down after the Second Revolution.” “The government tried to tear it down. The proprietors were fingered as Communist sympathizers when the Second Cold War began. As a result they tore down the restaurant. When they were released from jail they constructed this replica within the walls of this supermarket.” “This is fabulous. My darling, you are going to adore the food here...let’s eat.” “Yes, let’s. Booth 13 please.” Gaelin smiled as he said this. We sat directly under the masterpiece that had bonded Gaelin and I together all those years ago. I felt at home. The love of my life, and my dearest friend, together here and now...I was waiting to push pause on the recording of Time, and feel

this perfection forevermore. Gaelin fell in love with Corinne immediately. They talked and talked, and it brought an enormous smile to my face. After we had finished desert, we had drinks. The whiskey was undeniably perfect. My love excused herself from the table and Gaelin anxiously reached for the pocket of his jacket and removed a folded piece of newspaper. "I couldn't bear it after you disappeared, I had to find what was supposed to happen to us." "Well, what did you find?" I couldn't find a word about myself. I couldn't help but look you up as well." "Really, what bit of nastiness would I have become?" "Be certain you want to know Dean. If you are, I'll gladly tell you, but if you do are not sure..." "Now that's completely unfair. Now you've piqued my interest, and I need to know!" He handed me the newspaper article. "You died in 1998. According to this article, three men and a woman robbed a Las Vegas bank in 1998, and the suspected leader was shot through the neck during a high speed pursuit." "My god. I don't know how to feel about this. Whatever brought us here prolonged my life. I thought this was a curse. Now I can't deny that it has been a blessing from beginning to finish. I met the love of my life, and I still have you. Odd, that means I would have died when Corinne was nine years old. It's probably better that I died, I was doomed to walk the Earth alone, as I had always feared." "Here she comes Dean. Unless you think now is

the time to discuss where you came from, I'd put that away." I slid the paper into my coat pocket. I wasn't sure if this was something Corinne should ever know. It was her right to know, but a better time would surely present itself. "Hello my lover. Shall we blow this joint, and paint this dreary town red?" "Yes my Love." "Ready Middle-aged man?" "Let's swing Dean-O."

We made our way from casino to casino making disgusting amounts of money, and spending it just as quickly. The world seemed to be on its knees begging to give all the pleasures it had to offer to the three of us. "Caesar's Palace." "Yes Gaelin, let's go."

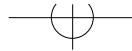
We strode into Caesar's like two kings and a queen. We couldn't lose to save our lives, and before we knew it, we had received everything but complimentary Heroin from the hotel staff. We were all positioned around a dealer that seemed to be making a fool out my darling and I, but losing his shirt to Gaelin. Corinne and I stopped playing, and just watched the dealer and Gaelin face off poker hand after poker hand. The more I watched this dealer, the more I felt I knew him from somewhere. I caught Gaelin's gaze and we both simultaneously realized that this was the dealer we had faced on that fateful evening in 1997. "How long have you worked here...Andrew?" He looked surprised that I

knew his name, but quickly remembered that he was wearing a name badge. "Oh, about eighteen years give or take." "Ever face as worthy an adversary?" "No. I always win in the end." This was definitely the same guy. His cockiness hadn't waned in seventeen years. The young woman arrived with our three glasses of wine, and after tipping her heavily, and receiving that "come hither" stare, Gaelin raised his glass, "I propose a toast. To my best friend and his eternal love...if she can stand him that long...may a lifetime of memories be made and may you both be kept safely wrapped in each other's arms." "Here, here! To kinky sex and longevity!" I retorted. "Dealer, \$1000 on this next hand. You're about to lose again, and then we must bid thee farewell for greener pastures." The dealer scowled like a bitter old man, and slid the cards to Dean slowly and with much animosity. "I'll take two cards Andy my boy." "Dealer takes three cards." The dealer looked like he had seen a ghost. What cards was he holding that made a professional waver in this fashion? I looked at Gaelin. His eyes were wide open with terror. I had only seen Gaelin like this on one other occasion. I started sweating because the other occasion was when he discovered we were time travelers. His face was twisted with pain, misery, and intense thought. "Number of the Beast, over Kings." As soon as the words rolled off Gaelin's lips the dealer laid his cards down. "Dealer has three

Aces." The light around the dealer began to distort and bend. I looked to my love. Her eyes were widening in horror. "Dean!" She shrieked. I reached for her and clasped my arms around her shoulders. I felt the invisible hands of Time wrap around my body over and over like cloth around a mummy. "I love you, I will love you for all time..." Our lips met. This was pure pain, tears streamed down my face, I knew I would never see her again. This is what death must feel like while it creeps through your flesh, as you lie helpless. I was pulled from her grasp and the world went black.

**

I faced myself. I looked directly into my own eyes. "Hello Dean," this person said. "Who are you?" I asked. "I'm what you would refer to as Death, Dean. I have taken your form to make you more comfortable." "Is this Hell?" "No, heaven and hell don't exist, just Death. You are in a different plane now. You have departed from the world of the living, and come to me. You are in a dimension of introspect. Continuous, stringent, self examination." "Sounds like Hell to me." "It can be if you so desire. Or this can be eternal rejuvenation and understanding. Humans run about like ants under a magnifying glass their entire lives asking one single, solitary question... WHY? We can discover the answers together." "Why have you ripped me away from



my eternal love?" "That was not my doing Dean. I simply sweep up the mess, I don't instigate change." "I don't want knowledge, I want life." "Then I will leave you to your hell." "Wait! Please don't leave me alone, now. All I wanted was a normal life. I found my eternal love; I was ready to start our life together, to be hers for all time. I've been robbed of that. I just wanted an existence free of adversity!" I screamed in frustration, dire, desperate frustration. "You have a lesson to learn Dean. Adversity makes you think. Without it decisions don't exist. Without decisions there are no options. Without options, there is no reason to think. If you do not face adversity, your path is clear, and so is your mind. Ever wonder why overtly religious people have that glazed over look in their eyes? No options!" I started laughing. "Enjoy the beauty of adversity, let it flow through and around you. Push against it and you will find direction. Let it push against you and be swept away in aimless frustration. Goodbye Dean." Goodbye? What did he mean? I started coughing. Bright, white light began flooding into my eyes awakening my senses. People rushed about above me.

White uniforms, latex gloves, silver badges...

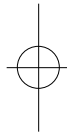
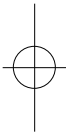
"He's back, we've got him! I thought we lost him. How do you feel son?" "Whuh?" Waking up has always been traumatic for me. "How do

you feel? You have been in a coma for three hundred and eighty days."

"Where's Gaelin?" I shouted. "Right here Dean-o, I woke up two days ago." The doctor pulled down his mask, "I think you'll be just fine lad, just fine."

"Will I ...will I ever be fine?" I muttered under my breath.

Gaelin and I don't discuss what happened to us. Why would we? My bitterness has created a continent of distance between Gaelin and I. Needless to say, I no longer read Henry Miller or Anais Nin. Fiction is no longer entertaining when your life is far more tragic than any lie a pathetic old man can conjure in his perverted mind. I don't want to be here. This is wrong, everything is wrong. I suffer.



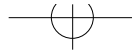


Confrontation

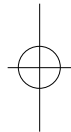
White, wispy smoke winds itself between and around the long, greased strands of hair hanging over the left side of my forehead. I follow the pillar to its source, cradled between two fingers. Two fingers on a hand adorned only by a single shining platinum band floating between my knuckle and the first joint of my ring finger. My mornings began the same. Before I could inhale my first deep breathe of oxygen, I fumbled for my cigarettes and with a flick of my thumb and a strike of flint I was inhaling the perfect ivory smoke that curled and spiraled in the sunlight that pierced my window. This smoke, as transparent and light as it appeared, was obscuring sunlight. Was I really breathing something that intense and thick? Disgusting. Oh, well, could be worse, right? At least I've never touched a crack pipe or slapped my sweaty arm desperately trying to revive a collapsed vein...any vein...I beg of you.

I looked around my room. I had almost completed the collection of literature Gaelin had given me for my birthday in 2014. But I could never again have her...my true love. The only beacon of light I had found in this cruel, destructive world. My ambition was destroyed. Thank god I stole millions before I met her. Since I lost my





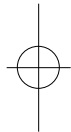
darling Corinne, I leave the house for three reasons and three reasons only-alcohol-cigarettes-and books. Nothing else matters to me, without alcohol I have no motivation, no drive, no need to better myself, or even try. I simple exist and suffer, finding bleak and momentary entertainment in books and smoking. Alcohol no longer pleased me. Instead she became more important to my existence than food. I needed alcohol to function now-I had sunk beneath the surface. I guess I could take hold of my destiny and end it all, but I've tasted life after death and I cannot stand the possibilities.



I had transplanted myself to a small studio apartment on the North side of Las Vegas. The rent and conditions were meager, but this freed up all of my money so that I could achieve a constant state of inebriation. Gunshots rang out all around, day and night, and somehow I found this comforting. I had even decided to join in on the decadence and found great pleasure shooting at the wall in my studio as I lay in bed smoking and drinking the hours away. After three months (and three times as many visits from the police and assorted authorities) my wall became a great crater-ridden monument to my angst. I was careful not to shoot out my window, but I had shot through the wall on two occasions. It occurred to me at the time to fear that my bullet had found a target outside my tiny universe but that involved caring about something other than myself, and

that no longer appealed to me.

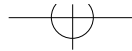
Under my solitary window was a wooden desk with a 1940 Underwoodtypewriter resting snugly on its surface. Small cobwebs formed around the keys, and across the single white sheet of paper left untouched in its bosom. Next to my typewriter, was a tall, sensuous, flask of whiskey. It was time for breakfast. I stumbled to my desk barely opening my eyes to the afternoon sun. I stared at the Underwood as I poured a shot of whiskey. Why couldn't I write anymore? Suffering is supposed to feed a writer's creativity, yet I could barely lift a finger to press a single key. I'll change that. I lifted my index finger between drags off my cigarette and typed



D-E-P-R-E-S-S-I-O-N.

This was actually progress. What can I say? I looked out the window at the wind whipping through the streets. The children didn't play in the street in this neighborhood, they made business transactions on the street corners, rolled dice against the steps of my building, and occasionally walked straight up to each other, drew their guns and murdered their playmates on the cold, grey pavement. I turned around; my apartment was tiny, dreary, and grey. I retreated to the warmth of my bed with my breakfast. I rolled over and picked up a copy of On the Road. I promised myself that I would read it once a





month in hopes that its powers would provoke me to get up and go, do something...it always had before. I lit another cigarette, damn only three left, I "d have to get up and go out soon...damn. After three pages, Kerouac's subtle optimism began to grate on my last pessimistic nerve. I set the book down and stared at the holes in the wall. Why me? Why couldn't I have gone through life not knowing Corinne? This pain was too much for me to bear; this depression had taken over, consumed me from within, and slowly, very slowly, eaten away at my very core. A tidal wave of emotion rampaged through my head. A tear dropped from my eye and landed, glistening in my whiskey. One cigarette left, time to get up.

I wiped away a circle of the condensation on the bathroom mirror and in a third person daze, I saw my left hand press the barrel of my 9mm to my temple. My index finger twitched over the trigger. Am I over it? Am I done with this world? That doesn't matter, you won't care when you're dead... Ah, but I've seen what lies ahead. I don't know if what I saw was reality, or a perverted flash of the synapse. I can't take that chance. I set the gun down. Not today, perhaps tomorrow. I picked up my razor and began to shave. Damn, I'm good looking. It's a shame for all the ladies in the world that I lost my heart in the 21st century. I bolster my own ego, why not, someone has to. Now that I've been flung

back into this century, and my true love, if I dared search for her, would be turning the ripe old age of seven. As a matter of fact...I look at my pin-up calendar...December 2, 1998...Happy Birthday my love, I hope you find love that equals what we shared. I could wish the same for myself, but I don't want it. I want Corinne. I want what was; I want the future...now. If I can't have it I prefer to rot away ...slowly.

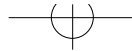
I step out into the late afternoon sun. It's one of those strange days in Las Vegas where the sun is mostly obscured by the clouds. These clouds have seen fit to clear a sunlit path to the liquor store for me...it must be fate. I pull the collar of my jacket up around my neck, tuck my hands into the pockets, and begin the block long jaunt to Andy's Liquor-Beer-And Wine-Emporium (carefully following the path carved by our father Sol).

Ten...nine...eight...seven...six...5...4...3...2...1-"Hey Elvis, playing Hawaii tonight?!" The neighborhood hoodlums felt that a pair slacks, and a button-up shirt circa 1945 necessitated Elvis worship. "Not tonight guys, but I'll let all of you know when you're able to stay out after the street lights come on!" "Fuck you Pelvis!" "Thanks guys, love you too!" Electronic doors open to the stylings of the "Stayin" Alive" soundtrack. Andy "The Wop"

was the owner of this fine alcohol-dispensing establishment, and a movie addict in denial. Andy knew every line, every scene, and every actor or actress from every movie you or anyone else on this spinning globe had ever seen. One sentence of dialogue could evoke title, character, and situation instantaneously. Andy was a perplexing fellow. He was raised in a wealthy family and bided his time with them until he completed his degree as a sound engineer. Straight out of school Andy happened upon a quirky band from Southern California that piqued his interest and took them under his aural wing. Andy sunk five years and a great deal of money into this band, recording and mixing their music for pennies. Then it happened...they hit the BIG TIME. Platinum record after platinum record made Andy The Wop a very wealthy man. Musicians from all over the world paid incredible amounts of money for Andrew to merely oversee their recording sessions. With this newfound wealth, Andy purchased several business chains that he ran from afar in between recording sessions. He always had a smile on his face—mostly for P.R. reasons—and rarely showed negativity on the outside. He was in Vegas for six weeks on vacation, and I enjoyed seeing him more often. “Dean, how they hanging?” “To the left, why the hell are you still here Vito? You know I can’t steal when you’re around. Shouldn’t you be in California crammed into a mixing room with five rockstars and their bimbo

girl-toys?” “Dean, Dean, Dean, Dean always trying to get rid of me!” “Actually it’s good to see you. What’s new in the “high alcohol content” section?” “I have some serious vino from the Motherland arriving this evening, definitely worth checking out. A little expensive, but since it’s you...” “Andy my boy, I only drown my sorrows in whiskey and gin.” “Well I’m sure you know where to find everything, help yourself. Oh yeah, Dean, we also received a shipment of Blue Sapphire Gin today.” Gin. It’s been a while since gin passed my lips. That thought reminded me of the good old days...damn I sound old. “Thank you kind sir, I shall return.”

Let’s see, six-pack of Guinness, six-pack of Newcastle, Chivas...Bombay Sapphire Gin...what the hell? It’s been TOO long. “Drew (which is short for Andrew—which is long for Andy) ring this up and make it snappy, the alcohol’s a calling” me.” “What are you doing to...I mean WITH, yourself these days? Are you gainfully employed?” “Let’s just say I’m “independently wealthy.”” “Why the hell do you live in this part of town?” “It’s a LONG, SORDID tale Drew, and I have drinking to do, good day.” “I’m sorry Dean, I didn’t mean to offend you. Look, you seem like a poker-playing chap, I’ve thrown together a Monday night poker game at the homestead, if you’re interested, here’s my address. 10:30 PM sharp, you know how poker players are, nobody likes a late entry, bad luck

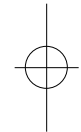


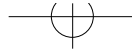
you know?” “Thanks, perhaps I’ll stop by, I’ll talk to you later Andy. By the way, no offense taken, it’s just been an interesting couple of years for me and I’m a little touchy as a result.” I snickered as I walked out; I saw Andy swaying in time to that cheesy love song from “Stayin’ Alive. He’s a good guy, but sometimes I wonder...

As I walked back to my building I noticed an eerie tension in the hoodlum circle. They were nice boys, and I never feared them, but I saw fear and nervous tension in their eyes now. I looked up and one of the older boys was blocking my path. He had a switchblade in his right hand and it snapped open revealing a shiny four-inch blade. “Alright Elvis, here’s where you cough up all your dough, or I gut ‘ya” real messy like.” Anxiety was dripping from his tongue and the aroma of fear surrounded him like cheap cologne. “I said give me your fuckin’ money!” I stood there silently. He started moving the blade around in his hand. They were testing me. Trapped animals must know their perimeters. These boys were trapped on these streets and they knew that one day they would become trapped men unless they acted. Unfortunately, they thought crime was their ticket out. Now they had to know where I stood. They had to know if they owned me through fear. The rest of my stay here depended on my reaction. “The money I have in my wallet

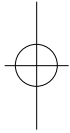
belongs to me son, I would appreciate if you would let me pass.” “No chance old-timer, hand over the cash, now!” Old-timer? I’m only twenty-three! I set my bag on the ground. “I’m not giving you my wallet. End of story.” I called his bluff, and now HE had to react. The boy lunged toward me with the knife. I stepped to my left and caught his wrist. I grabbed him by the back of the neck and slammed his face against a wall. I held his face there and hit his hand against the bricks until he dropped the knife. “God damn you’re slow. How old are you son?”

“Sixteen asshole!” His voice strained from his face being forcibly pressed against brick. I tightened my grip on his neck. “What’s your name?” “Fuck you!” “See this is what I don’t understand,” I began to apply more force, “Twenty minutes ago we were hurling friendly insults at one another, having a giggle at each other’s expense, and now there’s this whole violent episode.” “You need to recognize who this “hood belongs to, bitch!” I relaxed my grip on his neck slightly, “this “hood” belongs to the people who inhabit it. This filthy, crime-ridden block is just as much mine, as it is yours. As a matter of fact, I guarantee that none of you little shits pay rent, so this “hood, monetarily belongs to me! Let’s be realistic though, I want to live here and simply exist without worrying that some punk kid is going to try to off me for the twenty dollars I have in my wallet. Is that too

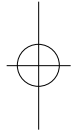


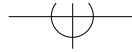


much to ask?" I tightened my grip on his neck demanding an answer. "No, no it's not."
 "Let's try this again. So, what's your name?"
 "James." "Thank you James," I took my hand off his neck and allowed him to stand up straight. "I'm sorry about the neck-face-wall-thing. Let's make a deal gentleman...gather around your uncle Dean. See, what none of you knew is that I have this." I pulled my 9mm out of the holster under my jacket, put the safety on and slid it back into its holster. "If I thought for one second that my life was in danger, James here would have received a slug in the forehead at point-blank range. I don't pull my gun unless I have to kill. Not warn, not maim...kill. Now ask yourselves, are these territorial pissings worth dying for? I'm sure most of you haven't even lost your virginity yet, and believe me that's worth staying alive for. Leave me be to live my life and I promise not to pick you off one by one in the streets out of sheer boredom." None of them spoke. Their pale, blank stares told me that I had either gotten through to them, or they were soiling their pants. I was satisfied with either outcome. I turned to James as I was walking away, "Don't lean with a knife, extend your arm. If you have to lean you're not close enough; you'll be off balance and in a prime position to get your ass kicked. Commit, or don't even pull it out. See you guys later?"
 "Yeah..."



As I climbed the stairs in my building I thought about James. Dumb ass kid was brave, but he'll be dead before he sees eighteen. You just don't pull a weapon unless you are going to use it. If you're not committed, you'll hesitate, and that's when you receive the contents of a 9mm in the forehead. The funny part is I could see in his eyes that he never intended to hurt me. That's the difference I'm talking about. James never intended to hurt me, but I intended to blow a perfect crimson tunnel through his head. It all happens so fast...then nothing.

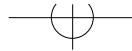




Do You See Forever In Her Eyes?

“What’s on your mind Dean?”

“ I know you and Sarah are planning to leave Las Vegas in the fall. If this woman is what makes this world bearable for you, then I want this for you. You and I have been closer in the year that we have known each other than life-long friends. Now you are leaving. The fact that you are unable to tell me this leads me to believe that you have serious doubts in your mind, and it pains me that you would follow through with something of this magnitude without being sure. Please don’t make a rash decision that will turn you into the bitter old man you so despise.” I invested no effort in hiding my agenda. I’ve been where Gaelin thinks he is. In that mystical land of numbness—of love—of proposed and accepted matrimony...head in the clouds...mind locked in silence unable to effect the outside world. Love brings about emotive existence, a plane of reality foreign to the mind...world with emotion as parliament and the sex organs as Prime Minister. “I don’t know what to say Dean. Sarah and I have been married for a month now. You’re such a condescending bastard. I was afraid all right? I was afraid to hear all the negativity you were sure to spew at me. I didn’t want to hear that I was wrong, that Sarah was wrong for me. I know marriage isn’t exactly



your opinion of earthly bliss Dean, but that doesn't necessarily mean that the institution itself is evil." "I never insinuated that Gaelin. Marriage is an evil institution unless it is given the proper respect. It is not a toy. It is not mere words. It is a lifetime commitment that can destroy or save your life. It cannot be viewed as the next logical step in a relationship, for then it is doomed. It will never blossom into the union of man and woman, it will become the contract you signed in blood, that will never release its grip on your soul."

"This is precisely what I was afraid of Dean. You fear commitment so much that you cannot let yourself feel love long enough to be swept away by its beauty. Sarah is perfect for me. We have our challenges, but love turns hardship into growth and indifference into compromise. Love cannot always be all consuming, sometimes love is simply giving up what is holding you back."

"Holding you back from what?"

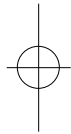
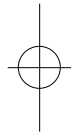
"Holding you back from being harmonious together."

"That's rubbish! Does she love Gaelin Gilbrausen, or the condensed, newly equipped, aerodynamically styled, Domesticated Man she hopes she can mold you into?"

"That's spiteful and unfair Dean! I love Sarah and I would do ANYTHING to make her happy!"

"I don't doubt that for a millisecond lad, but would she do the same for you? You'll give up

anything to make her happy, but can she simply accept you as you are and be happy? Would she give that up for you? That's why marriages don't last Gaelin. People will always be who they are! You may do everything in your power to be perfect for her, but you will still be who you are! You may be able to fight this your entire life, but it will manifest itself later in life in some form. You will become frustrated, short with Sarah, short with your beloved children; perhaps you'll fall prey to the idiocy of Mid-Life Crisis. But mark my words, if this happens, you will be destroying Sarah's life. You will be destroying your children's lives, and most of all you will wake up one day and realize that the last thirty years of your existence were a lie. You can't go back and fix it Gaelin. I've tried so hard to rewind time, but it is gone forever, your guilt becomes eternal. This is what you need to think about Gaelin. Not puppy dogs and picket fences, but whether or not you see forever in Sarah's eyes. If you don't, end it. She may still forgive you. Believe me, I wish I had Audene's forgiveness every day of my life. Goodbye Gaelin, I sincerely wish you a lifetime of happiness with Sarah. Contemplate forever Gaelin. Time destroys indiscriminately. If there is a doubt in your mind, a weak link in your love for Sarah, Time will devour both of you and you will never forgive each other, and you will never be the same. Just be sure Gaelin, be sure, or wait...for your sake...please be sure."



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“Are you ready?” “Yes.” “Yeah.” “Then let’s go.” The sun is scorching against the tender West European flesh of my neck. The knot in my stomach is a familiar one. I watch Brown and Gaelin slide ebony sheathes over their faces. “Remember, there is only one entrance. I will be here at the door. If someone is going to enter, I’ll escort them in and put them under Gaelin’s careful control. Brown, you know what your job is. Do not stop for anything! Sarah will be here in eighty seconds, don’t be late!” I light a Pall Mall, carefully rolling the end with my tongue. Filter-less cigarettes have the tendency of leaving tobacco on one’s teeth. There are some obscure people on the streets of Vegas this afternoon. Vegas’ searing heat brings out stranger folks than Hollywood’s full moons could ever hope to boast. Shit. A woman is walking directly towards me. Black sunglasses, cheap suit, and arrogance her bank account cannot possibly afford. I live for this sort of thing. I slide submissively to the side and in a brief moment as I swing the door open for her, our eyes meet and lightning passes through both of us, an exciting sensual rush that I cannot explain, except that we had experienced incredible pleasure with one another in another life. I swung my arm around to usher her in and with one fluid motion I pulled my 9mm, cocked it audibly, and pressed

the barrel against the small of her back. She did not scream. She moaned. I tenderly told her to lie face first on the tile and remain quiet...please. Brown had already opened and emptied the appropriate drawers and files, and was exiting the vault. Gaelin is stone cold and concentrating superbly on every individual in the bank. “Five seconds,” I call out. I step back into the intense heat. Something’s wrong. Maybe it’s just the fact that it’s 115 degrees right now. Better sharpen up just in case. Here comes Sarah, perfect. Brown and Gaelin walk calmly out of the front door while I cover them. We step into the running vehicle and off we go. Gaelin, Sarah, and Brown start shouting and celebrating. “Shut up ya” monkeys, We’re not out yet! Let’s TRY to keep a low profile until we hit the spot.” “Lighten up Dean, we pulled it off!” “Brown, how many gigs have you pulled? This makes three, right? Shut your mouth and keep your eyes open!”

— *If you don’t like separation of Church and State ...Move to Iran!*—

I rarely see bumper stickers anymore that make me giggle, it feels good.

Something is wrong. The stench of danger aroused my sinuses. Sweet adrenaline flew in the breeze; the sour aroma of anticipation hung around it like a steel cage.

“Everyone put their seatbelts on and ready your sidearm.” “What’s up Dean?” “I don’t know, just strap up and be ready for anything.” Maybe Gaelin is right. Right about Sarah. Maybe she’s the complimentary soul for his tortured existence. Maybe she can truly, finally make him happy. I’m glad I convinced them to pull this gig with me, it’ll give them a nice start together. I’m happy for them. I hope it all works out...

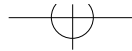
“NO!” My god NO! Crimson gushes from Sarah’s neck and her life floods onto my face and hands. Her head slumps against the wheel and her lifeless foot depresses the accelerator. I lunge across the seat and grab the wheel to steady the car. Gaelin is frozen in shock. “Brown, undo my seat belt.” I’m free. I unlatch Sarah’s restraint. Gaelin reaches forward to cradle his love, tears streaming down his face. I shove him back and tell him and Brown to get down. I am able to reach the door handle, and I watch in horror as I instinctively push Sarah’s lifeless body out the door, sending it reeling onto the asphalt, and under the wheels of our pursuing detective’s unmarked police car. This sends the detective up and over a nearby parked car and hood first through the front window of The Limey’s Discount Mattress center. “DEEEEEEEEEEEAN!!! You fucking Bastard! I’ll kill you with my bare hands!” Gaelin lunges for my throat. Brown wrestles him down and cradles his sobbing head. “Brown,

keep him down, I’m getting us out of here!” The detective must not have had a chance to call for back up, because no one else appeared to be tailing us, least of all marked police cars. I cleaned the blood off the windshield with my shirt and collected myself. After all, everyone in Vegas has a bullet hole in their car at one time or another.

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I fish tailed into the parking structure of New York, New York and raced to the fourth level. I helped Brown drag Gaelin out of the backseat. Gaelin, barely able to stand on his own swings and connects a fine right hook to my jaw. The pain wasn’t physical, I knew he blamed me for Sarah, and tears welled up in my eyes as Gaelin collapsed to the ground sobbing. “Gaelin, listen to me. We need to move, or We’re going out, period, end of story.”

We walk as calmly as can be expected to the hotel entrance joining the fourth floor of the parking structure. Brown had a suite set up last night where he was making himself visible with a couple of “lady friends.” When he opened the door the ladies were still asleep. “Perfect, they don’t even know you left. Brown, get undressed and both of you give me your guns. Brown slid between the two prostitutes. Gaelin and I sat in the dining room and lit cigarettes. “Gaelin, I’m



sorry.” “Fuck you Dean, this was all your idea. I should be holding my wife in my arms telling her I love her, instead I’m seeing her body crushed by the wheels of a Pig’s auto over and over. For what, Dean? FOR WHAT?!” The girls stirred. Gaelin lowered his voice. “For money Dean. The one thing that has never brought either of us a stitch of happiness...ever. Cut me out I don’t want this money. I’m leaving; it’s only a matter of time before they identify the body and start looking for me. She won’t even get a proper burial.”

“Gaelin, I think you should stay put for a while.” I grabbed his arm.

“Dean, the rest of my days will be haunted with the question What If? I now know eternal regret. I guess we’re even. I completely understand you now, and I’m disgusted.” He pulled his arm away and slammed the door behind him.

“Ooh hello there handsome!” A gorgeous young woman barely wrapped in a sheet stood in the foyer...the epitome of a siren. Every curve of her flesh pricked desire in me. The way she stood sang volumes of sultry magnetism. Then I looked into her eyes and saw nothing. The cold, blank stare of an actress who no longer believed in who she was portraying. She had lost her soul playing the part. She had lost her soul to pay her bills. All of this glorious money she made would not be spent on happiness, but on controlling the pain. Never quenching the searing fire that

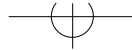
replaced her soul; barely keeping it from consuming her completely. She was a lot like me. “Where were you last night when I needed ya’? Feel like finishing off what your friend Brown started?”

“No thanks darlin’ hookers aren’t my style.”

And with that said I picked up my hat and made my way into the hall. I looked both ways, but Gaelin was really gone. Gone for good. I whispered good-bye under my breath and headed for the elevator.

I walked down the street feeling the weight of the world resting squarely on my shoulder blades. I slid into the joint I had frequented a year ago and sat down to drink myself into oblivion. I laid a one hundred-dollar bill on the bar and instructed the barkeep that it was his under two conditions. “Leave me completely alone. When I signal for you, pour me your finest whiskey, and then refer to condition number one.” He accepted, and I brought the glass to my lips. I could smell my salvation in its intoxicating vapors. Heat overtook me as my blood rushed to my head thirsting, craving for the numbing medicine. I tilted the glass, but before I could appease my blood’s craving I saw something in the mirror behind the bar. It was her, my angel with Wilde on her lips and flame in her eyes. Finally, it was she. After Corrine, after all that has happened, she walks back into my reality. This cannot be blind coincidence, but it can-





not be fate. Fate is a bedtime story for infant charlatans and the pounders of pulpits. No, there was no reason for her to interrupt my life, but I would not let her slip by me again. My mind slid to the photograph of Corrine in my jacket pocket. Standing before Hotel 31 in New York City. How unaware both of us were of any condition beside complete unadulterated bliss. It was time to let go of Corinne. It was time to face the fact that she and I were separated by powers outside of our control, and no matter how much I loved her, no matter how much she loved me, we could never reclaim what once was. I removed the photograph slowly from my jacket. She was vibrant, so beautiful, so utterly disgusted with the banality of this universe. I raised the photo to my face and kissed her delicate cheek... "Goodbye Corinne," ...and tore it in half. I must move along with life and try to deaden my memory of Corinne. Perhaps this stranger and I would someday love one another as Corinne and I had, perhaps not. Perhaps I was destined to accept the wretched fact that I may die alone. But I cannot accept this lying down, I must try to alter fate, I must try to control destiny, I must try to see forever...

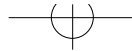
...forever in Her eyes.

Faith Asunder

Tonight I feel pain I cannot describe. It's dangerous to put your dreams into tangible forms. It leaves them open to be ripped asunder. Dreams are best kept in the deepest recesses of the mind. Danger is afoot when you allow these feelings and emotions into the light of day. I know better than to allow myself to be hurt like this, but I truly thought that this was IT, and to realize that it's over tears at my heart and tear ducts with Herculean strength.

I saw her tonight. This dove that threatens to glide through my dreams and ravish my desires. Ironically, I was on the same stool I had barely been able to wrestle into a proper seat on the night we first met. Now however, I had my wits about me. I was drunk, but my intoxication was borne of the silken touch of her skin, the majesty of her porcelain neck, the erotic curve of her lower back, and the penetrating fires of her emerald eyes. This time I will not lose her. A need I could not subdue screamed to me "Your salvation lies in this woman's gossamer caress." Well, when your subconscious is screaming such poetry, it's difficult to combat it with logic (hell, I don't even try anymore). I parted my lips to prevent her from walking right past me, and anxiety thrust through my mid-section with





sound barrier breaking force. I pulled back within myself and resolved to give up again. Anxiety is an omnipotent force that governs my every move. No, not this time! Perhaps she was all I needed to complete myself (or I would be able to convince myself of this), and I'd be damned if my personal inadequacies would banish me into eternal love of my addictions. I stood up, adjusted my thoughts (and my tie), and strode across the bar to where she was sitting, delicately sipping a glass of blood red wine with a gentleman. I glared fiercely and lovingly into her eyes and held out my hand. She took my hand and seemed not to hear her gentleman friend's protests. I stared into this man's eyes and instilled in him a sense that this was of no concern to him, and his best option was to sit down quietly and try to forget that this angel had ever touched his life.

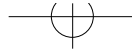
We danced through the streets of Las Vegas discussing our decaying society, and finally resolved that neither of us felt the ability nor the responsibility to solve the world's problems when the neon turned the night into day and an entire city lay in wait for just she and I. I stroked her argillaceous cheek and tucked a straying curl behind her ear with a tenderness that surprised us both. Our eyes locked and the entire world around us with its poisonous automobiles and deadly neon, its serial killers and rapists of children, its cold, cold depression, temporarily exist-

ed outside of our gaze. Instinctively, our lips met. The perfect marriage of passion and gentleness. I don't know how long we kissed, but when she pulled her lips from mine I longed to wrap my arms around her and keep this union forever. I was again locked in her hypnotic gaze as she traced my lips with her fingers as if allowing the rest of her skin to feel the passion her lips had just experienced. She looked longingly into my eyes,
 "Take me away from here I give myself to you completely."

We glided through the streets of Las Vegas to her home nestled forcefully at the base of our lovely Western mountain range. The view from her veranda was breathtaking, but I could not separate my eyes from hers, despite the fact that sipping precious Merlot without the aid of one's eyes requires more motor skills than I have ever claimed to possess.

"I must know your name. This feeling must have a tangible reference, or I will always be tortured as to whether or not you are a reality."
 "Do not crash into our universe with crass labels. The one thing you need to know is that I need you. I want you as I have never wanted anything in my entire life. If I were never to breathe the sweet aroma of a flower-laden glen, or feel the prick of a rose's thorn, I would not cry. But if I knew I let this evening pass without

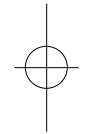


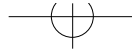


feeling the warm caress of your fingers along the small of my back, I feel I will regret it eternally." I cradled her body in my arms and laid her down (as a father lays his only daughter down to rest) on a breathtaking four-postered berth draped with diaphanous silk and mind-numbing burgundy velvet. My senses reeled as I felt her tender fingertips running down my arms, tracing the muscles in my back and stomach. The way she touched me made me weep for those who cannot truly feel the caress of a woman who will always and forever excite and stimulate their very soul. As she stared into my eyes and whispered words I could never defile by writing, I carefully touched my lips to her neck, covering every inch of this goddess's intoxicating flesh with my mouth. Her increasingly heavy breathing told me volumes of the pleasures she knew I could make her feel, and my will solidified into this singular obsession. She arched her back in ecstasy as I parted her blouse and lovingly caressed her skin with the edge of my lips, feeling her heart thrust against my skin and awakening every nerve in my countenance. She tore hungrily at my shirt, but I pulled away.

I stood and walked to the far wall and pushed the light switch to the off position. Then slowly, through the darkness I walked around her chamber lighting long, sensuous, white candles regally positioned in black wrought-iron cande-

labrums. The sensuality of her touch erased the world around me and all of my concentration and strength became engulfed in making this duchess sigh and moan and grope in ecstasy that she could not control. Control was of no concern. No, control was the last thought that could dance through our minds. This flood of eroticism was all consuming; even the symbiotic movement of our hips as this consummation took place, seemed to naturally occur, to the end of sending her into waves upon waves of sensual release. She suddenly gripped my shoulders, locked her heels behind my back and shifted her weight violently, rolling herself into a position of dominance. She looked down at me with an obsequious smile as her subtle hips moved pendulum like over mine. God, I could feel her! I could feel her tense as the waves of ecstasy rolled through her body again and again with infinitely more intensity! I placed my hands firmly on her hips and continued this motion for her. She relaxed her leg muscles as I moved her back and forth against my body, and she felt her release without the constraints of movement. The volume and intensity of her climax rippled through my body and made it impossible to subdue mine any longer. Quite contrary to previous experience, I shared in this orgasmic wave with her for several minutes, as we thrust against one another animalistically, neither one of us willing to let go of this purifying flood of erotic seizure. Finally, she slumped over, wet with the perspira-





tion of a thousand blistering desert nights, and lay exhausted by my side. As I stroked her hair I felt that this is where she should stay for all time.

I got up to retrieve a cigarette for her. The blank look on her face surprised me. A strange frigid wind slid across my flesh. I shuddered. I breathed in the carcinogens with a slow, calculated intensity. I lost myself in my thoughts, and when she spoke, I was startled.

“You should leave.” I could barely hear what she was saying over my own labored breath. “I think you should leave. Now.” I couldn’t believe what I was hearing. “Please don’t look at me like that. I never told you I loved you. I never told you that this was forever. We just shared something amazing, lets not ruin it with premature sentimentality.” I could feel my eyes widening in horror. Was this really happening? Was I to find a replacement for the one piece missing from my life, hold it, and then have it ripped from my hands? Had this ethereal two hours of pleasure truly been pure lust, and nothing else? I had defiled the memory of my love for Corinne for naught.

“That’s it? Am I never to see you again?” I stammered.

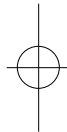
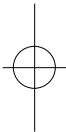
“I can see that this meant more to you than it did to me, and for that reason I think it would be better if we didn’t see each other again. Why

ruin it? We had an absolutely beautiful experience that I fear may never be duplicated, but it does not constitute love. I don’t mean to be cruel, but it would be far crueler to lie to you about how I felt. I think you should go.”

I was barely able to stand as pain, not physical, but emotional shot through my every nerve, peaking finally with a vengeance in my heart. I staggered a bit. Then it struck me. My ever powerful, ever present, defense mechanisms kicked in. I looked at this woman whom I was ready to give myself to body and soul, and I was disgusted. Disgusted mostly with my ignorance. I wanted this feeling of permanence, and undying devotion so badly that I unfairly forced my ideals onto this woman who simply wanted to be held for the moment and then released. I think I understood, but the pain was still very real and consuming.

I made my way home, and made love to my mistress alcohol until 5:30 AM (or until the end of “A Streetcar Named Desire,” whichever came first...I don’t remember). I never saw her again, and it’s probably better that way. My love belonged to only one woman and I lost her forever to the swirling waters of time.

Here I sit with my addictions.



The truest, dearest, most understanding, and steadfast friends I have ever known. They were also probably my ultimate demise. I lost my final delusion that night. Trust is dead, faith is crippled, and my optimism seems too grand an ideal in this day and age. I've lost faith in my own humanity, but that's to be expected in this day and age.

the end