

# the reinvention

## PART ONE

### the preacher

Dawn filtered through the small town of Verde Valley, Arizona. Light pink rays wound themselves from the clear sky, mingling with the dirty red ground-dust. And with the gentle rays came the gentle rustle of a delicate breeze. The faint sound of a far-off pickup truck could be heard winding its way through Indian territory. Painted red, it had lost its sheen long ago; now, as it barked and coughed with age, the bright proud red had been reduced to the same dirty rust as the rusty dirt it ground up and spewed out.

Two figures were sat inside the cab; both silently contemplating the grand expanse of the minimalist landscape. The driver, a grizzled local on his way back from an out of state trip, seemed to be in his late forties: grey-white hair seeped messily from beneath his tattered old baseball cap, almost reaching his pocked and ugly nose. His eyes, shadowed by an overlarge brow, darted suspiciously at the dawn scenery, as if he expected Nature to start conspiring against him. His unnaturally tight grip on the large wheel confirmed that his character was indeed suspecting and untrusting. He reached into his shirt pocket, and pulled out a pack of cigarettes. He offered the pack to his passenger, and began scratching his rough chin, pulling on his stubble once in a while.

Whilst the pickup approached the end of its journey, Daisy Saint-J approached the end of her dreaming. As she made the transition from one world to the other, a peaceful tide washed through her mind, and when her eyes slowly opened, they welcomed the new day with a serene sparkle. She lay in bed as the last moments of her dream went through a repeating fade, and a smile brightened her soft face. Life melodic floated through her remembrance of the recent timeless suspension, and as her mind hummed along harmoniously, the smile washed away any negativity. So, refreshed by sleep and dreams, Daisy pushed her covers off, and rose naked from her bed.

Through her open window, she could just hear the faint rumble of the aged pickup as it neared Verde Valley. And when she went to her little bathroom adjacent, the rumbling gained volume. All outside noise was momentarily muted as she ran the tap to wash. She bathed her soft heart shaped face, and re-entered her spacious bedroom. As she opened her thick green curtains, the pickup passed by and made its way to the centre of town. Daisy ran her hands over herself, slipped on a dressing gown, and made her way downstairs to breakfast.

The driver of the pickup pitched his cigarette onto the road, and began humming an old song to himself. His

passenger listened intently to the rise and fall of a lingering, yearning melody; after a minute or so, he interrupted.

"What's that you're singing?"

The driver seemed surprised at his passenger's sudden interest.

"It's just some old folk tune. Can't even remember the damned title."

"I like it, you got a good voice." The driver's surprise mixed itself with slight bemusement. "You talk like you an expert, Preacher."

The preacher gave a smile, and reached into the cloth bag between his legs. He pulled out an old tattered record, its sleeve frayed, and showed it to the driver.

"Music happens to be a great love of mine, sir," he told him. "This record here was given to me by an old man who taught me to understand the language and the brush of sound."

"Nice words, preacher; I only wish I could understand them."

Again the preacher smiled, laughing too.

"There's nothing fancy there. Think about them and they'll be clear to you."

The driver lapsed into silence, unsure of the preacher's meaning. He swung the large steering wheel, and pulled the truck to a halt beside an old boarding house.

"Thank-you my man, much appreciated." The driver waved him away, and pulled out into the road. The preacher watched the exhaust ashes, and knocked on the wooden front door.

Mrs. Saint-J, widowed for ten years, called hello to her daughter. Daisy entered the kitchen, and wished her mother a good morning, coy smile on her face.

"What you grinning about, Snowdrop? You been dreaming dreams?"

"I have mumma; the sweetest dreams I ever dreamt."

"That's good," and she patted her daughter affectionately on the head, smoothing loose dark hair. "I put your orange juice on the table. Drink up sweetie, and we'll go by the yard on the way to school." Daisy Saint-J hugged her mother and drank her juice.

The hallway of the boarding house had acquired a musty smell through the years of its existence. Memories lingered in every particle; all kind of memories good and bad. As the preacher entered, the memories, attracted, seeped electric into his psyche. The preacher removed his biretta, clutched it closely, and placed his cloth bag on the reception counter. He rang the bell and waited patiently to be attended to. After some moments a grey-haired, wizened old man stepped from the back room.

The two men looked at each other, the other drawn by the preacher's eyes. Sweat developed below his fluffed white moustache. The preacher stared for some time before breaking into an ambiguous smile.

"Good morning, sir," he intoned, "I require a room for an indefinite time; overlooking the desert if you have."

" Why yes, of course preacher," ingratiated the old man. " You just wait here, and I'll take you to your room." " That's fine. Thankyou."

Although it lay in the opposite direction as the school, Mrs. and Daisy Saint-J walked slowly to the graveyard. They skirted the perimeter of the town, listening to the distant echo of the mountains. They were caught like souls in purgatory, edged between the desert and the erratic town. A warm current passed them, throwing a gliding tail behind it. Mother and daughter smelt the desert in the breeze; saw the buffalo and the birds picking cactus. They smelt the burning sun above, and they smelt the Indians ritualising way past the distant mountains and into the desert plains beyond.

Daisy scuffed her trainers along the dirtsand. She held her mother's hand. Not through security but through love. She held her mother's hand, and she scuffed her trainers along the dirtsand.

Daisy gazed at the fluffy clouds above, like white bulletholes in the sky. She saw the angels

appearing out of & disappearing into  
the bulletholes in  
the sky.

Sometimes she called out to them, but that was when alone, and sure nobody watched her. Today, with her mother at hand, she merely watched them. As a baby watches a mother appearing into & disappearing out of the prism of light still developing into Vision. On a cold dark city night, the rumble of wet traffic sounds like the rumble of a distant battle all muffled cannons and the squelch of blood slipping and exploding eventually the five four will become natural. How funny she must look, all curved grotesque like an illusory mirror, or a fortune teller's glass ball.

Daisy Saint-J ran ahead as they neared the plot of land designated the Verde Valley Graveyard. By the time her mother approached, she had pushed open the tall gates, and now rested against them. She smiled and held her hand out. They held and entered the spacious and calming yard. They walked across the white-scrubbed stone path, and glanced at the greystone gravestones, which rose above the ground, bordered by short-cut yellow grass. And they came to gravestone marking out Tobias Saint-J.

Kneeling down, they two whispered their prayers.

Kneeling down, the preacher whispered a prayer to god, and kissed the head of Christ. Once finished, he withdrew a small frame containing an ikon of Saint Francis of Assisi. He placed this faceup on the hard bed, and whispered a prayer to his guardian saint. When this prayer had ended, he got up off his knees, and lay down upon his new bed. Gazing at the ceiling, muted reflected light entwined him, and he slipped into a trance. As a vision unfolded, his body sank back in relaxation, and his breathing slowed down into a very slow deep rhythm. He conversed internally & understands subterranean

thoughts that he withheld from himself. This, when he remained at the human thoughtlevel, was the part of him that gave him his music; hearing it filter through his conscienci, drifting up and dragging through darkwell emotions; heard it echo like a wide mountain valley. This was the part of him that gave a glimpse of the future déjà vu, that recalled the ancient past déjà vu.

The mother and daughter finished their prayers and stood up on the earthen ground. Their eyes fixed and understood. When the preacher had rested enough, he rose from his bed, and settled on the task of visiting the local minister. He adjusted and strai(gh)tened his black black attire, righted his cap, and left his room. The thin crimson hall carpets only slightly muted the creaking of the wooden floorboards, becoming unrestricted as he descended the staircase. As he left, he asked the old man for directions to the church.

" Straight on down the road, sir. Just straight...on...down...the...road."

The preacher nodded his thanks, and made his way straight on down the road.

As they walked towards school, Mary Saint-J reassured herself by talking to Daisy about the death of Daisy's father.

" Your father was called away from us, Daisy." Daisy nodded. " He was taken away, and I don't rightly know if he is looking down upon us Daisy; I'd say he weren't: so we better look after ourselves. You know that, don't you Daisy?" " Of course I do, mumma." " I'm glad you do snowdrop." As she said this they passed a preacher walking towards the church some two hundred yards back. He fixed a captivating gaze on them, and bid them a good morning.

" Morning Father," Mary Saint-J replied. " You the new preacher or something?"

The gaunt preacher smiled, and flashed strong white teeth. Mary smiled back, calculating his age to be thirty four. " If you're looking for father thomas, I'll explain the way to his house for you - he won't be at the church at this hour."

" That's very kind of you ma'am. I'm all ears," and he laughed. As Mary Saint-J detailed the route to father thomas', the preacher cast his gaze down upon young Daisy. His eyes shone brown at her, seemed to be conversing with her. She felt a tingle pass through her, and her chest expand like liquid cooling. She licked her lips, and the preacher thanked the mother for the instructions.

" See you later," he imparted as he walked away, the newly rising sun casting a long shadow behind him. They watched him go, and made their way onwards towards the school.

The seven-thirty service began. The preacher had visited father thomas, and had gained the assent to accompany the hymns. He listened to father thomas preach sitting with the polished upright piano.

He listened thoughtfully to the father propound on being and experiencing; father thomas seemed to be more forward thinking than most other priests, and the preacher listened with human respect.

Father thomas nodded to the preacher, and the preacher played a soft sustained chord. A-flat major, a sweet uplifting chord. He allowed the chord to resonate and echo all the way to its disappearance beyond the eaves, before he replayed the chord in sixteenth arpeggio. Schubert's Ave Maria. The congregation launched into the melody, and the sweet dolorous notes rose upwards, swelling and ebbing against the arched roof.

Daisy Saint-J, leaning out of her window, heard the escaping music, and a tingle, similar to her earlier tremor, passed through her. She called down to her mother, who came up and into the bedroom.

"Come and listen to the church music. It's so beautiful."

Mother joined Daisy, and listened to the music. A joyful smile smiled.

"Why yes, it **is** beautiful. So moving."

The two listened intently as the music floated ethereally past them. The preacher's fingers rose left & right in fluid motion; his left providing the lilting lullaby quality, his right marking the rhythmic melody. The congregation appeared to gain a new spirit from the music, and sang with understanding and quiet passion. When the song faded to a distant chord, a tingle vibrate arose from their faces.

"Beautiful," whispered mama.

From the church, they heard a new song emerge; a song with no words. A liebestraume by Liszt. F minor to A-flat major. A lover's dream. The notes sank into Daisy Saint-J, the music more than mere black dots on a ruled page. Daisy understood this, the preacher understood this.

"That was wonderful playing, father," a fat woman said as she left the church.

"Thank-you ma'am, I myself felt lifted by it."

"Oh yes, father," the woman replied, warming to the subject. "We **all** felt lifted." She smiled, her pert rosy cheeks deepening. Her grey eyes gleamed, and she walked into the cold darkness of afterdusk.

The preacher watched her go, and returned inside the church. He collected his cloth bag, pushed his loose leaves of music into them, and moved away from the little wooden piano. He hesitated, and returned. He sat down and composed himself.

His fingers gently leant down on the keys. He replayed the chord, loud. C minor. The top note middle c. The sonata pathétique by beethoven. As he slowly built to the Allegro bursting the bubble, his fingers trembled. Louder and louder, until an explosion of rage. The rage could not sustain itself, and the doubt set in. Frustration gave way to Sad Hopelessness, but the rage intermittently reappeared. As the first overwhelmed itself, the preacher slumped at the keyboard, exhausted. Daisy Saint-J could feel tremors running through her

body. She could not hear the music playing, but she could feel it, and it pushed through her like a speed rush. She sunk her body into her bed, her breasts swelling, and her hands re-enacting the preacher's as they slipped downwards.

As his fingers pushed down hard on the keyboard, her hands slipped inside herself, and as his fingers stroked a saddening melody, so her fingers followed his example. Instruments of joy, instruments of creativity. The exhaustion came over them, and they collapsed fulfilled.

"Are you okay, father," the voice of father thomas asked. The preacher immediately lifted himself, and turned to face father thomas.

"Forgive me, father thomas," he murmured, "I have not played that piece for some time, and it always moves me so."

Father thomas blushed.

"Forgive me, I did not mean to disturb you so." He smiled. "It **is** beautiful. Beethoven, is it not?"

"Indeed, father thomas," the preacher replied, smiling too. "His sonata pathétique in C minor."

"I had a falling feeling is all, mumma. It weren't nothing."

Mary Saint-J ruffled Daisy's hair.

"Okay," with a reassuring smile. "Goodnight. Darling."

"'Night mumma." Daisy rolled away onto her side, and sucked on her thumb.

The dark night sky shone clearly above, the constellations crammed into the small spaces, the moon languishing in its own private spread. The preacher's footsteps tapped along the night streets towards his boarding house, humming a melody beneath his breath. Daisy Saint-J closed her tired eyes, and drifted into a sweet deep sleep.

## piano lessons

Verde Valley, Arizona lies 100 miles northeast of Phoenix, Arizona. The small town lies in between the petrified forest national park to the east, and the Wupatki national monument to the west. A short distance north, and you found yourself in the painted desert, land of the navajo indians. The little colorado runs itself just south, and the desert air is usually too dry to be considered refreshing.

Verde Valley itself was founded in 1845, just before the mexican wars. The french missionaries who founded it named it Verde Vallée, in an ironic dig at the desert that had almost defeated it. The old church, found in the southeast quarter, was built after 1848, when the mexican war had rung itself out. Wars continued to rage after Arizona had joined the united states, but the small missionary of Verde Vallée kept itself neutral, concentrating on the conversion of whoever happened to stumble into the small collection.

Verde Vallée did not grow into a town until the civil war had ended, and the feuding appeared to have been quelled; or at least quietened down. For some fifty years, the small missionary slowly grew as traders passed by on their way to california, and when at last, in 1912, Arizona truly became the 48<sup>th</sup> state, a new church was built on the northeast of the town. During the foregoing century and half, the town name was anglified, fortunately not to the extent of renaming it Green Valley. And so, as dawn broke one day, the new church, now somewhat aged, had a cardboard sign tacked to the church notice board. It read:

Piano Lessons  
are to be given by  
Father Jakob CHIMES.  
the price is \$10<sup>00</sup> for  
fifteen lessons.

Daisy Saint-J, waiting outside for her mother to finish chattering to the other women, played in the small church graveyard, containing past senators and members of counsel. She leapt over the grounded gravestones, and ran through the ill-kempt grass. Her eyes became attracted to the preacher's notice, and she read through it eagerly.

"Ten dollars for fifteen lessons," she read aloud, "only ten dollars. Mumma," she called loudly, running inside and grabbing her hand.

"Daisy, what are you rushing about like that for?" Her mother pretended to be angry, but laughed at her daughter's eagerness. The other women started purring over Daisy, releasing the usual drab talk of women such as them.

"Outside, mumma," Daisy said excitedly, "outside on the notice board. Piano lessons bein' given by the preacher."

All the women oohed and aahed.

"He **does** play the piana so nicely, I gotta say," said the same women who had told as much the preacher a month or so ago.

"I imagine you wanna go, do ya Daisy?" her mother asked, remembering the seven-thirty service.

"Oh yes, mumma, I do."

"'Nd how much did you say it was?"

"Only ten dollars for fifteen lessons."

"Well, Daisy," her mother said teasingly, "I suppose ten dollars ain't that much to be asking for, is it?"

"Oh no, mumma," Daisy cried, sensing victory, "ten dollars isn't hardly *anything* for *fifteen* piano lessons."

"Well, Snowdrop," Mrs. Saint-J finished with a smile, "I guess I don't see any reason why you can't take 'em."

Daisy hugged her mother's waist, and ran happily back outside to skip between the graves.

"I'll be along shortly," she sang out to her unlistening daughter.

"My, that preacher'll have her playing Arizona in no time!"

The women laughed and continued their conversation.

The preacher greeted them as he passed them, and stopped to talk.

In the graveyard, Daisy Saint-J played a pretend piano on the table of one of the graves. She hummed Ave Maria as she played. When she had finished, a single-person applause sounded from behind.

"That was very nice, ma'am," came the rich tones of a youngish man.

Daisy swirled in embarrassment, but seeing that it was the preacher, she felt her blushes disappear.

"Thankyou sir," she replied.

"Now, if I'm not mistaken, you must be Daisy." Daisy nodded.

"I am Miss Daisy Saint-J," she said.

"Well Daisy," the preacher continued in friendly tones, "I have just been talking things through with your lovely mumma. You saw my advertisement on the church notice board?" Daisy nodded once more, the eagerness returning swiftly. Her feet played with each other, and she sat down on the gravestone.

"Careful of your piano," the preacher said and laughed. Daisy looked confused until she realised that he referred to her pretend piano. She returned his laughter.

"Will you teach me?" she asked.

"Why of course I will," the preacher laughed. "And I should ask: will you let me teach you?"

"I will," she replied, and jumped off the gravestone. Running inside, the preacher called after her. "Tomorrow night at six thirty?"

"Tomorrow night at six thirty sir," and ran back in to collect her mother.

At night, Daisy lay in her bed listening to the desert life almost outside her window. She heard the



occasional twitter of an owl, and imagined it hunting lizard, vying with the eagles. And further out, she pictured the vultures, awaiting the new day and a new supply of dead and dying animals. Vie or die. Fight or flight. And over these signal images, she could hear the ripples of euphonic harmony of a silent orchestra; the notes became the twinkling of stars, the colour became the milky way, silently watching over its own. Its own watching in the dark. You can only see me at night in the dark. I watch you ever; everonwards in protection of my darling children.

These thoughts drifted through the air, and as Daisy fell into her nightly trance, these thoughts flowed into her mind. The preacher collected these thoughts as he lay on his hard bed. His sacred record played on the gramophone. An old orchestra captured itself; charmed itself and wooed itself. A small smile trickled from thought to face, and Daisy entered her dreams.

In the desert plains away past those distant mountains, the Indians were in celebration; celebrating the hot sun that had recently shone, and the hot sun that would return once more soon. They knew in celebration came truth, and with this truth, the sun would return. They praised ahsonnutli, and blessed him for the universe, and all matter; they prayed that if their souls wandered, their turquoise man-woman would gather them up, and point the way to his majestic wealth of knowledge and experience. The colours swirled around as the memory of the flaming yellow lingered in the ashes of the fire, upon the moon, and the stars, like the sun had exploded beyond the horizon. The Indians watched and the preacher watched. The great swans blew music of the centuries, and the sweat streaming from the 12 holding the world swam into the rivers; flooding into the little colorado, into the gila, into the salt. Shooting stars swam across the sky, the spume of their wake glittering in the crimson sky. Through night some dreamt, some thought, some acted, and in the morning we all awoke.

At school the next day, Daisy daydreamt of the music; across the backyards she spied the top of the church, the dark red tiles covered with the thrown desert grit.

"Daisy Saint-J," Miss Whyss, her teacher rapped. "I do believe you're dreaming the day away!"

The girl next to Daisy nudged her. Daisy looked up with a start.

"Oh I'm sorry, miss," she stated.

"Now you pay attention, and answer this question: what are the ten commandments?"

"You don't need to feel so bad," the preacher assured the woman confessing. "Having dirty thoughts isn't a sin."

"But father," the woman replied, shocked, "I always been told they was."

"You been taught wrong," the preacher answered her. "You sound like an overanxious teenager. Do you and your husband enjoy sexual intercourse?"

He heard a throaty gasp from the other cubicle.

" Why, *Father!*" exclaimed Mrs. Rosedale. " I really don't think I should answer that question."

" Why not?"

" What occurs between me and my husband in our bedroom is private."

" Does god not watch over you constantly?" The woman fingered her rosary in agitation.

" But..."

" There are no buts here, ma'am. I am god's familiar, his human form. His vessel. Don't let people distort good words. Go home, and enjoy anything you enjoy. As the long as the intentions are positive pleasure, you have no need to fear god's wrath." He paused. Mrs. Rosedale sat silent. " Now go," he instructed. " Say ten Our Father's for your lying, and let it rest there."

" Thankyou, father, very good." And Mrs. Rosedale shuffled from her booth, and tottered down the main aisle.

The preacher listened to her footsteps clack away from him, their reverberations pounding outward curved as they spread through the church. The redolence of dust gathered, and the preacher withdrew his thoughts. His mind threw the shroud of memory across his thoughts, as other, more distant footsteps shivered across his contemplation. Through an unapproachable effluvium, cold and grey, the splattered mystical gravestones rose crooked and shaken. The gravestones strewn

like miniature ruins,  
like altars prepared for a ritual.  
Or like ships of the sky,  
ever ready for flight;  
some crumbled,  
like cities destroyed during war.

Selfobsessed wars raged in the near distance, the air lying heavy with a smoky blood smog, the occasional crack of rifles burning orange through the haze, muffled shouts and muffled screams as men went down. An explosion, and a nearby farmhouse reduced itself to rubble. A thousand deaths and a thousand rebirths; fatalistic resonance and the cultured breeding of the dark energies amassing sucking the fibres of positive thought. We can't fight negative with negative. We can't fight negative with negative. Listen to me, hear me, we cannot defeat negativity through negativity. Positive thought is our sole redemption; we should not allow ourselves to be hoodwinked by the elected distorting our humdrum reality and introducing the unelected the unallocated. Crucify me so that you shall have the truth, and the truth shall set you free. This cycle of condemnation shall continue until our self destruction or our self deconstruction; always and forever. force, force, force.

Ditatus deus, the preacher thought, chuckling wearily. god enriches. My thoughts fed by the ceaseless mechanics of the Ever.

The preacher crossed himself, and left the confessional. Genuflecting before the humble travesty nailed above the altar, the preacher traced a kosmik prayer across the large chamber.

The next day at six twenty-five, Daisy set off on the short journey to the church. Happy, she whistled a song through her eagerness. Her clear voice rose pure upwards, enriching the surrounding atmosphere. She took the outside line of the town, passing the graveyard. Her eyes rested on the tiring sun, and the breeze blew cool on her cheeks. As she cut across the field between graveyard and church, she spotted the lean figure of the preacher approaching out the darkness of street. She hailed him, and scurried towards him.

"Hello, Daisy," the preacher welcomed as Daisy breathed hard by. "A glorious evening, don't you think?"

"It's lovely out, father," she responded, gathering herself, and walking up the church path with him. The sun, as it finally decided to dive, flashed a brilliant white sheet across the gravestones, then retired. A nightbird cooed in the old ash tree, its soft vibrations kissing the airwaves.

"Such a sweet 'n gentle sound," observed the preacher. Daisy listened intently, nodding her head both in agreement and in rhythm to the bird's sigh.

"Yes it is, sir," she answered, pushing open the wooden church door. "

She held the door open for the preacher, who entered, and followed close behind him. Their footsteps swamped well upon the thick velvet carpet of the central aisle. Daisy watched the preacher stride timelessly in front, following at/in her own simple pace.

"Have you ever played a musical instrument, Daisy?" the preacher called behind.

"I have father; I played recorder in my junior high."

"Did you now," remarked the preacher. His eyes held an amused sparkle.

"Yes I did; I played in the orchestra too."

"And do you remember what pieces you played?"

They had reached the piano. The preacher sat on one side of the wide piano stool, Daisy on the other. She thought for a minute before answering him.

"I think it was mostly just hymns and stuff, but," and she reached into her memory once more. "I remember one piece had a name like...oh I can't remember," she half-cried in frustration. "I'm sure you played the other night at evening service."

The preacher reassured her, and hummed a few bars of emotional melody. Daisy's face lit up.

"That's it," she exclaimed happily. "Yes, I'm sure that's it."

"I'll tell you what Daisy," the preacher said, the smile of an idea now in his eyes, "I'll teach you that piece first. Watch where I put my hands."

His hands played C minor forte, middle C being the top note.

" Now you try," he told her, and gently placed her fingers on the ghosts of his. " Now push down hard, and feel the notes."

Daisy pushed down the notes of the chord, harder than the preacher had, and the tragic sound of that beginning chord wound itself into the surrounding fibres of the church. The preacher waited until the reverberations had died down, and nodded.

" Beautiful tone you have, Daisy." He turned and looked into her eyes. " Beautiful." She smiled.

" Now," the preacher said, amused once more, " we'll set about learning the rest shall we? By the way, do you read music Daisy?"

We leave those two to their piano lesson, for it would be boring to describe the intricacies of such a labouring passing of time, and our reward would be a scant knowledge, and useless information. So, we leave them, we walk back down the aisle of the church, perhaps regarding the fine and heavy scented candles, maybe following with our eyes, the stations of the cross. And we step outside the church, and feel the crisp late summer night air, smell autumn as it makes its way across to us. We cannot resist a glance at the fading red sky. Already, a few of the earlier stars are making their appearance known. Is that a planet we can see? I believe it is; Venus perhaps. Yes, it shines brightly tonight. We think about it as we pass through the little traditional graveyard, watching as a squirrel scampers skywards along the old ash tree.

And as we make our way along the dusty streets of Verde Valley, that tragic chord follows our route. Ah, here we are. We enter the sanctuary of home, and leave that tragic chord outside. The fire burns brightly, and has created a good heat for us in our absence. Making our way to the television, we settle down for a patient night of watching whatever starring whomever about whichever. Goodnight, see you in the morning.

## communion

" Peace be with you."

" And also with you."

The preacher accepted his eucharist from father thomas with a murmur, crossed himself, and rose from his rested knees. Father thomas continued along the snakeline of sinners replenishing their soul, and reached the white-clad figure of Daisy, and Mrs Saint-J, dressed in a pretty, floral dress. As an altar boy placed a round wafer of bread on her tongue, the preacher watched intently, observing the sour taste dissolving in Daisy's mouth. She crossed herself and rose, her eyes meeting his; he saw her eyes in a thin strip of shadow, her large doe pupils restless in their whites. His vision cleared and he saw the smile on her face. They walked together towards the rear of the church, and sat waiting for Mary Saint-J.

" Daisy," the preacher whispered, " why don't you play us all a hymn?"

Daisy blushed in embarrassment.

" But father," she argued, " I ain't nearly good enough!"

" Oh hush you!" the preacher laughed. " You're good enough. You know that tune I taught you?" and he hummed a snatch. Daisy nodded. " Well I wrote it down for you to play now. You can do it Daisy." He leant down into his cloth bag, and pulled out a few scraps of handwritten manuscript. Daisy reached out and felt the tattered manuscript in her downy hands. Soft light shadows fell from the peaks of creases, the ceaseless inkmarks of melody and harmony. Her eyes followed the notes upon their journey, an inner chanteuse leading Daisy through the scribbled piece. She read until the coda, and her eyes went back to the beginning, and read the preacher's dedication to her. She looked up at him, her eyes trying to express timeless emotion within immature framework.

" We can play together," the preacher suggested kindly. " I'll play the low and you can play high." He laughed once more, and she joined in.

The hymn that Mrs. Rosedale, previously mentioned parishioner, was tinkling with, ended. The line of eucharist seekers dried up, and father thomas moved onto a new chapter of his sermon. Time dragged by as Daisy and the preacher awaited the Go In Peace section. Finally, father thomas told us all to leave with clean conscience and pure spirit, and, like the end of a movie, the congregation scattered before the cast credits had barely begun rolling.

" Now don't you go wandering too far Daisy," Mary Saint-J said as she passed Daisy in the aisle. " Me 'nd the other woman'll just be outside discussing town news." She released a spirited grinwink, and Daisy replied with her own funny face.

" Now don't you go worrying Mrs, Saint-J," the preacher rejoined, " I'll make sure Daisy remains the paragon of virtue!" Mary shook her head in amusement as her group of female parish members hustled her towards the clear warm day outwith. When they were alone, the preacher crossed himself, genuflected beside his pew, and escorted Daisy towards the altar where father thomas busied himself with the task of candle snuffing.

He turned as the approaching footsteps, smiled in cordial greeting.

" Fine sermon, father thomas," the preacher hailed with habitual compliment.

" Thankyou, father, thankyou." He snuffed a thick roman candle, releasing a rich and sweet smell.

" I wonder, father thomas," began the preacher. " ...I wonder if it is possible for Daisy to play the congregation a piece on the piano at this evening's sermon. Something spiritual naturally. I wonder if that's at all possible?"

father thomas broke into a broad beam of a smile, assenting with active pleasure, taking Daisy's arm in affection.

" Why of course, father! Of course!" He paused a couple of seconds. " What piece did you have in mind for her?"

" I thought Schubert's Ave Maria, father."

" An excellent choice." father thomas nodded his head in approval.

" I myself shall accompany her, soothe any nervousness she feels."

" Excellent father."

" Very good. May we practice during the afternoon?"

" Naturally," obsequiously. " I have to leave Verde Valley for the afternoon, so you shall have the free roam of the church."

father thomas excused himself, and went to his vestry to change from his garments. The preacher turned to Daisy.

" You'd better get permission from your mother, Daisy."

" I'll run outside and ask her now," came her answer.

She skipped across the polished floorboards, her soft tread echoing like rippling stones. Moments later, Mary Saint-J's head appeared from behind the open doors far away, and called out to the preacher.

" I can't wait 'til this evening preacher. You sure she can do it?"

" I'll teach her some this afternoon, Mrs. Saint-J," he assuaged.

" Great! See you later father."

" Yes, yes," he quietly replied, and went to the piano and waited for Daisy.

Sweet tones crept through the church hall; washing over the ikons lining the arched walls, cleansing the saintly statuettes. The preacher sat patiently beside Daisy as she picked her way through the piece.

" Good," he murmured in appreciation. " You've learnt so quickly, and with such delicate emotions."

Daisy blushed at the compliment. " Thankyou father," she finally spoke.

" Now, let me join in." He placed his left hand at the lower register of the piano keyboard, and began playing a double-bass part. " And please, don't call me 'father', nor 'preacher.' You call me Jakob."

" Okay," Daisy mumbled, deliberately avoiding using the preacher's name or title.

They played the remainder of the piece in silence, and even after the last resonance of the last chord had drifted and blurred to the horizon, they allowed the silence to speak to them. Finally, Jakob turned to her.

" Daisy, may I ask you a question?"

" Of course you can father Jakob," she answered. " What is it?"

" When you pray, Daisy, when you close your eyes, can you see Our Father?"

Daisy took some time to ponder the question. She nodded.

" I guess I do, Father Jakob."

" Good." He paused before resuming his questions.

" And when you beg forgiveness, or seek the favour of assistance, do you hear the voice of Our Father? Please, take some time to think."

And again, Daisy dwelt in the silence of contemplation.

" I don't know. I think sometimes I do, but I can't be sure. Maybe it's only me."

The preacher gave a knowing laugh.

" A very good answer, Daisy. One that has inspired generations of religious and spiritual thinkers." He shifted slightly on the broad piano stool, gaining comfort.

" Have you heard the expression that the eyes are the windows to the soul?"

" I think so, yes. In my English class I think."

" Yes, most probably. Now I want you to look into my eyes. Look into them for half a minute, then close yours and begin praying. Then tell me what happens. Tell me what you see."

Daisy gazed intently into Father Jakob's eyes, seeking an answer to all her unasked quest(ion)s. As she slipped into an almost entranced state, her eyes misted over and her blue pupils began losing their already watered colour. Slowly, and without even noticing, her eyes drowsed and her eyelids met. When Jakob saw this, he pulled his eyes away and began playing the piece softly. He played through until the end, and diminuendo merged with ritardando, peacefully resting upon the final chord. As the music enlightened the church, a new light (unseen) lay upon the fibres of energy, stranded in the fabric. Daisy, in her state of being, became transported through the filament of the church, her thought-energy becoming one with the church. Unseen, the Universe seeped through the pores of her mind, filling her with the positivity needed to sustain hope and furtherance. d a i s y d a i

s y is destroyed and all who sailed in her are no more. The Universe shook through her with goliath bolts of electric current. Jakob clenched her small delicate hands in his own, channelling the current as it flowed unlimited in its full might.

" We are here, my sweet," he whispered, " we are ready to be communicated with. Our communion begins with the death of the old Self. The mercy of Universe is flowing through us trance and trance and the neverebbing of the forward intensity guides us through the dangers of the Unknowing. They in their ignorance will strike but we are prepared to meet them at the Gates of Realities."

The church, in the reality one above robotic, shone neon in its brilliance; a proclamation sent forth to those who dwelt above. All who knew: saw. All who saw: knew.

As the chemicals in Daisy's mind mingled with the makeup of the nonexistence, the white light pervaded her body so that she, like the church itself, shone neon. As Father Jakob clutched her hand, he felt the immense vibration rising from within her body, trembling a tidal wave through his hands and up through his essence. After some time, the moment passed.

" Wake, my pretty virgin," he traced quietly to her sleeping overconsciousness.

Gradually, like the fluttering of a dying butterfly, Daisy's eyelids opened, and her eyes gazed into his.

" Father Jakob," she quivered, " what happened to me?"

The preacher delicately slowly withdrew his hands, in tenderness.

" When you looked into my soul, Daisy, tell me what you saw," he coaxed kindly. " What did you see?"

Daisy took a few moments to collect her thoughts before answering.

" I saw the Universe, Father Jakob." She broke into a laugh bordering quietly on the hysterical. " Father, I saw the Universe and everything in it. I know!" she exclaimed. " It was amazing."

Father Jakob smiled at her, a quietening smile, a calming controlled smile.

" That's right Daisy," he said gently. " I knew that you would understand the Vision. I had complete faith in you." He patted her , and tilted his gaunt head towards her smooth. With no preparatories, he slowly kissed her upon the lips.

" We are here Daisy," he spoke into her. " We are here. We have arrived. In ancient times your vision would have been metaphorical and featuring angels. No need for such hush hush these enlightened times in the distances of our allbeing."

Once more, he brushed his lips on hers, and she allowed his hands to reach out to her body, slowly moving like a lioness in the grass.

" d a i s y."

He unbuttoned the few buttons on the front of her floral dress. Reaching around his neck, he pulled his crucifix off, and placed it upon her pale breasts.



Pushing it gently so as to make a light impression, his hand came into contact. The soft skin yielded as he pushed his crucifix slightly harder. She tilted her head forward to kiss him.

"Ditāt Deus," Father Jakob proclaimed almost silently. "Ditāt Deus." He urged her against the piano top, now both hands on his crucifix. They slunk to the floor, sliding towards the pews. As they glided across the well polished wooden floor, Father Jakob unfurled her dress, fully revealing both breasts. Suckling them, they disappeared unto the first row of pews. Knocking against them, a collection of dusty red-leaved bibles tumbled in slow-mo, hitting the air. They mounted the leather knee-rests, sliding above the friction of a thousand worshipping knees.

Reaching the end of the row, Father Jakob slipped Daisy fully out of her pretty dress. In only her virginal white panties, they moved lizard-like into the side chapel devoted to the grace of the Virgin Mary. The candles lit themselves throwing a glorious glow across the body of two. An unfelt wind billowed Father Jakob's black robe. Slipping his fingers beneath her panties, he grazed the burgeoning hairs, whispering Hail Mary full of grace. The blue and white statuette of the abstract virgin.

Daisy pushed her hips forward and his fingers slipped naturally inside. He lay her down beneath the rack of iridescent candles, opened her and fucked her.

## PART TWO

### Introduzione

The kitchen door of the Saint-J's opened, and Daisy poked her head around.

"Mumma!" she called out.

"Right here," called Mary Saint-J from the lounge. Daisy grabbed an apple and ran through the house.

"How did it go?" asked her mother, looking up from a thick book she had been reading.

"It was great, mumma," enthused her daughter, smiling broadly and childishly.

"I gotta say," her mother said, "you look bright as a star. You got happy cheeks."

"I do?" asked Daisy, and laughed in the same childish manner as before.

"Think you're ready for tonight?" asked Mary Saint-J with a twinkle in her eye.

"Oh I am," exclaimed Daisy, hugging her mother. She jumped up.

"Come on mumma, let's go take a walk into town." Her mother laughed as daughter pulled her up from the chair.

"Okay, okay," she chuckled, "Come on, let's go."

The preacher gathered up his black robe and snuffed the candles one by one. As he moved between them, his lips murmured a soft prayer to the universe. A soft gush of wind flowed from his clothes, flickering the licking flames as they died. The statuette of Mary gazed on in approval as he passed her by; her little side-chamber exuded a warmth impregnating the surrounding area, and Jakob enjoyed being the midst of it. He glanced up at her and smiled. "Bless you, mother of man," he praised her.

He heard father thomas entering from a side door, and moved into the main chamber of the church to greet him.

"Pleasant trip, father?" he asked. father thomas looked up, caught unaware that he was not alone.

"Yes thankyou Father Chimes," he replied. "And you?"

"A most successful piano lesson, thankyou." He smiled. "Daisy will be excellent tonight, I can tell."

"Great. I can't wait to here her play. And." He added, "I heard a few of the woman looking forward to it too. It'll be a minor occasion for sure." He laughed softly, and excused himself. Jakob left the church, and made his way to his lodgings.

## a star is born every day

The winter came down beautiful but hard in Verde Valley. Frost shone upon the hard desert, and animal refusing to hibernate found itself cast into a cold friendless arena. The cactus and yucca entertained themselves with charming lustre, seeming to celebrate the christmas feeling. The people in Verde Valley had begun hoisting fir trees, scattering tinsel and baubles across them. Main street bright with decorations, the settling of the crisp and surreal atmosphere of the forthcoming celebrations.

Daisy played carols on the piano, especially Away In A Manger, which she would play two or three times through at a time. Her mother would hum along with her as she busied herself. Often, Jakob would drop in for dinner, and the three would pass the evening together; sitting on the porch talking, playing cards. This winter's morning, he dropped in early, carrying a few gift-wrapped packages, evidence that he, like everybody else in this small town, had fallen under the spell of the season.

Blowing out frosty breath clouds, he banged the outer porch door, shouting out hello to Daisy and her mother.

"In here, Jakob," called out Mary from the front room. Father Jakob went through to the front room.

"Good morning, ladies. And how are you both?"

Daisy stopped playing a carol, and turned smiling to Jakob.

"Morning Jakob," she welcomed. "Are those for us?" she continued, having spotted the packages.

"Maybe yes maybe no; you'll have to wait until the 25<sup>th</sup> to find out! Now play!"

Daisy continued with the piece, her feet tapping against the wooded bottom of the piano.

"How's the baby?" Jakob quietly asked Mary Saint-J. She smiled confidently, reassuring the preacher.

"The baby's just fine Jakob. Just fine." Jakob nodded his head in contentment.

"Great," he murmured.

"And how's the father?"

"Oh, he's coping pretty good with it all"

"If he would stop worrying for a second," Mary admonished positively, causing Jakob to laugh self-deprecating.

"You're a hundred percent right Mary! A hundred percent."

"Well, Jake, you just stop your worrying and help me bake my mince pies." She patted him affably on his arm, and left the room. Jakob leant down and kissed Daisy on the cheek. Flinging her arms around him, pulling him close, she returned the kiss and stroked the nape of his neck. Relinquishing for a few seconds, he gently placed her hands back onto the ivory keyboard, and kissed her

ear. He left the room, and Daisy continued playing her christmas carols.

The time had come for the church congregation to be told of Daisy's pregnancy. Although Jakob had proposed that Daisy and her mother stay at home to avoid the kneejerk reactions of the parishioners, Daisy determined to see their immediate judgement of her. It was agreed that Jakob would inform father thomas before the morning sermon, and that Father Jakob himself would deliver the shock from the pulpit.

Jakob was interested to see how father thomas would react to this most controversial of information. He would use it as an approximate stick of judgement, naturally diminishing reason by fifty percent to account for the nonintelligence of the congregation.

At eight o'clock on sunday morning, he rose from his bed in the Saint-J's house and went down to the kitchen to brew a strengthening cup of tea. As he watched the vibrations of steam dispersing from the kettle, he slipped into daydream, oblivious to the physicality of the welcome kitchen.

The kettle clicked automatically as the water within reached boiling point. He felt a warm hand on his shoulder, and looked around to see Mary Saint-J smiling sympathetically at him.

"Scared?" she asked, with gentle rhetoric. Jakob emitted a low laugh.

"Almost," he replied.

"Don't worry, I doubt there'll be a lynching." Jakob smiled to see Mary retaining a good humour.

"I'm still not sure about not naming the Father," he said. "I think we should be entirely open with the congregation."

Mary shook her head half-violently.

"No!" she exclaimed. "If you did that I wouldn't be so confident about no lynchings!"

"I know, Mary, but still...oh I guess you know them better than I do,"

"You bet I do, Jake. We'll tell them, and we'll probably have to move to a new town."

She sat down beside him, and they lapsed into a minute or so of silence, each contemplating the same thought, each trying to envision a solution to the affair. The solution suggested by Mary haunted them both, weighing heavy and inevitable upon their collective brow.

"...you're right Mary; we'll tell them she's pregnant, they'll demand to find out who the Father, and we'll all move on. But," his tone brightened, "as long as we remain firm and positive, when we reach our next destination, everything will be fine."

They heard footsteps on the stairs, and Daisy joined them. She went first to her mother and hugged her, then on to Father Jakob, who she kissed lightly on the lips.

" Talking about me?" she asked, equally lightly, her arm around Jakob.

" We are, snowdrop.

" You still telling the church?"

" Hmm-mm. Yes," replied Jakob.

" So we gonna be moving?"

" That's just we've been discussing," her mother revealed.

" I think we will be," Father Jakob added.

" Okay." She moved to the boiled kettle.

" Tea?" she asked.

Father Jakob stood behind the wooden pulpit, and gazed down at the assembled congregation before him. He glanced right and observed the anxious, almost terrified expression adorning father thomas' face. He glanced towards the back of the church and saw the two female Saint-J's, both remaining remarkably placid in the face of impending outburst.

" I have, today, some news to impart to you as we gather this day." Again he moved his head slightly to watch the fidgeting figure of father thomas.

" It concerns a young member of this congregation, Miss Daisy Saint-J." As expected, all heads turned towards the mother and daughter at the back pew.

" If I could retain your attention," Father Jakob called out. His powerful tone of voice ensured that their heads straightened and again faced him.

" Now, when I tell you this news I expect you to think about it, ponder it for a few minutes before making any judgements." He saw their appetites whetting, their thoughts sharpen with their preguesses at the soon-to-be bombshell, for they had no doubt that a bombshell was forthcoming.

Father Jakob sensed that a few of the congregation had correctly guessed the news. Thus resolved, he pushed with no more hesitation.

" Daisy...has fallen pregnant," a crescendo murmur, " and is due to give birth before the new year." The murmur flooded the harmonies of the church, ranking against the neutrality normally existing within the architecture.

" If you could remain silent and calm and thoughtful. After all, this is a building designed for thought, is it not?" The congregation disagreed, and the murmuring continued swelling. Distinct remarks could be heard floating above the general hum like scum on a pond.

Father Jakob gazed down on the assembly, feeling an anger mopping his stomach. He climbed down from the pulpit and went to stand with father thomas.

" Well father thomas, that went about as well as I expected."

" Yes," replied the quivering father thomas, " it didn't...go down...at all well."

People had begun looking at the Saint-J's in an unfriendly manner, a fact that did not escape the attention of Father Jakob.

" I'm going to Daisy and her mother," he informed father thomas, " to comfort them."

He walked down and away from the altar, striding down the aisle towards his distressed. As he sat down between them, a person sitting immediately in front of them, turned around asking, " Who's the father?"

Father Jakob, expecting this question much earlier, made no answer. It surprised him somewhat that the question had not been asked sooner.

" I'm afraid that I cannot tell you that; it is between myself, Daisy, and her mother."

" So the father doesn't know?" came a suspicious voice.

" Sorry; and the father. That is all."

" Oh come on, Father Jakob," came another curious and irate voice, " you've told us that she's pregnant, but you won't tell us who the father is..."

" That's correct. Now," he turned to Daisy and Mary, " come on, let's go."

They stood up and began making their way across the pew. The parishioners gawked at them as they passed. Daisy's face reddened, and Father Jakob held her arm supportively as they flowed into the aisle and out of the church doors. They rocked across the small graveyard, past the ancient weeping willow, and the shapes and forms of gravestones. They could hear people inside sniding and deciding whether or not to follow.

" Let them snipe," assured Father Jakob as they made their way home.

Although she had just experienced her first big dose of trauma, Daisy had remained in good spirit, or as close to good spirit as she could remain. She lapsed into the occasional introsilence, musing on the faces turning with their eyes steaming; pseudo-shocked expressions stuck upon their sour faces. She heard the creaking of the red-leather lining of the wooden pews. When these images faded in their haunting, she would join in the conversations between her mother and Father Jakob.

They sat discussing the immediate future; would they stay in Verde Valley, or would they essentially flee from this backwater town - let it fall asleep again, rippling every ten years or so as a scandal erupted and the guilty parties would be expunged.

When they thought Daisy's lapses into absorption had quietened in frequency and velocity, they asked her for her opinion.

" You know, when I was thinking, all I could see in my head were the people staring at me; they looked so bad to me; I don't know if I can stay and be looked at them no more..."

Both Mary and Father Jakob reassured her, feeling that the decision was quietly deciding itself. As it did, they lapsed into a silence enabling the decision to think clearly. They had been in this state of self-solitude for maybe five minutes when a knock came from the back porch. father thomas entered.

" You've got to come quick - some of the men reckon the father of the kid is Billy Myers; they've got him outside the church. You better go and tell them if he's the father or not."

" I'll go," Father Jakob said. " You two stay. I'll be back in a half hour." He turned his attention to father thomas. " Go outside and I'll catch up in a few seconds."

As father thomas left, Jakob spoke to the two women. " Well I guess the decision's been made. You wanna start packing?"

## transliterated companion of all

As the mother and daughter trod wearily upstairs to pack, the priest and preacher made their way towards the church.

"Why'd they pick on him?" asked Father Jakob as they strode swiftly towards their destination.

"I don't know," replied father thomas, seemingly in thought. "He *is* kind of rebellious."

"Oh," said the preacher, almost scornful.

father thomas reddened as the silence became tense. Finally, he spoke.

"I know."

They reached the church in silence; a silence disrupted by the commotion occurring within the boundaries of the churchyard. A ring had assembled itself around the teenager Billy Myers, glaring accusations being aimed at him. His face had reddened and sweated as he defended himself vehemently. The preacher approached the group, and immediately they turned to him, re-aiming their opinions and questions.

"Is it him?" they asked frankly, almost singular in voice like a dense harmonic tongue.

"No," the preacher replied in his minimalist fashion. he turned to leave, for he retained no desire to communicate with the herd confronting.

"Wait," they commanded. "You can't say that and just leave. You've got to tell us who the father is. Maybe it *is* him; maybe you're protecting him Father."

Father Jakob rounded angrily on them.

"I tell no lies. Do you not trust my word? It is not my nature to provide gossip, nor to feed meat to the wolves." Again he turned to go. The crowd, momentarily dumb from his diatribe, gaped at his rippling anger, their blank faces almost having a thought etched painful on their combined face. The father heard the rabble begin once again as he strode from the graveyard, but paid no heed to their whining.

father thomas began scrambling behind him, but the preacher, his gaze holding the horizon, commanded him to return to his flock.

As Father Jakob approached the back porch, two anxious faces peeked out, searching for the flaws in his face. He grazed them with an encouraging smile, and the porch door swung open. He took Daisy Saint-J, holding her thoughtfully within his muscular arms.

"Don't you worry, Snowdrop," he assured her. "We're leaving now, and there ain't nobody to stop us going."

She peered upwards at him, reassured, and her mother placed her hand tenderly upon her forehead.

"You packed?" Jakob asked her. She nodded.

"Then let's go. We may as well leave straight away. Yeh?" She nodded assent, and they collected their



belongings, and packed them away within the trunk of the green-trimmed brown estate.

As they wished their home goodbye, the fluffed up clouds overhead withered into cirrus, and seemed to swoon into vapour. The blue, almost opaque, sky swam heavenwards, and stars appeared through the pinpoints of the draining atmosphere. The estate skidded ochre dirt behind, and within a minute, the small town of Verde Valley, Arizona, had twinkled out of their existence. Now, only the open flat tarmac befriended them on their journey towards an acceptance they shouldn't need.

The outward appearance of the travellers condemned them to an aspiration that had been forced upon them before birth. They had to conform to themselves, even if they fought. Even if they fought, they were doomed to be entrapped until death prised them from - their selves - and they were free once more to roam the plains of nonexistence until once again settling upon the hearth rug of time and being. Now under the piercing yellow of sunshine and above the solidity travelling crust beneath them they roamed their cage and attempted to examine corners that they had yet to explore. The radio flourished florid with its innocent sounds of rock and roll; innocent obsessed songs of the acute pain of being. The whistling of the wind as it swirled and gushed surround them abounding rich texture of the glass operas that fulfil the promise sought each day by each individual; the gambles as they leave the residual thoughts inside and self deny; like a tragic symphonious melody combining the ethereal with gravity. Grave. The straightness of the road, like the straightness of most people's existence - so straight that however fast you are going, you appear to yourself like a dawdler left behind; so unaware that you are hurtling through time, speeding faster and faster toward the impending punishment for nonconcentration. But that speed is required for the penetration at the journey's end, to break through the paper-thin barriers that are intended to break our linear fall; the parachute of a drag racer.

The landmarks placed inert at intervals of our lifetime; a judge to warn us that we are travelling too fast, the occasional herd of cattle chewing ruminating on the cud. Such an existence! The clouds fluttered obtuse with their shapes shifting - a swinging medallion in glorious three dimensions, and attention held as a squadron of empty bombers explode in the air as they trade existence with that swinging medallion in the sky. The echoing bark of a rancher's dog, all bass no treble. The rickety fence that guards the herd, shackled in the memory like the gang of thieves glaring at you as you pass. Daisy Saint-J, a self-embracing bundle in the back seat, gazed with no commitment at the clouds as they amused her with their easy contortion, the heavy echo of the music inspiring her with happy and unhurried languid thoughts. " I keep thinking...hoping...and praying..." Jakob Chimes, fingers tapping to the familiar beat pervasive, stared at the expanse of almost monogrammatical scenery,

and his mind imagined scenes to fill the supposed blankness. Mary sat in the passenger side, lost in her own memories of the music describing, arriving at the image of her dead husband. Tears of infinite sadness welled within her as her memory confronted her with the image of him dying so young as she held him, trying to pass her life force to him; hoping then crying with desperation and futility. She felt like howling; to express the anger and grief that condemned her - she wanted to erupt with that infinite energy hurt that needed to be released, like striking oil, she wanted her black thoughts to darken the skies. Jakob pulled the estate to a gliding stop. "Come on, let's stretch awhile."

They three left the estate, kicking up dust.

Daisy comforted her mother, sliding arm between arm.

"What's the matter mumma?"

Mary felt the surge of tension releasing itself unexposed.

"I was just thinking..."

"About daddy?" Mary nodded, wet tears remaining to keep guard of her emotions. Daisy turned to Jakob.

"Jake, why'n't you tell mumma it's alright, that daddy's everywhere right now, watching us..."

"let's go'n sit on that grass there, and we can talk about it."

They sat themselves on the dry grass, the two women flanking Jakob. He swept an arm around each of them, pulling them into him.

"When we die," he began, "we just stop becoming human beings, that's all." He paused, then continued on. "We leave all our human characteristics behind to rot, our personality, the prejudice and greed we accumulated during our lifetime. All that, we leave where it belongs - dead and buried in the ground. But the pure consciousness we entered this world with, well, that we take."

"So what's the point in living?" asked Daisy.

"Exactly!" enthused Jakob. "Why do we exist as humans?" Again he paused, as if expecting to be supplied with the answer.

"We exist," he finally said, "to experience. To gather information...but this human life we live is only one single part of our whole Existence - like one single cell compared to an entire human body. Each life we have leads on from the last, bonding and interacting with each other life we've lived. And the future is defined. The future is just the evolution of the present; we can guess at what is in the future, we can even feel pretty confident that we know what the future holds, but we can't be a hundred percent sure because evolution presents that tricky element of chance. We are united at death, united and remerged into the mass of the universe to Be at a higher expansion..."

"So daddy ain't looking down on me?" asked Daisy in soft bewilderment.

"He is, but he's not your daddy any more."

" Who is he?"

" He's the extension of everybody's spirit. He's all around and within."

" Like God?" asked Mary.

" Yes, except there is no God. We are all what we call 'God'. We contain our spirit, can it like beans, and death is the tin opener."

The three of them burst into laughter at this comparison, repeating the line to each other, allowing it to be savoured.

Father Jakob became suddenly serious.

" We still have a problem," he told the two women.

" What are we going to do? Where are we going? When we will arrive, and more importantly, will we know when we've arrived."

Daisy and her mother looked at him. They had a slight confusement etched upon their faces. They, like Jakob, did not know the answers to his questions.

" I guess we just keep driving until we reach wherever. Maybe we can go and see the Grand Canyon or something. That'll be nice. I've only seen it the once; and I was so young back then that I never really appreciated the beauty of the place."

The three of them smiled at the suggestion.

" Believe it or not, but I've never seen the Grand Canyon," Jakob told them. " I've heard plenty about it, but hell, I've never seen it. Except in postcards and the like of course."

" Well we're agreed then," said Mary, " the Grand Canyon it is."

They made their way from the grassy patch beside the road, and sat back inside the trusty station wagon. Father Jakob gunned the engine, and they sped off into the endless yellow wilderness of the Arizona desert, having gained some purpose in their seemingly seamless journey to oblivion.

" We all happy?" Jakob shouted above the roar of the old engine. " I hope so," he added.

The dust kicked up behind the station wagon as it cruised straight ahead, the road, tarmac barely present, cut through the Arizona plain dissecting the sunny day like the horizon cuts perception.

Presently they approached the outskirts of a small rural town; they stopped to eat in a diner similar to any diner in the south.

The diner held only a handful of customers; truckers mostly, though it appeared to Jakob and the Saint-Js that a couple of the men there were regulars. They sat down in a booth and waited for the waitress to serve them. A minute later she came over.

" Afternoons," she drawled. " 'c'n I get ya?"

They made their order and waited patiently. Daisy's attention became drawn by the television screen.

" Look! There's Mrs Catchall...and there's Mrs Grandagnon! What're they doin' on the teevee?"

A sinking feeling infiltrated Jakob, and he asked the waitress to turn the volume up. An amused reporter was now positioned on the screen.

"...and these locals are completely up in arms about the runaway preacher who, along with a mother and her fifteen year old pregnant daughter, are believed to have stolen thousands of pounds from the local Verde Valley church. As you heard the local pastor father thomas explaining, the preacher, Father Jakob Chimes, moved into town less than one year ago, and there is growing concern that he might well be the father of the unborn that little Daisy Saint-J is holding."

"father thomas," murmured Jakob beneath his breath.  
"father thomas."

"A state-wide bulletin has been issued to troopers; this picture of Mary and Daisy Saint-J was taken some four years ago...unfortunately no photographs of Jakob Chimes have been traced. Further updates throughout the day. Back to you, Tom."

The three sat stunned, blown away.

"It has to be father thomas," Jakob expressed.  
"The perfect opportunity for him to disguise his own disgrace. Damn that man."

"This is terrible," was all Mary could say, whilst Daisy sat glumly looking at the teevee set.

"What'll we do?" she finally asked.

"Who knows Daisy," replied Jakob. "Who knows."

"We might as well keep heading north towards the state line," Mary spoke up.

"Keep heading for the Canyon?" asked Daisy.

"I guess we might as well," answered Jakob.  
"Anyway, let's get out of here. I noticed a grocery store across the street; I'll get some things while you two go on to the wagon. I'll only be a couple of minutes," he added.

The three left, Jakob separating as suggested. Thoughts lay heavy on his brow, and he began to be afflicted by a sensation that he had not felt for many years now, namely paranoia. Even when, or if, state troopers caught them and discovered they were without such a large sum of money, the seeds of condemnation were sewn, and Jakob knew that it would be nearly impossible to clear their names. They could only hope to reach some northern state where they would probably be safe; Washington maybe, although Jakob detested the cold weather up there. Maybe they could merge undetected in California; so many people in the city there. Who knows, he thought in desperation, who knows.

They sped through the barren desert state heading north, their pickup trailing ochre dirt behind them. A group of tense figures sat within the cab, their bodies hunched and grim-set. Another group huddled together on the open back, rifles leaning between their knees. In the midst of this grizzled bunch sat the trim lean figure of father thomas, an anxious expression washed through his features. The group remained mainly silent, thoughts of a dark nature penetrating their minds, thoughts of vengeance and judgement. Only father thomas had thoughts of a god within his mind, and then only through distorted imagery and fox-like connivance. They listened to news

reports humming quietly from the radio, ears alert and waiting for mention of the fugitives. As the truck gained momentum, so the blood coursing through their bodies seemed to accumulate, occasionally like bursting through their thought bubbles. "Son of a bitch," one would occasionally mutter. "That fucker's gonna get fucked," also seething wriggling from the dry lips of another. As the pickup dwindled into the distant arid hills, a stale wind blew through the creatures of the desert.

father thomas, although enrobed in the riches of religion, dwelt not above the poverty of jealousy. His usually easy nature had been somehow fundamentally challenged since Father Jakob had arrived in his small town and taken control; father thomas, who until then had been running his parish essentially on automatic pilot, had been forced to face the fact that his character was neither special nor especially positive. father thomas was, had been, and ever will be the same as the majority of humans - trivial and unaware of his unintelligence until being confronted with a portion of the truth. In this case the truth came in the shape of Father Jakob Chimes.

And so father thomas had dwelt in his rooms in dark thought and darker nights had nestled upon his brow; deep nights where his shallowness prevailed. He had spent his lifetime forcing himself to be profound, but his concentration had slipped and his true nature arose; and now he found himself shackled in the back of an old red pickup truck trading profanities with the townsmen, aware of his truth and unrepentant of his lies.

"Cigarette?" offered the gnarled mouth of his neighbour.

"Thanks," he mumbled. Nat King Cole came across the air waves, this is the end of a beautiful friendship, "turn that over there," shouted to the driver.

The disappearing road neared its end, and the three travellers noticed the changing scenery as the last hope of greenery gave way to ceaseless energy of rattlesnake country. Boulders strew across the gentle and the sharper slopes. A rare sign pointed the way to the grand canyon. This renewed their optimism and the echoing landscape augmented their rising hope.

"Almost there," spoke Jakob.

"What'll we do when we get there?" asked Daisy.

"Who knows, maybe the canyon'll provide some answers." Jakob paused. "I hope so," he added.

The huge canyon loomed ahead, splendid in its many shades and sinews. The imagination became the catalyst of everlasting life and nature as the innate life-form slumbered. Jakob pulled the car to a stop, and leapt out of the station wagon with the energy provided by the wondrous sight.

"Land of heart's desire, where beauty has no ebb, decay no flood, but joy is wisdom, time an endless song," he murmured to himself, his eternal soul enraptured with the canyon before his eyes. Daisy stepped out beside him, wrapping her arm around him as she did.

" I never seen such beauty," she whispered to him, embracing him closer.

" No," he answered simply, " never saw anything so beautiful."

They gazed at the expansive freedom calling out to meet them, and felt themselves giddy with the purest devotion for each other and for life. Nature and its unifying forces had unshackled them of the cares and worries inflicted upon them in recent days. They felt renewed and invigorated, ready to face capture or death or freedom; whichever they ordained for themselves. No need to feel hungry for physical entitlement; no need to crave for whatever else their eyes would ever see. Their memories had engraved the masterpiece. They kissed and returned to the wagon.

The old rusty pickup truck passed the old wooden sign scrawled generations before:

T H E   G R A N D   C A N Y O N  
*50 miles*

" He told me once how he'd never seen the canyon before," father thomas informed his companions.

" You better be right, thomas, or we'll be huntin you 'stead of that rattler," comforted the powerful figure of Abraham Feldstone. The others laughed derisively at father thomas, who suddenly realised how lonely the life of a traitor can be. Self pity invaded his barren soul; a flash of comforted warmed him: any kind of soul-filler made him feel better than living off an empty soul. His thoughts began whirling as in yellow desperation he tried to judge the situation; he felt sure that the family of three would head towards the canyon.

The new family of three mingled with the locals and travellers flocking the main tourist station on the east of the Grand Canyon. Gaudy tee-shirts and tacky gifts showered themselves at them like some surreal ballet, or a drug-like Disney trip Dancing Pink Elephants. A slight shiver of disappointment crossed Jakob's being as he gazed at the mental rape of the most beautiful sight he had seen. Men are vultures, despising and despised by nature. Deliberately racing towards their doom, they surround themselves with blankets of false comfort, be it the organised religion or the cult of money; they bring shame to their brains. Father Jakob swivelled and walked quickly in the opposite direction, head down so that he could not see, eyes communicating with the Universal.

" Jakob," called Daisy, standing beside a painted metal railing. " Come here 'nd see this beautiful view." She leant delicately over the railing, her eyes closed, an unconcerned smile glowing through her features.

She felt the everlasting breath flowing through her, and emitted an aura of benign peace across the echoed chamber of the grand canyon, like the thousand million whispers of an everlasting wheel spinning through time. She felt the kick of the star being within her, was aware

of the spiralling helix uncoiling within her, feeding off her mind like a spiritual umbilical cord.

"They're coming to get us," she murmured. Jakob slipped behind her.

"I know," he whispered to her ear. "They're closer and closer, and we've nowhere to run."

An orchestra of light awoke and spread through the gentle beginnings of an early dusk.

As they wrapped themselves closer to one another, they could hear the atoms vibrate, awaiting to take them homewards.

The engine of the rusty pick-up suddenly sprang out of nowhere, almost deliberately noisy. They could feel the headlights pinpointing them, arcing out a triumphant sneer as it topped the hill, could hear it coating downwards towards them.

"Almost here," he said softly, and kissed her cheek then her lips.

## dance of the tumblers

The two figures rose through the air like thrown ragdolls, arching gracefully and poised across the air. The grand canyon stretched beneath them like the map seen from an aeroplane window, ant-like in perception. And they reached the pinnacle of their rise, and so began their slow descent homewards, down daddy down mummy down baby. And as they fell their bodies rotated in a midair dance, their arms reaching out for one another, and it seemed that the camera had fallen to the floor, and captured this dancing couple horizontally, spiralling into dna, travelling somewhere else...somewhere else...down mummy...down daddy...down baby down.