

THE NOXIOUS AND THE DAEMON FLOWER Brund Massé

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Dim is a caffeine-ridden anarchist desperate for a way out of the Maze. Enters Aethel, a fearless nihilist, out for blood. Together within the Obscurantis Disorder, they wreak Chaos over Metropolis and seek to destroy everything the World has become.

A visionary work of rare beauty and gothic aesthetics, The Noxious and the Daemon Flower offers a horrifying new perspective on counter-cultural activism.

3rd Edition

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The Noxious and the Daemon Flower

Third Edition

By Bruno Massé, aka Raven

Cover photo by Candace Barbieri (Candylust.org)

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undead undead undead

Preludium

Schadenfreude

My life is only my life. Doubtless you will slay me, when I am done with my tale. But you cannot erase my pain, or stifle my yearning – or avoid the cost.

- Stephen R. Donaldson

November drapes me in dark vestments, now that the witching hour approaches there rise celestial patterns for mine eyes to see, solemn in the abysmal sky - the ivory scythe and the starflowers, grains of argent sand above the numb mechanical Maze where I now advance, fierce and insane, to enact my final jest.

Almost –

Footsteps soft and lithe as I make my way, rooftop upon rooftop... vying slowly, absently - shadow upon shadow leaping atop chimney, swinging from parapet like some malicious imp - winged and grinning - yes, and nervous, though I may have reached my own personal crest, my absolute triomphe and am not yet defeated.

A cruel wind blows

Tears fill my eyes, the autumn gale marring my flesh without relent whilst vengeance wanton screams my will – yes, it can not be stopped. Vengeance and loth for the one, so scathed and bleeding and charred she hath made me, wherefore have I risen forth to take what she has stolen from us. Retribution. I shall not recant. Yea, it sustains me still: I mustn't fail.

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The Maze doth not avail. Hist! Do you hear me, traitor? I am coming.

Stricken with the absolute bliss of my murderous urge, I gather my strength against the endless distance and hasten further into the unknown.

And so I fly as a crow of murder, concealed by night, tatters of raiment fluttering at my hind like raven feathers – and I leap, roll and start again, onward through countless obstacles towards a promised place and a promised time.

Oh, I am coming

And though that sickly orange lighting shrouds the Maze in omens of watchfulness, I know there can be no witness, no saviour, no helping hand, *she is despairingly alone*: locked away, 'twined in stasis, unaware that this night hath her appointed demise, long foretold but ignored by all. Cherisheth thy sleep then, traitor? Hearken! The way is unclear and there is no beacon to light my way, but *mine was always the darker road*.

Abyss reigns absolute whence I rise.

And here, *hither*! It stands brute and cold, this Maze, this labyrinth of sort – the awkward picture-imperfect metropolis for whom ere yester' eve I hath bled my very last droplet of humanity. Surrounded! Ineffable! Skyscrapers outline this luminous *château-fort* in every direction, bent over shapeless boulevards like the grey veins of some dead creature. But let there be no inch of a doubt, no inkling of a fucken afterthought: we are doomed and we are trapped and there is no probable way out.

Yet somehow, I must get through to her.

And here, wait, lo and behold! On a turning of ceiling and crusty pitch wall, the dwelling of the one revealed: this rigid, blunt building lost in a sea of selfsame constructions. Warped in the orange lighting it looms high over the slum streets and trash dumpsters, the broken-down cars, the traffic lights. And now it stands but a stone's throw from my position! Ah! I can see it in the distance: the old brick, the pinkish paint, yellow pinions, shanty frames, rusted railings – all there in good sooth – and I laugh, snarling at the moon sickle and stopping a while to recollect my wounded self before the final jump.

The taste of blood on my lips

All is still.

Panting heavily, trembling with glee, I rest my flesh upon a low dais, catching my breath for a minute's peace. Contemplating the horrid visage of the Maze – all around – I remember the reason I am here. Do you hear, traitor? The very fucken brutal *reason* I have come forth at last... though you know it not. For if vanity hath plagued your bitter darkness to a pure, bright sun, then I am the coming eclipse, and *you will answer to me*. But will you still be there? Won't you stay and meet me thence, you pathetic sot?

... sat and calm, now, pulse steady and muscles hale, I look into the moon for a tithe of wisdom. The Maze glowers disgust into the heavens but I contemplate the appointed hour, thoughts drifting past memories, fragments of being that still... haunt me.

Scents and images pursue me always. Understand: I can not forget. Perhaps this *is* the reason I have come, after all. Tales, moments, fragments. Remembrance seduces me, drives me in trance, yet it is hard to recollect, to articulate. Words never really did suffice. I am possessed.

What little amount of time do I still have? Oh, who will know? Who will hear? What can I still *spare*...

Yes, I'll say.

Yes, I remember. I remember it all! The desolate, cold frost of winter as it rimmed thick on the railings of my Scarlet Fae's dark lair – the endless nights of a scorching summer in lust, or the rustling of myriad garden leaves, turning to gold during the delightful season of decay... an eternity of revolt and absence. Daeva warned me about desiring new gods, yet the gifts sweet Aethel hath granted me cannot evade - can not surfeit... I must remember. And what? No wound have I not yet taken. So soft, so blithe. The taste of blood on my lips. The oath. The flames of the Black Star, and its promises to keep. Friend, do you remember?

She is to suffer

Oh... you see, I remember it all, hence am I afraid. Quite, most very fucken petrified! Ah! This, this you must understand first and foremost, for my tale spirals down such intertwined shadows as must be acknowledged the sheer... despicable *horror* I've so blatantly endured, so long. Yes, I'll say. Yes, I do remember.

But I'll ne'er evade the Labyrinth, the bleak stare behind the guards' gasmasks, or forget the betrayal that hath my hour of shame. Blest Aethel, wherefore doth thy absence crowneth me lastly? Love, their prisons become me. I am destitute of a demonic bloom, misery'd by ruling winter and iron chains so wrought to my accursed name; no, there can be no escape, either for myself or the traitor, but I'll stay content with circumventing the Maze one last night... oh yes!

Yes, yes I'll say. Yes, I can never forfeit the memory, or the umbral reality of what I have become. But you, you my friend, will remember also, and I will bequeath to thee the tales so hoarded through my darkest years.

Whispers, perhaps, and a little more.

Noxious unto the Maze

Some say I bite the hand that feeds -but to these disillusioned eyes 'tis sweet revenge to watch it bleed it has only fed me lies

- Martin Walkyier

I.

Absent, locked in a spell of impenetrable dusk, hours flittered along the perverse embrace of amnesia. Emptiness cradled me in its lap, transient, whiled from Life by unjust hands.

Trapped.

At last, a sharp pain woke me.... though it was already too late. Pulsing, the remains of a greater suffering throbbed from the back of my skull, across my neck and into my left shoulder, gnawing at my very muscles like a claw, sending wave after wave of anguish up and down my spine. Slowly, it sliced my spirit from repose and I sought to answer.

Damned and mindless, I lay sprawled on a cold floor like a ragged doll, thrown out, near-dislocated limbs all askew in improbable positions: bent and pulled and misused. Left temple swollen and blue, caked trickles of blood around my fingers where two nails had been scratched and torn. A sense of urgency hovered about my flesh yet I could not answer its plea.

Pain became thought, and thought became awareness, and awareness became certainty. *Trapped*. My senses rose to fling me into being... again. Was I broken, was I dead? I mean, who the fuck could have done this to me?

All around, flutters of remorse lingered: they were the stains of a brutal past. The air was recycled and rank and there was an odd sour smell to it, like old sweat or urine. Within it transpired the worries of myriad debilitated minds

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with *why's* and *how's* and *who's* - all to which I paid scant heed, considering my own burning interrogations. How long had I been unconscious? Still, silence answered me naught. The ages mocked with knowledge yet I could not recall could not decipher the cause, the reason, the *meaning*.

This place, I understood, must have been devised for contraption.

Shuddering, scum-crusted eyes gazed open to witness rigid iron bars locking me in, flinching at the sight of those humming, fluorescent tubes fixed in the ceiling. Recoiling in horror at such blinding atrocity, I yelped and winced and wailed:

"Oh, damn -"

But then, from out of nowhere, echoed a hoarse tongue, blurting gleefully:

"Well said, comrade."

No, no! Wait a minute! I though.

Where the fuck am I?

What the fuck is - oh, shit, fucken bloody fuck, fuck -

The voice sounded like some naked seraph hailing me from behind Heaven's gates, light-hearted and gay. It spoke to me like I was the first flower of Spring.

"Hey, it was about time you came to. I mean, I was just reminiscing about the nineteen-seventeen Ukrainian insurrection and I thought you could sort out one or two details for me."

No, wait! Who is this? Why, what... fuck!

Hopelessly, the voice continued.

" - admitting the low probability of a qualitatively intensive radical social upheaval based on a solid revolutionary and near-dogmatic belief system, in retrospect, a socialistic ideology of class-war, bourgeoisie, and *blah blah blah* - "

All Hell, I rasped. Then all of a sudden it hit me, and I could remember... shields and batons - no, wait, there were chants, yes, slogans that spelled something inaccurate - void of meaning - and so compelling, with these eyes everywhere, afraid, angry - and cameras, microphones, tin cans and wooden two-by-fours, and teargas - and mace, tasers, rocks,

clashes and spurs... row after row of fucken brutal paintstained riot pigs, with their fucken four-digit numbers and their right to assassinate -

Yet as I recalled, my cellmate went on, oblivious.

"Blah blah - all so boring, really, but considering the determining essence of violence, all binding and tragic and pathetic, just wait, I mean, hear this: imagine *inanimate* violence, like walls, basements, and jails - like this very lovely space of confinement we seem to have been spewed into - as a separate, cohesive *entity*, I mean... comrade, I'd like your appreciations on organic revolt and, well basically, my question is: what possible harm can you cause wielding a steel pipe when there's hundreds of Nazis microwaving your brains out with their sort of multimillion credit kafkaian deathrays?"

He paused a while, still in shock.

... yeah, it was all coming back to me then, my own mental haze clearing up, I could recall in vision all rumbling: the barricades, the spray paint, projectiles and police trucks... and helicopters, too, and walls lashed with graffiti whilst megaphones screamed insanity - complete fucken *chaos* 'til I found myself lost and anxious, looking for my affinity group and couldn't... they weren't there anymore. And I twirled on and again until I felt a trashing headache, some inhuman pulsing whistle, and then I lost it completely. This... wave of force blunted me unconscious like some sledgehammer rammed into my skull. And my own flag was lost. What happened?

But Nickel kept on his discourse.

"I mean, I'd just like your input on the potential of biological warfare in the situation of a post-modern, totalitarian, Police-State New World Order. Any thoughts, Dim?"

Then he added : "Or should we keep this for some other time? I guess they could be *listening to us.*"

Listening to us? Ah, now I could remember. Alright. I guess I knew that noisy fellow. Knew him, yes, and no. You see, you meet lots of people on the Helter-Skelter but you never really get to *know* them per say. But that's another tale,

isn't it? As for Nickel, you could say I trusted him. You could also say he bugged the hell out of me. But he was a familiar face, and that was enough.

Nickel. Maybe I did know him after all.

He was sitting at the end of the room, back against the wall, clothes all shredded and resown like some streetpunk uniform, with diverse militant buttons and pins and some patches he'd sown to his pants with dental floss. An unkempt, greyish blue mohawk fell from his head across his eyes, emphasising the very human wreck he'd become. You could see the holes in his trousers where he'd scratched his knees bare on the pavement. An evil sight, I can tell you.

Eh, an admirable Anarch, this Nickel. What a misfit. He was way too learned to pass off as an actual crusty-punk. I mean, he should have worn glasses and sipped port wine or carried a laptop or something. But he just stood there, out of place... yet another awkward, misplaced rebel. Of course he wasn't my first choice of cellmate, if you know what I mean (which I doubt), but still, he was a good friend with a good heart, something hard to find these days, even for radical socialists.

Nickel? Well, that was his action name anyway.

"Hey, Makhnovitch," I finally replied, half-smiling. "Please stop talking shit. My head hurts."

Apparently, he found this all to be quite entertaining. As he came to examine my scratches he wore this annoying, sarcastic grin, like he was actually *enjoying* seeing me at my worst. The weasel. Well, maybe not my worst.

"Hell," I rasped to Nickel. "What the fuck did they do to us? Did I faint or what?"

My comrade's voice hinted of remorse. He let out a snarl and suddenly became very serious.

"Fucken pigs", he moaned. "How would I know? I did see you fall, though. Only I didn't get the time to figure things out. They pitched that bloody stuff at me too. New crowd-control weapons, I guess. For fuck's sake, they could've killed us all."

Nickel looked around and concluded, like some notorious specialist:

"Yes, we're in trouble now. This is serious. There could be tens or hundreds of us locked up in here. Who knows? These pigs, I tell ya. Holy Fuck. Or maybe they just took the two of us? Can they even get away with it?"

At which point he started pacing the room to and fro, obviously deluded with the notion that dialectics might actually save us from our tormentors, whispering some unintelligible legal terms like *captivity* and *evidence* and *I* wonder how long we'll be here...

Eventually, he looked yonder in the hallway, perhaps for some sign of hope or vengeance or sentiment of living. But who dwelt beyond these endless halls, these rusty gridlocks, if not the architects of our own humiliating demise? Had we been forgotten? How serious was this, in any case? I mean, couldn't we get legal support of any kind? For fuck's sake! We'd gotten in deep trouble, yes.

What next?!

"Eh," Nickel sighed. "Isn't *this* depressing..."

And I... I lay aghast, unbelieving, head resting against the cold concrete wall, feeling drained. How did I get there? Perhaps some introspection was in order - yes - a bit of autobiography, a little Hanzel und Gretyl, some carbon fourteen and a lecture in Chaos Theory.

Now how the fuck -

"Heck," Nickel cried out. "Do you think they have espressos back there?"

...what matters is not so much what we bring, but rather, what we put to death.

- Karl Kraus

II.

...then I remembered. Earlier that day I'd gone to the Eastern Square to vent. And by venting, I mean clasping the frayed remains of my spirit with the thin aspiration of shaping coherent syllogisms, by whatever delirious means the morn could contrive.

Opalescent, the statue of Angelique loomed high, there in the Square center - a finely carved vestal angel of marble white, wide wings spread, an air of innocence about her soft, cold visage. There she stood on a pedestal, overlooking this most disturbing park. Here, the homeless dwelt aghast and transparent, forgotten and weak. All around us, scores of business automatons traced their linear patterns, wandering, focused on some remote concern, whiling away their lunchbreak smoking cigarettes, talking on the cell phone, drinking cinnamon Chaï tea in little tiny Styrofoam goblets. Urgh.

I'd laid my black flag at the foot of Angelique, entrusted to her implacable mien for safekeeping. It was my first one, I kinda felt attached to it, feeling sorta proud to lay it alongside my favourite Icon, that lonely wench – so out of place here in the midst of the Maze. She shown with forgotten grace, and like us Anarchs, was all but acknowledged.

Until the appointed hour, I was bent on my insoluble enigma. Eh, September would help me. It befitted this portrait nicely. A chill gale blew, and I welcomed its kiss sweetly, though it numbed my joints. It seemed a fitting set for abstract lore. So I'd settled 'neath Angelique and scattered my papers round me in a half-circle, mostly references and monographs, my Keats book marked on *Sonnet* and the picture of Van Velde's *Parcours Rouge* which – force of habit – always got me working... Except today.

At the center of my little *bric-à-brac* lay one black fountain pen and one clean white sheet of paper. An absolutely white, virgin, clean and untouched page. Fuck. I *needed* to write, and if possible, something intelligible. And fast.

And yet I could not.

Discouraged, on the brink of a furious outburst, I laid back, sighed and took a generous swill at my coffee mug - my fifth since the morning - to resign and gaze, silently, at the people going by... daring to be looked back. Nothing to lose, now. I felt so noxious I thought I'd either cough up blood or actually start writing something. Either way, I'd be satisfied.

Damned Helter-Skelter. How come we'd always get into these situations? So cold, then. Tightening my scarf, I breathed on my hands to bring back some life into my fingers. "Ok, all right", I thought. "All right, fuckwits. Let's go."

I was running out of time. You see, there were only a couple of hours left to hand in this paper outline to an old Maoist fuck at the University, or he'd fail me or something. And for some reason I can't recall, I did not wish to be failed.

I needed to write. So out of nowhere I started scribbling. Thoughts, details, ellipses about the absence of women philosophers and the symbolic significance of the Luddist movement. There on, things just went downward, as they always do. By the time I'd finished my cup these veins roared aflame and vitriolic. I was shaking. Nausea lapsed and visions assailed me from all sides, pulsating my pen into the warm midday - I could not contend, yet needed to bring form, to utter in a semblance of logic - and this chaos warped me from inside out and unto the clean, scatheless sheet, in great gouts of deep, black ink.

And eventually, it hit me.

"Hope", I thought. "Yeah, the big drive, the golden dream, the motor fuel."

An epiphany of sort.

"All of them. Innate gestures. Ornament grace. Lurkcry-resume-fry. A *mutatio controversiæ*. Oh, these dumb fucks. I'll burn the world."

And I went on, mainly to divide the structure and form the first draft, with the subtitle:

Roots of oppression in post-catholic delusion or how many crosses does it take to nail a Revolution.

But the strength of my intoxication subsided as fast as it came, as it always did, and for a second there I lost track of my thoughts. "Too late," I realized. The protest would start soon. No time, no time at all. *Late*, always so fucken late. And so the White Rabbit ran.

A protest, yes. A demonstration. For what, now? How many people? Which demands? Organized by whom? And what about defence? Would there be vegan food, at least? Ah, too late, too late. Let's go.

"Screw this", I muttered.

Forcing down the last droplet of my mug, I packed and got up, leaning on my beloved statue. Details and numbers and rendez-vous points: a million trivial concerns seemed to gang up on me, I twitched and winked them away. Nerves burning, sinews tense.

Let's go, let's go.

My old backpack was tearing up, two safety pins held the fabric together. But it would have to do.

Picture, pen, book: check. Gasmask: check. Spare filters: check. A new red paintcan, two bricks and a bottle of water. Check and re-check.

Finally, I buttoned my coat, hauled up my backpack, clasped my black flag away from Angelique's care, unfurled it timidly and started running into the boulevard.

Another freak in the Maze.

Souls of darkness, dwellers of nightfall Searching, grasping for timeless breath Dead is now the art of dreaming Dreaming is now the art of death

- Marcus Ehlin

III.

"Well, if they do," he went on, "they better gimme some cream to go with." Nickel paused for a while, looking about, then concluded: "there are only so many lows a man can sink to, you know."

He just wouldn't shut up. And my head felt like it was caving in. But why resist, I wondered? Let him speak. Let me hurt. Chaos rules.

"Better yet", I replied. "Some pig's blood. That'd perk up my evening."

Nickel smiled at me then, in the dark, and I could see him leering back - an awkward, sad expression, as though he regretted being so cynical. It was only a question of time before he fell silent too, crouched on the opposite side, waiting.

My eyes closed... I couldn't suffer the sight of this place. All these buildings - rooms and halls, doors and bolts and yon, the Maze and its Labyrinth, the inhabitants, the cruel, despicable beings ruling there...

Doleful anthems cradled me, sleep I desired yet I could not rest. Trapped between slumber and agony, I lay in some anaemic state, a trifle in hate. I wished for a semblance of normality, or some means of scheming retribution for these lords of whoredom, these muddy piglets to whom we owed this most heartfelt experience. What? They could plunge us down the sewers, hang us on the gallows, take us to trial. Blast! Would we feel the slightest hint of remorse, then? Would we still grin at their coarse, alpha-male sadistic machismo?

Revenge I craved with every breath, yes, arrogant though I was to have willed the study of Hope upon that

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very morning. Angelique was far off now and in this world her light cast but fleeting shadows. I might never see her again. No, we had sunk into deeper stone, me and my comrade. It was cold Horror. This time, Nickel alone shared my solitude, and *he* was a lesser beauty.

Noxious unto the Maze, hours passed and sleep reeled me in... wounded I recoiled, retreating in somnolence, fading to the steady pace of my ache. Between hoarse breaths, lips whispered evil prophecies. The lure of revenge *possessed* me through and through, but it found no release in my blood, no harbour... no clean, crystalline spring. Tainted. Hurt.

A spoiled vessel, seduced and weak, that lay shuddering in the grip of an inextricable disdain – yes, but the waves of anguish did relapse, and by subtle movements alone, hysteria drained into a sort of absent serenity. I felt spent, entombed, cradled in the shadows of this deathly enclosure.

When sleep finally did come, I felt the frozen, velvet darkness of night and fell in love with its touch.

And our faith it will die with the sun It will lie Underneath All will see

- Beth Gibbons

IV.

The computer screen lit the plaster walls with its eerie white glow, punctuated by a tiny blinking cursor. I stared at it dumbly, half awake, while four small speakers pulsed the rhythms of Chiasm into my flesh, pacing me to my duty, dulling my spirit into a steady, altered consciousness where I'd forget hunger, thirst, sleep - all save my purpose - my purpose: to finish this accursed paper and get on with my unlife.

Almost four-o'clock now, and it was almost over: a couple of hours since we'd been released and toddled our way to the University, instinctively, like a couple of sorry dogs, hungry and cold... but smiling, yes, shriven and free.

Why here? See now, this was an office of the Executive Committee, the social sciences' Student Union. Did I say Union? I mean, it belonged to *us*.

And I had a key.

Sure, it was a hell of a dump, though it couldn't have been any other way. Never expect Leftists to clean up after themselves. We are nomads.

Pah. Everything stank of humidity and wet boots, dust and grime. Dirty ashtrays piled up on the floor. Some beer bottles had been stacked in one corner against the wall: a sculpture, I guess. The plywood meeting table was littered with outdated leaflets and staples and dried-off glue sticks. Overhead, a dismembered Barbie doll hung by a shoelace, hair cropped short. This place was, as Aethel would later quote, *impropre*.

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But you must understand, now, that in the middle of the night one can be grateful for a sanctuary, *any* sanctuary. As it happens, we would have settled for less.

Take for example old Nickel over there, sleeping on the couch, all huddled up and probably freezing his arse off, assuredly dreaming he'd been cast out in some nineteenth century Siberian underground jail, plotting his escape. See now, he didn't *know* the multitude of graphic defilements these cushions had succumbed to in the past year, and so he slept... I, on the other hand, would not. He, ignorant though he was, slumbered without a care. This example reflected quite sardonically the only joy left to us, this *innocence* - and up to now, the bravest fuel we'd so voraciously burned on. Nickel slept, and to tell you the truth, I envied him. My dreams belonged to the State now. I had been locked up for the first time.

No, of course I hadn't taken it *in* just about then. Ah! Would you? To be precise, I hadn't had the time to grasp, rationally, the implications of being arrested during a violent protest. Again, *could* you? My affinity group, as it happened, had escaped unharmed. And, in legal terms, so did I. The terms were unclear. Let's not get technical.

But does it even matter? Oh, no. On the Helter-Skelter, criminal records can be considered as medals, excuses, divine intervention or else. Albeit, their relevance oft pales in comparison to the significance of late papers. This, you could think, is why I eventually found myself typing the night away, sucking on my eighth cup of coffee. Half-dead and indestructible.

There I was. Clickity-click. Forming coherent sophisms (equations based on empty presumptions), twisting concepts into fitting turns, concluding further down – dialectics as a weapon and language as the canvas to be painted on, but a corrupt one at that, yes, fittest for deception. Argumentum ad hominem. Who cares what you say, as long as is sounds true? Eh, sometimes I could even deceive myself. But no matter, thoughts drifted and I purged the substance of them into content, form, rationale, until at the end I came to the moment of bliss: the last stabbing statement, a conclusion in kind – my pun, a cute little wink, the last sentence and sum of all precedent observations : *there is no hope*.

Ah, I didn't believe a word of it. I mean, the format pleased me: it would challenge the authority (and I do mean authority) of my professor. Further more, it would be graded and accepted, because I had respected the norms and the norms needed to be respected. And that was the greatest extent of my liberty as scholar: adept at filtering and annihilating every single notion I was supposed to absorb, to consent... and reproduce. Ah, yes.

There is no hope. That was my riposte. A last page, a last paragraph, and then finished. Saved. Printed. Stapled. Filed. Done. Another worthless piece of knowledge. My blazing victory.

Surfeit on the junk pile of my lore, dizzy and stuffed with such vague notions and cruel evidence, I had done it... and it was *over*.

Over.

Only when I retreated from the desk and stood up did I see at last, there in front of me: splotches of crusted blood all across the keyboard, darkly hued in the ghastly screenlight.

Horrified, I stumbled back and kicked my chair away, which tripped over with a great metallic *clank*.

Nickel did not so much as bulge.

Somehow, I was truly alone.

By believing in less, I die further in the shadow of beauty. Thus having nothing that can still bind me to life, also have I nothing which can lead me against her. I began loving life to the pace of dispersing hopes: only when I have nothing more to lose will I become one with her.

- Emil Cioran

Cold and weary, I made my way to the window and leaned against its thick, chill glass. Beyond there rose the archpillars, the web of lights and publicity signs, the luminous towers, the infinite halls of concrete, glowing in taints of black and grey. A prosperous wasteland, my space of confinement.

V.

My two fingers were worse now, swollen with a slight purple tinge, hardly noticeable in the Maze's orange light. Most of the nails had been torn out, the scarlet vitae had poured unto my hand and wrist. *For fuck's sake!*

Sighing, I clasped my hand into a fist, wondering, and I embraced the pain as a sentiment of life. At that moment, that very *instant*, I understood.

I remember it clearly, yes - there, in the cold, dark room at the twelfth story of a concrete tower, at the end of the longest day... looking to the city with a gaze mingled in fright and pure delight.

My eyes, I felt, were finally open.

"A maze," I whispered. "This place, this... Metropolis. A labyrinth for us all. And they, the makers. To find... Daedalus."

All around, circled with walls and barbwire fences, piggies, warthogs and snipers. Had I gone insane? Could my abuse and weariness lead to such hallucinations? How clear, then, did I perceive the blunt, rigid nightmare of the New World Order?

Nickel's words about inanimate violence echoed hoarsely through my head. "Enough," I thought. "Anon! There must be rest, even for the wicked." Yet how, how to simply look away and go back to the way things were before, singing and dancing and hopping about, all merry and gay? Where did all the golden people go? Aren't *they* the stupidest fucks? Ah! Lucidity paints the walls with the blackest pitch! Godless Christians and their saintly sadness would crucify us.

No, the Maze could *never* release me.

There was no certainty of ever feeling healthy again, free of mind and strong in flesh. We were in for the full ride – oh yes – and the Revolution *appealed* to us, purer than the thought of a clean bed or a hearty meal. The Maze never slept. Nor did we. Our voyage, it seemed, would not end.

See, see? In a few hours the day would ramble on. Perhaps there was hope, but there was no escape. I had to attend one committee meeting, two courses, a work shift and another paper to hand in the next morning. Hours, more hours, an endless road. Courage did not suffice. The White Rabbit ran on.

One day in the life of an Anarch, and I was hurt beyond repair... yet not surprised, nor particularly daunted. Greater horror surely lay in store. Cynics paved the road.

Noxious would I soon forget my name; fucked on this big neon light Helter-Skelter . This was one day, one day alone. And here now, at the end of it all, dawn would rise, and I would see it set forth upon the world – I alone.

This nameless theatre orchestrated all factions beneath my wavering gaze: yes, I could see it then, the skyscrapers, the endless lights, the orange heavens, drowned in stronger tides of blue. In the distance it would rise, this ruddy flame... the fiery orb, swooning into sight to illuminate the Labyrinth...a brand to scar the night over.

Oh rise, nameless one, rise!

But did it mean we'd find a way out?

No; it meant we'd grasp the horror in somewhat less subtle themes.

Trînefhylxanfhîne

[To the establishment] the "efficient" individual is the one whose performance is an action only insofar as it is the proper reaction to the objective requirements of the apparatus, and his liberty is confined to the selection of the most adequate means for reaching a goal which he did not set.

- Herbert Marcuse

I.

"So... the study of Hope..." Mr. Mandel used his old Praetorian paternalistic voice – my personal favourite. What a monologue. "That's a tricky essay, you know. At your level, we don't usually encourage these exploratory researches, you know. The bachelor level is more a question of *know how* than of, you know, fundamental epistemology."

Hum. Dealing with teachers was never, my, hum, you know, cup of tea. What to say, hum, what to say?

"Well," I answered in a soft tone. Seduction, seduction. "The question here is merely to try and isolate one paradigm inherent in political theory, so as to put in review all that I've learned these past three years. Basically, it's a deep retrospective meant to back a plausible thesis. It's been done already, but my take is slightly different, namely because I'm influenced by lesser known works of the early Frankfurt School."

Good. Never threaten teachers. Stay in control, never show doubt, but don't go *too* far. Leave them with some obvious claim to make. Oh yeah, they like that.

Mr. Mandel scratched his chin. Good.

"Well, I think we can make this work, you know, but you're going to have to redo the first and second chapters,

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follow the given structure more closely. You should get an 'ok' grade and be eligible for the master's degree if you work hard enough. It's daring, but then, I'm not surprised. We say this, you say that..."

Aye, that was a joke. It wasn't funny, and it wasn't particularly clear what he meant by that, but then, this is how insecure males communicate. *Just nod. Consent.*

I faked a smile and got up to leave.

"Wait," he said, then took a document off some pile of paper and handed it to me. "Here, it's a scientific article I just published on ethical ontology. Maybe you can use it to, you know, help yourself in structuring that next outline."

"Sure," I said in a formal tone.

The next instant, I was outta there.

Love for the party love for the nation Love for the fix for the fabrication Love for the corpse for the corporation Love for the death and for the defecation

Andrew Eldritch

II.

The University never paused to consider it might spawn the likes of me; a loose bullet built by flaws and kilos of caffeine, rendered immune to dialectics by *absorbing* tenfold centuries' worth of sheer *horror*, all in bold print... a spectacle of postmodern existential debate, everything crammed in my head like so many carpet bombings. Through the years, cruelty smeared my reflections like acid rain across rose petals, as though the Earth itself bled to my grim discovery. I suffered, I wrote. And words alone accomplished naught.

Daresay I, there *is* something terribly wrong with scholars. Sure, they're ambitious and curious at first and its kinda cute – aye – but this *sarabande* of degrees and lessons and papers and grades, the triad of Sloth, Strife and Strain warps scholars into something else altogether: they become either *obsessed* with the object of their study, or completely *disgusted* by the mere hint of it.

Yes, there is profound perversion in the sustained experience of mediacy. That is to say, as products of reification, we are dead to the world, *but survive in thought*.

Hence comes the visceral yearning for direct action, yes, *any* fucken action. So the State can't be justified, then we must burn it down. So Capitalism kills? Let us fucking *obliterate* its very sustenance into absolute nothingness! Patriarchy, anthropocentrism, imperialism? Family? Church? Name it! We'll destroy every fucken pillar of this world...

Ah! Let us act. We must be free.

Eh, as far as I'm concerned, putting a tithe of our will into being would serve to abate any scholar's anguish... so naturally, when the annual Anti-Capitalist Gathering came around, it felt only natural to heed the call...

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What is essential about the affinity group is that it is a method for organizing small actions of the sort necessary for attacking the many facets of power that we confront everyday [and] allows for the fluidity necessary for the development of an intelligent anarchist analysis and practice.

- Venomous Butterfly Publications

III.

I was almost asleep when the army truck rolled past us with a rumbling *clunk*, sending twirling dust and pebbles into our windshield.

Jöns, the driver, let out a snarl and mumbled some inaudible curse. Clare, in the front seat, was half-way through rolling a joint atop some brochure on queer theory she'd picked up at the Union. Motionless, she whispered through her soft breath some inaudible comment. What did she say? Was that *cunt*?

Ming, sitting right beside me, took her headphones off – listening to some screeching Alec Empire – and placed a disapproving hand on my arm.

"You look like shit," she said. "I mean, metaphorically of course."

"Hew..." I sighed. "Just shoot me. Serious. Ever since the other day these riot pigs keep creeping into my dreams." I paused, then closed my eye again. "Fucken agony... just so tired."

"Come on now! Better get some rest, mate!" Jöns was apparently trying to cheer me up. Aye, good honest Jöns. Somehow, any advice I got from that almost-macho straightedge Wing-Chun vegan seemed inherently hollow.

Pity. Could've used it.

"I mean it," he said, all excited. "The Gathering, *then* the party, *then* some nightly fun, *then* the protest. Ah, we'll be knee-deep in action. And..." he leered over the side, licking his lips, seemingly thrilled with anticipation. "The antifascist league issued a warning about some bonehead RAC in

town, same time as our little parade. You know, Rock Against Communism?"

Oh, I knew. I knew. It meant bad news. More so, I could see that the newest member to our affinity group, the ever crafty Ming, was sorting through a backpack seemingly filled with paint-filled light bulbs, some bleach-injected pingpong balls and a couple packs of toothpicks. My, oh my. Now tell me, how come whenever Ming wasn't brewing organic soaps and detergent and toothpaste, she was mixing low-cost devices for property destruction?

"Oh, by the way," Clare added dispassionately, smoking the bud, flipping through the pages of her little zine, "the next issue is finally ready for print. I've assembled the pics you sent me, Jöns, and the recipes from Ming, just like we talked. Only problem is, I got this *other* article by e-mail. Someone named Annabelle. Didn't use an action name."

"So?", said Jöns.

"Well, I didn't expect to make a decision without the proper mandate. But this tacky piece of crap was so revolting, I mean...she was going on and on about Latin American social movements and the all-holy Left. Urgh. It didn't fit our platform so I junked it."

Her voice never wavered.

"I'm just so sick of that bullshit leftist tautology. What's the deal with these newbie whitetrash beatniks thinking they can enforce their little boardgame politics on us? I tell you, if I have to read one more reformer piece of crap about the Foro Social Mundial I'll fucking kill myself."

"Sure," answered Ming. "Didn't they get it already? The Union is *ours*. Heesh!"

No argument here. Clare was an expert in *agit-prop*: agitation and propaganda. I mean, she'd been in the movement for years, longer than any of us for sure. Punctually, she put together the Union's newspaper – *Point Blank* - while we wrote and voted everything in. Eh, you could say we trusted her: Clare was made of stone.

And she hated reformists.

... eventually, when a second army truck rolled on by we hardly noticed. Thunderously, it moved on and slit

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effortlessly in the scenery, like a gust of dirty wind, merging with the miasma of grey slab and endless highways. We didn't look twice. Eyes closing, you whisper words that bled The veil of dusk is tightly drawn Light fading, it sets you free again Unscathed by the hidden blade

- Ted Tringo

IV.

Perched on high, the theatre unveiled beneath my gaze. Vertigo spun me into a delectable swoon, yet I drank from a double espresso and grinned wickedly. Aye, it couldn't be helped. A particularly remote balcony hid me from peering eyes as I silently watched the General Assembly taking place: there in the vast circular hall.

My affinity group lay behind me, lurched atop wooden crates and foul carpet strips. They had lost all interest in the play at hand and waited patiently for the end to come... yet I hung, mesmerised by the intricate scene yon and felt compelled to drink every second of its overlong, procedural dullness.

And how...

The olden amphitheatre had been built for baroque plays and the like, tragedies, soliloquies and other derivatives, yet now it served as a mere audience room, large and derelict: the forgotten asset of some other University. Today, we held it for our gathering and it served its purpose well.

Beneath, some five score delegates of various collectives were assembled for orientation and consensus decision-making. Questions would be answered, statements would be issued, resolutions taken, information made public: there would be debates and votes, mandates would be given and mandates would be revoked.

Leering, I sipped and grinned down to each and every face. This was chaos in motion, and I revelled in its slow, sublime dance. The air smelled of intrigue where mute sedition twisted the tongue of conspiracy. Dark, bitter pitch stifled through my lips and I finally felt whole.

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See!? Allies and enemies had banded here, you could count them, name them, qualify their implication and deduct their next move. Delegates were here - yes - members of other collectives who were built of yet more affinity groups. There were federations, autonomous comities, associations, rink-a-dink cooperatives, all clatter associatoïds. Hyperidentification galore: many pins and patches and symbols and tattoos and little stars identified them as radical feminists, students, vegans, punks, queers, straightedges, postleftists, anti-civilisationists, artsy, unemployed or homeless - heralded 'neath the colors of black, black'n'red, black'n'pink, black'n'green and all the possible hues of reddish materialists: Maoists and Leninists and Trotskyites and Marxists and who knows what.

But more importantly, every person here accounted for, what, *ten more activists* at the very least? Aye, words would spread wide, wide and deep: a thousand souls stood for this moment, and *we*, we were taking back what dignity had been raked from our lives. I could *sense* it, I could give it name and thought and form. It was here.

The Revolution was coming.

... then another speaker came to the phone – one whom I did not recognize. New faces always triggered high hopes in me, yet I could not guess – could not read what lay behind her ample smile, her pale blue skirt and flowered vest, the bright yellow bandana she wrapped around her head like a women of the East. And when she did come forth and was called to speak - in that instant, that very *second*, she opened her mouth and took a deep breath and ruined it all.

"Hello all," she began in a feigned nervousness. She was used to this. "My name is Annabelle Ducharme, I'm sort of new here and I'm really glad that you gave me a chance to speak." She paused a while, glaring around the audience, locking eyes adamantly, almost lovingly. Before she continued, her unwavering gaze went up into the balcony. Did she see me?

"I am a delegate of the Latin Women's Rights Committee. We are part of the League for Human Rights and World Without Frontiers. Basically, our wish was to come to this gathering with a sound and honest plea for solidarity."

Here we go, I thought. A sheep among wolves.

"My friends, I don't have to tell you that the situation is, to say the least, *critical*. It is seen, it is felt, here and elsewhere. For change, we must induce meaningful actions, not senseless debate."

I almost laughed, then, that this mere reformist would come lecture *us* on action, when Clare suddenly jumped to my side and whispered in an almost cheerful tone: *"Her*, it's her! Annabelle, the one who sent that stupid article. Who the fuck let her in?"

The other went on, I couldn't look away.

"The recent budget cuts in healthcare, welfare and education have reached historical heights. We're on the verge of loosing what holds civil society together. And..." she added with renewed vigour, "you have experienced, I am certain, the new crowd-control weapons the police force used in the last protest against economic reforms."

The nerve! Who the fuck, *what* the fuck was she?

"Well people," she went on, "the government has made a *terrible* mistake in this, and right now – not yesterday, not a year from now – but at this *very hour*, a strong social movement is building up to make things change. We can make things change. Wheels are turning. In all," she paused dramatically, "we want to build a new, united Party for Citizenship."

At once, protest rose in the assembly. Many people laughed, mostly anarchists. A couple of reds shouted for her to get history lessons. A low, tumultuous roar rose in the hall. Seeing I wasn't the only one insulted, I took a swill of espresso and smiled in the dark.

Yet Annabelle continued with sustained determination.

"Wait, please, just let me finish." The roar subsided, she went on hastily. "What we have *here* is a real opportunity for change. The tide is turning, and we find that most people would be inclined to elect a progressive party. The people must be given a *comprehensible*, transitory choice. The Party *is*

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the viable alternative. We can change the system from the *inside*." She looked on for support, eyes wide with accusation. When no answer came, her last words echoed in the form of a desperate, passionate plea.

"We need you."

Yet the assembly met her defiance with silent indifference. Fivescore activists met her proposal squarely in a refusal which no whisper stirred.

Consensus was met.

Undone, Annabelle walked off and went through the hall, proud and equally silent, until the wooden doors of the old theatre slammed shut behind her colourful silhouette.

When I drained my cup and left the balcony to rejoin my own, I looked at my group's reaction and *victory* was written on their faces.

And that is the way it's always gonna be! That is the day when they all gonna see flames and fire Burning business buildings... Fuckin' politicians – your smile on your nice face makes me spit blood

- Atari Teenage Riot

V.

The dusk of November had wrought an icy morn. Black flags twirled beneath an auburn sky whilst countless activists geared up for the coming march. Thousands were assembled here, yet in the midst of this commotion I lay forlorn... with a new flag; some cheap black nylon guntacked to an old twoby-four. I wore two black bandanas, one on my head and one on my face, like a mask. Old habit, you could say.

It was almost noon when I finally resolved to act, even without my companions. They had failed to meet me, and having circled the block thrice I had decided to remain on my own... though I considered the news sourly, to say the least.

Why, oh why... Clare, Jöns and Ming were nowhere to be seen. They carried most of the equipment and supplies. Meaning that I didn't have a gasmask. *Fuck*!

Ming had shared some of her stuff with me, in case the night proved *inspirational*. Still, that hardly passed as compensation. When the fury of the protest took over my senses I couldn't help but feel betrayed.

Cursing uselessly, my words were muffled and deafened by the screams of my other comrades.

"Where the fuck..."

The march began to move.

"How the hell..."

And I walked, flag held aloft. Everywhere, police trucks blocked the roads and tailed us close. As we moved through the Maze, screaming chants at the top of our lungs,

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the overwhelming intimidation of the warpigs induced disturbing doubts on the relative safety of my arse. Sooner than not, I had forgotten about my group and concentrated on potential targets.

Overhead, one helicopter flew across the sky and circled back again, apparently to keep our track. The other Anarchs leaped right and left to different sides of the protest. Bicycle scouts sped across alleys and boulevards back and forth, giving us hasty reports on the movement of all four riot-police units dispatched to *order* us.

"Bloody fuck. Where are we going?"

No one answered me. Tension mounted. Nearing an empty patrol car, I hastily opened the gas tank and slid two special balls. Closing the lid in a flash, I ran back to the crowd, heart beating fast.

Ok. First scenario: Jöns, desperate for woman skin, might have met some hardcore girl at yesterday's benefittype and concert-fundraiser party had somehow (surprisingly) managed to woo her into spending the night together, after which he'd be totally spent and happy and out of order. On the other hand, the recently depressive Clare might have smoke metric pounds of the green stuff, rendered ultimately enthusiastic about those cheap shite-beer pitchers - maybe as some valiant effort to break away from the frustrating stillness of her clockwork existence - and gone totally vomitous and apocalyptic for the later hours of the night, which would also quite miraculously explain the absence of Ming who, though divinely gifted in property destruction, was always available to succour friends in need of instantaneous, all-consuming devotion - and in that selfsame motion left everyone else who depended on her in a terrible fucken mess from which there could be no escape whatsoever.

Hum. Second scenario: The police had charged all three in some wild night of publicity disfigurement and had locked them up about twelve hours ago to rot in another death-stench prison cell until the end of Time...

Urgh. I was deeply immersed in the construction of a third, more plausible scenario entitled *Ditching Dim for dumb*-

dumbs when a warning echoed through the Anarchs nearest my position. "Dispersion," it said, "dispersion, dispersion!"

Oh, fuck no. Fuck no!

Looking around, you couldn't see any tear gas shots or pepper spray froth or any fucken rubber bullets. No heatwave from the new weapons or anything. Oh no, we couldn't see *any* policemen. Yet in the panic that spread through the crowd, I did make out a large, green military truck parked three blocks off, surrounded by what appeared to be heavy armoured police.

The trucks on the highway. The State's walking will. The trap was sprung.

The White Rabbit panicked.

Soon enough I too was joint in screaming *dispersion*, *dispersion*! and went skulking around back for some forgotten alley to make my escape. No time to fight.

Dozens were gathering here and there, some had chosen to make a stand and were breaking down whole chunks of the pavement. A fire was ignited somewhere off in a pile of junk. Three Anarchs had torn off a park bench and were dragging it away as some sort of fucken battering ram. Broken glass littered the street. A dirty smoke rose up.

Suddenly I found myself in some brickwall alley with some other twenty activists, half of whom weren't masked. They had gathered in a circle and were exchanging hasty suggestions.

"Ok, main's closed-up, pigs trail up the rear on the northside. Scout's warned us about fifth so come on! This way!" said one.

All followed.

Finally, I thought. Lets go...

Fear flared like wildfire; we ran like the wind. But many scattered and disappeared thither. Screams echoed in the distance. This way and that we retreated, instinctively, the masked ones keeping together. We didn't speak. Steel barricades shone at every end, large detachments were moving in the sector, blocking off all exits. A woman screamed: "Boxing us in! Hurry!".

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My companions broke off and she was dragged by the arm. One whispered: "Silent now. This way."

We leapt across the pavement like dirty hyenas, engulfed through countless alleys, frantic and out of breath. When a wall of riot policemen caught us headfront in some cut-off road I was ready to scream.

But my friends were wiser. In a moment they came together and faced off in another direction. I trailed along, clasping my flag like a fucken lance, and we slipped through one corner as the police charged us. These plunged fast with shield and baton. Some girl on my left was rammed on the head and trampled underfoot. Others crashed against brick walls and swooned down in a flurry of iron kicks. Flinching down, I avoided a *coup d'estoc* and rolled on and up again, lashed away as gas canisters swiftly shot off ricocheted on the walls and nearly blew my head off.

Fuck, fuck! I leaped across a low fence into a side street and followed until more pigs shone off to my right. *Trapped.* Choking on my own breath, I sped off into another alley... only to bump against a dead-end stonewall. *Trapped.* Tears streaming down my cheek, the world melted in clouds of burning vapour.

Trapped and alone.

Looking back, I could hear the heavy clangs of army deployments. No cameras rolling, no innocent bystanders. No witness, and I would soon get a sophisticated taste in police brutality.

I was desperately trying to come up with a plan for my next move when all of a sudden, a low voice hummed, somewhere close. "Hey, psst!" it said. What the? I couldn't see anything. Then one of the trash dumpsters on my side opened slightly from the top and there appeared a dirty gloved hand, waving me in.

The metal top opened widely. Leaning against the dumpster, I braced myself and skittered against the edges to haul myself inside... and the soft filth sunk me down, I was gasping, suffocating on the disgusting stench of rotten chicken bones and potato peels. But somewhere in the dark enclosure of debris, a friendly face greeted me, smiling, like I was a new born babe.

"Comrade!" he whispered. "What a scene, eh?"

The weasel, the crusty-punk ideologist. Nickel. To tell you, I never thought I'd be so happy to see *him* again. There he leered from his throne of junk, all huddled and prone.

"Ooh, mate. We got the army this time." He was snorting. "This is fucken delirious. They usually take a bit longer to charge, though. I wonder why that is..."

For a second there I ignored a particularly strong urge to puke and swallowed hard, failing to catch my breath. The burning in my eyes subsided, I was getting used to being gassed.

When Nickel produced two beer bottles from his backpack and handed me one, the weight of the world reeled in certain dementia. Chaos ruled. The others had succumbed to a more violent fate, and I had escaped. It couldn't be helped. The White Rabbit chocked on and played dead.

Then, out of the blue, Nickel whispered in a cheerful tone: "Hell of a party last night, eh mate?"

And I, I couldn't stop laughing.

I die everyday and every night I rise Searching the hideout for my pale light The sky cries its shiny lies The truth is my pain The doom is my life

- Sonya Scarlet

VI.

The Übermensch pub stood on the northern slope of Memorial Hill, straight at the heart of the Maze. A small house built into a leftist pub, its windows were now frozen with the icy caress of December. Winter raged outside; here was now a bastion for activists. A fine place it was, with wooden stools and tables, piles of old history books and different oil paintings depicting riots and dismembered politicians, all bathed in a delicate, honey lighting. A certain harmony in violence.

Lonely I sat, scribbling the hours away, waiting. A black espresso fumed in a small round porcelain cup, there, right in front of me. Dark euphoria filled my spirit at the eldritch potency of the bitter elixir.

In a tiny book I wrote a fragment of Keats' poetry;

... then on the shore Of the wide world I stand alone, and think Till Love and Fame to nothingness do sink.

Oh, what fathomless powers did the words convey? What truth had I failed to grasp, that this one rhyme seemed to encompass the fullness of existence in its beautiful, endless sorrow? My black fountain pen espoused the verses lovingly, over and over I wrote the words, tasting their strange, ethereal meaning.

And I let the instants fade, waiting patiently. My affinity group was supposed to meet here, and yet again, I consorted with poetry, trimethylxanthine and the wailing kitsch of the *Übermensch*.

In my backpack there was a bachelor certificate with my birth name on it. You could say it was hidden. Eh, I loathed it more than I expected. Violation breeds academic success. Tonight, tonight I hoped to celebrate this piece of farce, to close the comedy of scholastic strain once and for all.

Noxious unto the Maze, I had sought escape through the academy, but had burned myself on this plague, this swarm of dusty ego-fucks, I mean, pompous patriarchs obsessed with posterity and publication. Strapped in Ivory towers they ruled – expensive prisons built on urine-stained bricks and ornamented by the Nation's proto-nazi flag. And none would dare gainsay their word unless they'd sodomized ten year-olds or smoked crack in the cafeteria.

Exceptions there were, yes. From time to time you'd find a worthy spirit or two ready to teach a challenge. But what noble knights ever did charge in with lance and purple pinion raised? The worthy saved me ne'er. Gentle and meek were all but present in moments of need. All Anarchs were *persona non grata*, and for a good reason. We did not teach fear, but doubt.

Yes, doubt and disdain. They despised me before I was done: I had proven the inherent flaw in Hope – to some extent, yes – and had lain something of a disposable curse in the establishment. Bureaucrats can not sustain deviance openly. But could they ignore us still? For certain, it was over.

And what remained, now that tricks, taunts and seductions had come to a close? Rejected – rummaging my lowly way off the grounds with a meaningless degree in hand...

... then on the shore Of the wide world I stand alone, and think Till Love and Fame to nothingness do sink. And when I laugh it's tears I hide And when I cry it's joy inside A foul disease has stained the land The bitter harvest of a dying bloom

- Hansi Kursch

VII.

"Listen up, everyone! There's boneheads three streets below, in large numbers. We're going after 'em, but we need everyone to come."

Jöns had entered the pub with six other friends, heads shaved and built like wild fucken oxes. Hearing this, most of the people got up and packed. Apparently, all would join.

Fuck.

My group wouldn't meet me thence, I understood. They'd be there with the other Anarchs, trying to stamp out this growing pest. Theoretically, I could understand their position. But at that very defining moment, my world was collapsing and I bared my fangs.

Jöns came up to me, gyrating.

"Hey Dim, you're coming, right?"

An instant lapsed, I couldn't answer right away. Somehow it seemed like anything honest I could say would be sheer *overkill* to one as obtuse as Jöns.

"Hum, no. No, mate. I don't feel so good."

Obliviously, he was disappointed. His gaze erred to my espresso, my book and my poetry.

"Oh, just so you know," he said, "there's been a couple of us checking out this Nickel guy. Yeah, we found out he's an *under*."

The White Rabbit screamed.

An under? What the fuck!?

"Yeah, fits every hint. Had a huge record a couple of years ago. Never sees anyone out of the meetings. 'Was suspicious so we got a couple of people watch him close. He was caught talking to pigs at the Anti-Cap Gathering." I was aghast. Nickel, an informant? An undercover piggy? A fucken traitor?

"You're shitting me."

Jöns was in a hurry. The pub was emptying. They were good to go.

"Yeah, I'm telling you 'cause I know you talk to him a lot. Security's gotta be tighter, *Dim*."

Stricken dumb, I just nodded, oblivious. Jöns clenched his teeth and left to swell the ranks of the outside mob. Chanting anti-fascist anthems they all rambled down the snowy street, left fist raised.

When the parade faded from hearing, I couldn't help but contemplate the loss. My eyes filled with tears – I couldn't help, couldn't stop... the meaning escaped my grasp and I mourned for the Ideal. The movement, the Revolution, the solidarity, any fucking hope... all was fading back into the void.

The Maze ruled absolute.

The White Rabbit chocked on and died.

and i have fought your sorry war i won't do this anymore there's been enough blood spilled for you if only you could see me now

- Erica Dunham

VIII.

"Skål," I whispered. "To the Revolution!"

The Übermensch brewed their own stout, it was called Lieben Nacht, as in 'precious night' or something. And I tell you, it was a mighty treat.

The pub was almost empty now. The only bartender (some mainstream piece of shit) had been cleaning dishes out back for some two hours or so. Aside from him, there was some slobbering couple half sprawled in a couch, plus an old beardy guy sipping what appeared to be mead. He wore a beret, so I didn't bother speaking to him.

... only when I took a greater look at the pub interior did I actually notice *another*, a stranger being overcast by the winter night howling away beyond the glass. *She*. I knew her not then, I'd ne'er seen her face or heard her name spoken, and I couldn't tell the purpose of her stay nor the hue of her raiment, though it was dark... sweetly dark.

But who was I to gaze at one so? Better to stay alone and celebrate the passing of lies. Better to remain huddled in my own misery, to curse the cowards who had forlorn my very essence, to blight this entire universe in poems of death and dying.

And yet... I noticed that she was holding a thin zine in her hands, the latest *Point Blank*. All of a sudden it hit me, and I couldn't resist but break her silent meditation.

I'd say something like 'yeah, I wrote that article' or some other looser remark. Ok, ok. I got up.

But before I even reached her, I saw a tiny white thing skittering on her shoulder.

An albino rat. "Hey, I'm... uh..." Loser, loser.

She looked up at me with a huge grin. Her smile was so wide I almost broke off and ran. Her hair was pale, loosely braided behind her back, whereas her eyes were lined with thin wisps of red. But what caught my attention was the leather necklace around her neck from which dangled a tiny black star.

"Yes?" she said in a light tone. Bemused.

"I... just noticed you were reading *Point Blank*. I'm part of the group that makes it. Even wrote an article in it, something about Hope..."

"Ah!" she started laughing hysterically. The rat skittered across the table. "Yeah, it's so fucken lame." What? How could she... "Oh sorry," she added all of a sudden. "You must be Dim, then. Yeah, your article is what got me reading that... that... oh, man. Dim. Damn."

She was laughing. Apparently, she didn't care about anything. And I was about to (try and) forget the whole thing when she kicked the other stool in my direction and asked me to sit.

"Tell me about it, then. I'm bored out o'my skull."

And I brought my things over, took another gigantic swill of *Lieben Nacht* and sat down, mesmerised by her pale, frantic eyes and the black star at her neck.

"This is Tony," she said, pointing to the rat. "Least, his real name is Antonius Block, but I don't think he understands a single word we're saying." She paused and fixed on the rodent, bewildered. When she snapped out of it her lips curled in joyous tones : "I'm Aethel."

Good, I thought. An action name.

A thousand dreamers crept as one Journey'd by the colder sun Knocked at the chamber's gate Yet this sleeper does not wake

- Monica Richards

IX.

Lieben Nacht flowed like a river, my poetry drowned in Aethel's mad smile, transfixed by her ardent orbs to lose all sorrow and forfeit the weight of my days... I told her everything, recounted every pain and every sentiment and she understood, yes, and she laughed and laughed.

Haze crept in, faster than I thought. Black ale drenched my mind with a deep, shivering fog – the hours passed yet I could not recount, couldn't decipher... her eyes mesmerised me: these pale, quaint eyes which feared nothing - they gleamed with merriment and pure hatred, seemingly innocent yet malicious, for all the vibrant howls and chants and whispers Aethel spun wild nightmares of languish cruelty and loving treason.

Delicate, the black star resting softly against her skin shone bright with promises of chaotic splendour, therein I felt the poignant cry of anarchism and saw darker, fuller designs of revolt and creation. Aethel was not insane, she was unfettered: her wrists and ankles bore not the social chains that had bound and restrained me so... the virulence of her will cleansed me of unease.

As two we sat and twirled, we waltzed in great outbursts of destructive glee, poised against Thought itself. All around, the pub seemed to cave in as we hushed and screamed in blatant coarseness, favouring a scarlet rebellion against Church – any church, of which she spoke of again and again with fiery intent. Any notion of a God we spurned and cursed and spat upon.

How to say, how to - I don't know. That night, we destroyed the whole world over and over and over again. And

in the void left by that dissolution we erred sensuously, the albino rat sniffling 'round in eddies.

Visions faded into visions 'til I lost her eyes and saw no more – but felt – the pub wheeling around me, chairs, stools, paintings and pint glasses and found myself lured in senseless movements, streets and lampposts wheezed across delirium where I dragged my feet steadily, unknowing. Aethel's laughter shone in the Maze; I flew to its light like some delirious moth.

Darkness swallowed the Labyrinth against strikes of orange nausea. The memory is bleak... there were screams and whimpers and hysteria whom naught echoed. A cold abyss welcomed us and we roamed, uncaring, into the embrace of the winter night.

I trailed the cheerful, scarlet silhouette of Aethel for what seemed like an eternity, aeons in unknown pathways and remote alleys. The snow beat against my brow yet I welcomed its kiss gladly; finally I felt *something*.

Coming into an enclosure, a foul and rancid air engulfed us and we followed plastered hallways, crackled and ill-lit, until she led me to some downward staircase. It was old and ironwrought - I almost broke my neck on the descent and sudden vertigo reeled my mind into a semblance of consciousness. For a second there I understood that *Lieben Nacht*, alone, could not have unfurled such strong intoxication.

Clambering down into what appeared to be a vestibule, I lost the feel of my doubts, wherefore she, the other, lured me whence flashes of red shaped the eerie form of a chamber. There, purple drapes fluttered wide and used wooden floor boards creaked and croaked underfoot.

An auburn couch stood at the center, immense in the derelict room. Circling beyond the thin drapes I fell unto the couch, gazing at the low ceiling. Scented wisps of smoke twisted across my sight, tracing intricate patterns.

Gasping, I closed my eyes, hoping to shut out the full force of this delirium. What mess was this, what succulent torture? Had my end come, would this be *it*? What nameless treason was I to suffer once more?

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Defiance, defiance!

My failing will purchased me one last act, and by refusing slumber I rolled down from the couch, unto the floor. My eyes opened, still hazy. A perfume overcame my senses: that of burning leaves and autumn rain.

When I looked up, Aethel was standing over me, as a daemonic bloom she smiled; her pale visage solemn and majestic. Locks of ivory fell from her neck in alabaster cascades. At their center, the black star compelled me, truth lay therein – its flames were my only light, and I would follow.

When her frail hand rose, clasping a thin, doubleedged blade, I shivered in fright and did *naught*, moved *naught*, spoke *naught* – at which she placed the blade on her forearm and pressed slightly, lovingly, and two scarlet droplets rose, dripping unto the blade and upon her fingers.

Into her eyes I gazed and saw – felt the grip of a writhing desire, a burning, nameless lust which said *dare*, and the blade said *dare*, and the wound said *dare*...

Ravenous, I leaned forward into her raiment, breathing the scent, the warmth of her, then delicately released my embrace, reaching for her hand and caressed it softly, slowly, pressing my lips against the soft, incandescent flesh to lick the warm, acrid blood.

> And then... And then... Then there was Darkness.

Interludium

L'heure de la Sorcière

I love you so! Yet if you wish today, As eclipsed star, rise from the shadows And prance where Madness roams 'Tis good! Sweet dagger, unsheathe thyself!

- Charles Beaudelaire

Once upon agony...

"What beauty," I hushed. "What beauty in decay, what truth herein! I was ne'er given a second breath. When I drank from Aethel's pale veins, the curtain was shut – all the anguish and glory thence stems from that one bloody kiss."

All around it stands now, this Labyrinth of sort – the oblique Maze and its fetid breath, circling the dark silhouette I do now become, *l'heure de la sorcière* is coming. Hurry ghoul-Dim, fleet to thy tryst!

She waits there yon the traitor's tower.

And I contemplate, kneeling on the edge of the last building before the gap – a straight twenty metres fall below – the distance I must now leap, erstwhile my tale ends and all that I've suffered account to naught. No, I must make that jump, for my beloved and for the traitor.

Dare!

In one swift move, I unsheather the sgian dubh and hold it beneath the moon sickle. There it shines with argent brilliance, before my gaze in glory – see!? How that blade slid across the white warmth of Aethel, and what malignance it curled unto the world? That perfect Damascus blade, of two hundred fine layers of steel welded by strong, cunning hands,

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sharpened to perfection, here in the firm grip of my fist, bestowed unto me for darker designs.

Dare!

Rushing back away from the gap I brace myself for the jump. Hiding the blade away, I concentrate on the task at hand. Triumph, perhaps, but horrible failure if I fall, and it would end my life and my tale. No, I must succeed. The Maze doth not avail.

The wicked have wings.

Dare!

And so I run. Across the dusty roof gravel I go, breathless, weightless, shadowed by fainting light into ashen gale: flying in the distance of a crooked heartbeat, and there – there I jump, plunging out into the void and shapeless air, falling – falling into nothingness, down, further down, until my hands catch the brutal iron railings of a staircase, slippery and wet, and I slip, and I hold - I hold.

Breathing hard, heart beating wild, I bring myself up above the railing and very gently roll unto the platform, lying back. Outside, the low rumbling of the Maze echoes endlessly. What other noise did I make? Surely my fall has awakened some neighbours, some guards, some watchmen of some kind?

But no. Silently I rise, unsheathing the sgian dubh again and tread softly to the window of the one, there some paces away.

Oh, I am coming.

Nihil and Daedalus

motionless in time my instincts are a crime eventually he'll see it's swirling into me the air surrounds my mind i'm swimming through the sky please liquefy my need i cannot learn to breathe

- Emileigh Rohn

Whence my Fall stemmed I know not, nor could I aptly qualify the murky waters that fed my subsequent asphyxia. I mean, desertion festered within for moons ere I e'er saw clearly – ever gazed straight and strong *into these eyes* – the implacable, delirious eyes of Aethel, and her fierce, vehement laughter. Ah! Did you think I would have hopped and bopped away like a little squirrel if I hadn't been undone by her last, beautifying stroke?

Aye, the origins are dim. Surely, surely that hellish night did sunder some last defence, some last bastion of faith in anything right and wrong and absolute. Aethel brought about a most overdue ending, though I was lost long before ever meeting her. When that ivory horn sounded the retreat, I ran. These bleak beginnings have passed. What cometh hence is the stuff of nightmares.

Desertion! I screamed. Desertion and betrayal - from intellectuals and leftists and arrogance, great gouts of dusty tears and the anthems of a thousand failed insurrections faces, contacts, parties, books, jokes, honours, codes, teach-ins and fashion styles. Nickel's serene treachery, Annabelle's

I.

thoughtful idiocy. My comrades' indifference – all displayed for all to see, there in the horror of the New World Order.

Noxious I fled to bury the White Rabbit.

...and I fled from that Scarlet Fae first and foremost, crawling from her pad in the early hours of dawn, wiping off the dried blood from my lips and struggling to erase the memory, that sentiment of blissful fright. It had freed me more than I cared to admit. In fact, what she'd *unleashed* within I could not yet grasp, but the seed was sown and whetted in flesh – yes, I would become something more terrible yet... unfettered by the Flames of the Black Star.

Questions!? Questions there were, yes. Questions you may ask, why's and what's and whose and when: but ah! Don't you see? This is the great Aporia, that cloggering fucken truncheon of interrogations which the mind cannot abate, questions upon questions upon questions!

I had no answer, nay – I felt no particular desire to answer anything. That's it. Rationality flunked out the window. The Helter-Skelter ne'er stopped. Tell me: who but our deathly oppressors have any time to *spare*? I mean, any judeo-christianoïd fuckwit might have sought escape from this ordeal with clinical amounts of lithium and a thorough brainwash. Aye. Any dumb, stupid redneck consummaton would have gone shopping for shoes or a tiny brown puppy. Ah yes, perphenazine and domestication; a lesson in Hope.

I, on the other hand, *tread the darker road*. No postmodern über-love for mankind, no fucken upper-middleclass sense of Family, no beatnickish egotistical peace in solitude, and more importantly: no cosmic, metaphysical sense of *order*. This world was not mine, do you hear!? My Fall from the Anarch movement exposed an acute *absence* of absolute, wherefore the only semblance of Truth lay in black espressos and stout and warm blood.

Deeper would I crawl: deeper and deeper 'til only action name remained and all flittered into History, whence I'd ne'er claim it back. Deeper on, to stuff my senses numb with the junk of the world, the scum of the Earth – scream Nietzsche's thundering Ja! 'till I forgot the very meaning of negation.

Further down the Maze.

Pseudogasmic chemistry Necromorphic apathy But who will save the sane? Some beings just can't change

- Peter Steele

II.

Aye. I was in bad shape.

My great scheme lay in tatters yet I discovered the will to plot some more. Perhaps some greater conspiracy would cleanse me from the *atroce*.

Before I went living with proles I figured three things were in order: Health, Labor and Home. Jo' Stalin could have staked it in a five year plan, but to me it was a question of days. If intellectuals can't handle a bit of plumbing they can at least make their way through the Maze at ultra speed. I mean, there aren't many things leftists understand more than capitalism.

So here it is.

First, I quit coffee. Ok, I was *way* off on that one but at the time it seemed appropriate. After Aethel's eerie session I was convinced a change in perception might help. So there, I did it, I quit... and from then on everything slowed to a slithering roadkill crawl. Withdrawal entailed, to say the least, some *interesting* effects. Euphemisms aside, the inside of my skull was rammed by a daily biochemical wrecking ball, and I couldn't focus, let alone concentrate, for weeks on end, which, in all regards, could be summed up as a *bummer*. Ô what jolly, jolly good. Notwithstanding, some psychotic *cacodaemon* would ne'er surmount this makeshift evasion down the Slum Safari. Heartburn and aggression were sure to blow my cover. Caffeine had to go.

Second, Labor. I xeroxed tons of bullshit resumes (yes, bleached, recto-only unrecycled paper: nudge-nudge, wink-wink) and sent them around to big franchises around the city. The response was quick: bachelors do well at minimum wage. The almighty Cosmos must have smiled on my recent prostitution, for I swiftly scored a job in a drugstore... and it seemed like the greater of many, many evils.

Third, proles. Ok, I did mention proles, didn't I? Yeah, I know, you gotta love 'em. Since a shit-job required a shit-place (logically), I moved into a low-cost flat in the lower eastern part of the Maze, a five-story cardboard construction. Oï, there must have been sixty units in that Bauhaus catastrophe, and it stood there, fissured and crumbling. Of course, the question of centipedes and other urban fauna was relinquished to the theme of mere regionalism. From door to door lingered the pungent smells of curry spice, sweat, strawberry soap, rotten meat and tobacco smoke. Proles, eh.

The building stood all huddled amidst countless overpasses, interchanges, boulevards and various macadam coatings. Neighbouring streets presented a collection of hairdressers, pawnshops and crackhouses. Oh, and children, too. Lots and lots of children. You gotta love 'em.

Proles. Well, ok, maybe I didn't *love* them at first, per say. Saffron and Vic would be considered *acquired* tastes at best.

The two of them lived alone in that small flat, their last roomie having run off after a particularly swift Mormon indoctrination. Amiable young nutjobs they were, in that they weren't particularly violent and managed to keep their sexual deviances under control. Both home entrepreneurs, in a way. My guides on the Slum Safari.

And then... there was Cherry, too.

I can't watch TV longer than five minutes without praying for a nuclear holocaust, really, on my hands and knees, wishing it upon every one of you. Really, that's how much I love TV. I think it's great.

- Bill Hicks

III.

June wrapped the Maze in glorious suffocation. Recordbreaking heat scorched the urban desert – it erred freely through the streets and the open sewers.

"Urrrrh, my crack's runnin like a creek. Jeeesus, Dim, open that fucking window..."

There is no proper way to introduce Cherry, I'm sorry, but that's how she was and ever remained. Her words muffled against my elbow as she lay bristling, naked, half asleep, nagging on about the obvious fact that we were cooking in our own juices.

Streams of burning sweat were curling into my eyes as I considered the possibility of heeding her plight when I heard the clinkering ruckus of industrial night-delivery traffic.

"It's already open, *love*."

"Ah, fuck it", she groaned, then landed her sloppy, pink lips on mine and just sagged back unto the mattress, inert.

Then settled one of these deep silences which I so enjoyed, for in them I could almost forget my interrogations, almost forget who I was – and *she*, she had nothing to say, didn't bulge, didn't move, just lay against me like a seething, shapeless slug.

And seeing her like this – I mean, I didn't really *know* her, to be specific, six days top when she'd come to Vic to get some pills for an upcoming rave, I had no idea it would come to such lustrous fruition.

Don't get me wrong: I loved her in a very disdainful way. She appeared like a very quaint piece of wedding cake,

bloated, tasty, absolutely nauseating and lovely. But she was using me, and I was using her, and it was glorious. The distraction she proffered proved most useful, and I was kinder to her than any other passenger on the Slum Safari. And boy, did she love cats. Someday she'd get one, she said. As of now she couldn't readily afford the operations, the medicine, the food. So she was saving up. Desperate for a kitten and a soulmate. Ad blah blah blah.

Sweet, sweet cherry.

Eh, proles... gotta love 'em.

Suddenly she rolled from the bed and got up, looking for some discarded g-string. "Ah, Jeeesus-Christ..."

I flinched at every mention of her Lord, but it made violation all the sweeter.

"Ah'mah goin' for a shower... juss can't stand it, urrh."

"Good idea," I said. And she just got up, blistering, put on a pink teddy and left for the bathroom.

Outside thundered the chaos of the apartment where everything clammed and buzzed with life, even though it was nearly midnight. I closed my eyes for a moment, listening.

From the living room echoed the screams of some Portuguese commentator, overtoned with the roars of brash hooligan crowds.

Vic loved soccer/football. Every now and then his cell rang, but he'd never do business until the match ended. One must have principles, especially when the livingroom is also your franchise venue. Vic was a business man, though he did follow certain deontology. Patience is a virtue junkies ill understand. Whatever the offer, he waited 'til the ending credits. It required some explaining, of course, so he usually spent the whole match talking customers into waiting. And for some reason, he always found a way to sneak the word 'penis' in a conversation. That fucken chav.

Don't ask.

...then, aside from soccer rants blew synthetic explosions from Saffron's technoroom – microphone telecoms and submachinegun rattle, followed with an

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occasional mortar *bang*. At the moment, he and his teammates were engaged in some virtual jungle guerrilla, maybe for the past four or five hours. From the rashness of the commands he was issuing, they must have been on the losing side.

Of course, Saffron was just his online nickname. His real name was... hey wait, *what was* his real name?

Anyway, with Cherry gone, I became all too lucid for my taste. So, grudgingly, I put on some salt-crusted clothes, grabbed a beer from the fridge in the kitchen and joined Vic.

And there he was in his signature goldchains and trackpants, chitchatting on the couch like some morning talkshow host, sorting through piles of tiny pills and plastic baggies.

"Feckin' cunt," he said. "Primo the game ain't fucking over, secundo it's too hot to move, and thirdio you penises still owe me grande from that last wad I got'ya. Yeah, I know. What?! Now how am I gonna make myself clear to you beatches, eh? Don't be dissin'! You get your douchey ass over at fourth and central and I fix you up, just be there in two, k? Ok, yeah, ok - k, love you too, bro."

Hanging up, he lit up a smoke and dug into his baggies anew, mumbling something about tits and asses.

"So what's the score, eh?" I asked, already halfway down my beer. "Hmmmm," he started, when his cell ran again. "Dickheads! Just a sec –" and he started on again.

Luckily, Saffron chose this time to make his grand entrance, though I highly doubt the choice was his, rather the game was over and done and he was too angst-stricken to remain in one place for more than four minutes. So he came in with a beer and sat next to Vic, took a cig from his pack and lit it up.

Man, that electro-lemming looked white as snow now, eyes all bloodshot and twitchy. Akathisia took its toll. Hadn't shaved for weeks, thin wisps of beard hung from his chin like snot. *Does he still take showers*, I wondered. Seeing as though he was still in a bit of trance, I blurted out: "So the war's over mate?" And he started laughing franticly. "Lmao, got fucken pwned – bunch of Korean nolifes. OMFG, these guys are wired. Afk'd now cuz I had to give my box a rest, it ain't gonna hold the heat and I got a bane later on. Guild's takin over some ore mine you know. Tough titty."

And I was confused. Can you imagine that? "A bane? You mean in another game?" I asked.

"Yeah, some mmopvp, you know. Lol sry Dim, yer such a carebear. Forget it."

Well, I was only remembering something about him being a guildmaster of some sort when Vic burst into a hissy fit.

"You fecking manhos just figure it out! Fuck!" Then he hung up and threw his cell across the room. Saffron didn't seem to notice, just stared, dumbfounded, at the soccer ball rolling across a field of green. Vic, somewhat calmer, took a deep breath, lit another smoke with the last and just went back to watching the game, calm as a Hindu cow.

Somehow, I felt right at home.

"She still here?" he asked suddenly. And I knew he would have sprinkled words like *fat-slut-bitch-whore* if he'd known me just a bit better. Right there, I felt glad he didn't. Then I was trying to psychoanalyse the actual content of his concern when, all of a sudden, Cherry's voice rose from the watery rumble of the shower.

"Diiiiiiiiiiim!"

Now what can she want, I thought. Some comfort, perhaps, or the answer to some everyday trivia? Would I actually have to *walk* all the way over? No fucken way!

Instinctively, I turned to my chief advisors for counsel... and they were grinning like monkey devils. *Grinning*.

The next instant, I was up and strolling across the hall.

And everyone heard me giggling.

As soon as men accept money as an equivalent for life, the sale of living activity becomes a condition for their physical and social survival. Life is exchanged for survival [...] as people accept the terms of this exchange, daily activity takes the form of universal prostitution.

- Fredy Perlman

IV.

Ok, I started working in a drugstore somewhere on the eastern wing of the local Mega Mall. Did I say drugstore? I meant, an institution, a parlour – Squeeky's Ultra Drug Company (as seen on TV) - one of those huge hybrid fucken franchise giga-drugstores where nobody really goes for medicine, but for all kinds of fluffy pink apparatus in six different kinds of smell, all on sale, open all night, ad nauseam. The shop had two floors with an escalator right in the middle, and seven departments to fulfill the shopping needs of any sale-junky... and us sixty-four employees, trainees, management: all busy little slaves buzzing around and around the clock.

Wasn't it all fitting? Outside, the heatwave was rounding off kills by the score, mostly elders and newborns, but here we revelled in conditioned air like so many dekalitres of absolution.

Aye, it was fitting. Squeeky's was one of the finest products of consumerism and was wildly attended. This cathedral held mass twenty-four hours a day. And in this temple the natives offered printed offerings to the plastic idol.

Here, a low-grade scum-smuggler like myself was highly pushed by six ranks of command, more or less intent on our breaking down, but all fairly impervious to human anguish.

The younger workers were part-time juvenile student-by's who tried to pay the bills using this retail prostitution for income. Generally, they justified their servitude to Squeeky's due to the fact that they might get somewhere else, once their studies were finished and all debts repaid. To put it frankly, working here scared the living shit out of them and pretty much motivated the extra effort they had to put into school to get the hell away. A very effective balm I must say, but I can assure you many still punch-in every day.

The older were full-time, dead-numb simpletons who clasped their suffocating state with an emotionless, complacent stare. For them, there was nothing ahead, no greater hope, nothing. They all seemed to have committed some sort of existential crime – buying a house or a car, breeding offspring, gambling debts or whatever required monthly payments – and were serving time here... a lifesentence of sort. Hey, if you've ever seen these types, you'd understand they're the saddest bloody mongrels in the prairie... gazing at the capitalist train rolling by somewhere off in the distance, witnessing the almighty countdown of their existence, paycheck upon paycheck.

As for the *clientèle*, there isn't much to say. Male slaves. Female slaves. Black slaves. White slaves. Slaves slaves slaves slvessl vlsealvsla easlsae vellsevvealslslev

In fact, one could endure the overfed, ingrate leeches that slid between the gates and ramped on the blue carpet by the score, rummaging for shiny commodities and spewing malcontent loathing at us gratuitously – I mean, those could be *dealt* with.

No, the worse part was the *music*.

That pastel valium noise, that sugar coated switchblade – it seeped from the incrusted ceiling speakers like marshmallow syrup down into our agonizing psyches like coma in unborn children. Urgh. That very fucken despicable ear-raping formula with words like *life* and *love* and *free* as though they were some sort of bubble-gum lubricant – until their meaning was utterly rent and the very taste of what they meant seemed to fade!

...but then, I was ever the only one to suffer from commercial radio stations. The others, apparently, had been

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born to its sound and could not distinguish pillows from prisons. Sometimes, they even sang along.

Goosebumps...

Thence, I required to entertain myself, erstwhile I'd never bear the torture.

And so during the calmer hours of my evening shift I fancied to converse with certain other clerks, or cashers, or cosmetics technicians, of variable social issues and base political events, feeding them droplets of information, squandering here and there the many facets of counter-cultural praxis. Indirectly, I was implying the absolute – and I do mean absolute – necessity of Revolution.

Day by day, week by week, I would plant seeds in barren minds, planning my Anarch harvest with reclusive glee. To ease the trail, arguments were constructed very stealthfully, questions asked, sighs expired here and there, some little sarcasm, or a cunning little pun. Yet I was ever wary to restrain my *true* self. Eh, *that* would have been horrifying to anyone. My subjects needed not be discouraged, no. And I was too far gone down the anarchist road to expect any sympathy on their part.

So delving into many a subconscious, I would approve of this and disapprove of that, strengthen certain feelings and very, very gently undermine more reactionary positions – all with a flutter of *affection*: the key to the ignorant's mind.

Then, when in time it was plain that I could be perceived as a peculiar sort of lad, I tread more carefully and let them *help themselves*, saying this to one and that to another, carefully choosing my words and the ears that received them. A very tricky task, oh yes. And quite thrilling. I mean, who knew *what* these heavy doors, once unlocked, would let loose?

Cultivating sedition in the plastic field of Squeeky's Ultra Drug Company, I strived to install the paradigms of rebellion – never concluding on what needs be done, no, but giving them everything they needed to figure it out themselves – so that in months my subjects must agree with the logic of anti-capitalism... as they sometimes did. All fun and games, nay?

But mind you, I did it for sport rather than vision, I must confess. There was no workers' union in the Mega Mall, nor would its presence have cheered me if all had turned out differently. My thoughts, as they were, went far beyond syndicalism. 'Tis but a fool's errand.

My aim, to put it roughly, was destruction.

I'll tell you this right now... throughout all my schemes and little mind games I really just yearned to see rage come alive: revolt, blasphemous words, morals ripped to pieces, ideas torn asunder, gates flung wide! *Schadenfreude*. Oh yes, the bliss of roaring down what lies others had put in these debilitated minds resembled tackling the face of Adam Smith himself, hence I yearned – ached – for explosions, coups, sporadic stealing, disobedience, fistfights, flames set to whole departments and the skulls of all six fucken lines of management smashed under a flurry of tills and priceguns...

Oh yes, an orgy of nametags and scabby uniforms scavenging the alleys for baby oil and razorblades, dancing naked with blood dripping down their necks. A band of overworked sicklings slicing their noble way to the quickest, most soothing outcome to their anaesthetically putrescent lives. You motherfuckers had it coming, we'd say. We'd drag the disembodied heads of our loathsome regents right into the food court, to be impaled there atop pointy broom sticks, displayed like tribal warnings to the World's consumers.

And never fuck with us again.

We'd whisper dark designs and sharpen our rusty spikes in tight circles. Yes. We'd craft Molotov cocktails from fondue fluid, napalm from mixed soap and lighter fuel, and shrapnel from different varieties of Drano ground with broken glass shards and nasty little copper nails, ducktaped to gallons of bleach. Oh yes, enough to make Netchaiev chuckle like a little girl.

And me, cloaked in the rotting skin of executive whores, would be reading prophetic lectures from *God and the State* into the interphone for hours on end, croaking my

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doleful anthems over and over, losing control in screams of rage and armed desire:

Hearken, comrades! Here we make our final stand! Hold the lines! Hurry now, we must burn EVERYTHING – everything to the ground from whence it came! Ah ah ah haaaaaa!!!

> But let's not kid ourselves. This was only distraction. I was just hiding. Squeeky's made millions. I scooped up puke. Order was kept as I knew it would.

Tallies up his loneliness, notch by notch For the sea offers nuthin to hold or touch Notch by notch, winter by winter Notch x notch, winter x winter Now his leg is whittled, right down to a splinter O o Cabin Fever! O o o Cabin Fever! O the rollin sea still rollin on! She's everywhere! now that she's gone! Gone! Gone!

- Nick Cave

V.

Stealthfully, so stealthfully did I make my way through the Slum Safari – I had them all fooled – Vic, Saffron, Cherry, all the workers and patrons – under their very nose an Anarch schemed sabotage on a daily basis, and I whiled the remains of my time in cheap beer, TV sport, reality shows, Christian preachers and the warm, succulent flesh of my sweet Cherry. Gabbin' 'bout weather and sodomy. *Jouissance* and distraction.

Aye, life was good.

...but unlife beckoned me still. Such narcotic peace could not contain me forever. The everyday dullness of my makeshift proletarian guise grew punctuated with significant hollowness. See!? Something was growing inside, yes, something pure and potent, like the smouldering ambers of a campfire, glowering, aching to temper and shape my will into a crueller tool. The many distractions I was gorging on tasted thinner, less satisfying. Soon enough, I couldn't convince myself of the splendour of derision, though that, too, was fitting.

Yes, something was growing and I found myself acutely aware, as the days rolled down in trickles of burning sweat, that I was *changing* somehow - my desires becoming hoarse and many, my anger deep and profound, concentration more enduring as I could focus ever more clearly on the aims to come.

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As fitting as this decline appeared, it also seemed fitting to conceive a new plan, ere the undertow claimed me for good. I mean, *how long can you fake your way?*

Aethel had spelled it for me, aeons ago, yet I couldn't grasp the fullness of her intent – she was gone and I was gone and all that remained were more... questions.

That is to say that at first, I did not understand the depth of my visions. I was hiding, I had run away from the revolutionaries... yet the Revolution itself appealed to me moreso, though being face to face with the alleged subjects of social upheaval did nothing to complete my knowledge of subversion – nay, there was no end to the horror but my own.

I needed a plan. Until then, I would leave no mark, no sign, no trace of my passing.

Stealthfully, so stealthfully.

... so I prefer the robot who knows it's a machine.

Nic Endo

VI.

"No, I said *twenty* you slutty lil'penis, 'the fuck d'you thunk I'd do with ten? You know wha'I'mean? Bad day to step on my rubber pinkies today Putcho-man, I feckin' swear! What? Oh, aight, aight!? -"

We could hear his chav arse from all the way across the flat, even with the loud thumping dullness of his blinghop musical filth. He was real pissed. And it was late, so fucken late... I just wanted to sleep – sleep... you see, today was my day off. And I had done nothing. Nothing. And now, my flesh ached for release.

Somehow, I was required to face the moment, though I cringed and shied at every second. Beyond ridicule, my condition's name spelled *kitsch* and I was utterly fucked.

"D'you ever think of leaving me?" Cherry said, leaning over, her great stature implacable and bristling with orange streetglow. A dab of sweat dropped from her brow to my chest. "So, d'you?"

What to say, what to say...

No, it wasn't that I couldn't find words, or even ignore my pestering drugdealing roommate – nay, I guess with adequate concentration I could have strolled out of this mess and *faked* my way through, once more.

"Of course not..."

What a hypocrite. Would she notice? Was she that dumb?

"No!!" Vic screamed in his tiny little plastic phone. "Twenny...Twenny! Who the fuck – pass me Chris rightaway... I said – k, hey Chris, now Holy Fuck man, that's some cold shit right there!"

And then Cherry finally caught on. "Y'don sounn like'ya mean it..."

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Silently, I took a deep breath, trying to escape... but somewhere in the background (and this really disturbed me), I could hear loud echoes of lustful moans, aggressive taunts from wet tongues and greasy lips, doubled with slaps of loose flesh, which strangely enough, conjured images of what could be summed up as *spankings*.

Somehow, Saffron's techno warpost had turned into a mass, low budget virtual orgy. You could hear screams of commands and begging, overtoned with the low grunts of male toys, like animals. Oh, and a light salsa drumbeat in the background. What a soundtrack.

My apartment was a freak circus.

Yet Cherry's monologue went on.

"Cause I was textin' Stephany 'cause I was wonderin' and she was all like 'just aks him' and I said I dinn'know and she said..."

This is their world, I thought. Their world – and I have nowhere else to go: bridges are but smouldering ashes now. Immorality – or the blatant delight of *wrong* stank of this very place, it was in the air and in my lungs and everyone expressed this taint in more or less horrifying tones. An instant of wicked genius could purchase me one last advance...so I played the joker in the pack.

Aethel's blood coursed through mine – I understand that now. Her gift belonged to me. That mad laughter ringed in my head like the bells of some infernal abbey – it sang fierce and true and I kneeled to its call. Aethel... the thoughts I couldn't ignore. Oh, let the leaves burn where they may!

So I looked at Cherry in the dark, and I gave her *these* eyes, and they burned of lust and of hate, and my gaze froze her in place. When we kissed, cold lips grazed the sagging mouth of that hollow wench – albeit she felt their touch and was lost in my desire, which became hers – which became ours.

When the last of her doubts did faint, we succumbed into it, sweetly, and I dreamed and *yearned* for Aethel's veins and shuddered in the choking heat of the Maze...

Not knowing what I had become.

Can you free me From these unsafe grounds Secret tell me where did she drown

- Liv Kristine

VII.

August came swift and lithe whence I chose to enact my plan. It was a sudden change that sprung my design into motion: this divine breeze had hailed the death of Summer and its recurrent effects. Ah! I was cloyed from sufferance and woe – all the sweet poisonous tricks'n'treats the Slum Safari could possibly disgorge. *Defeated* in all, yes, save the one irremediable fact that I was still... undead.

Yes! The last rays of August prophesied an imminent birth to Autumn. Wanion light, fading heat... and lengthening shadows, whence my kind always resurrects in darker themes.

The time had come to unfurl my plan, desperate though it was, for I had become a desperate man, and extreme resolutions became me well. Perhaps if I trembled and shook the Maze, my chains would fall loose. Would they not? Was it not honorable to aim for different heights? *See*!? All the apathy, all the indifference of my proletarian guise purchased this one, glorious moment.

And I would savor it.

My dreams had driven me short of complete insanity, actually, to tell you the truth, I can't claim my mind to have been whole at that epoch or since – but, better still, I had learned the sole, valuable lesson of the Maze: in its midst, *no one is sane*.

Departing, but for a time, I only brought a couple of things – my backpack hung with seven safety pins, I put in some pen and paper, a bottle of water, my Keats book marked on O solitude! if I must with thee dwell and a picture of Van Velde's De Maan. I wore the clothes I had when I first fled my old life, perhaps to try and remember who I used to be.

And then... then I walked.

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Under a pale sun, overclouded in a stifling crown of smog, I made my way across the Labyrinth, street upon street, first north, then west. I *knew* the way, it had been etched in my mind week after week on my shifts at Squeeky's, mopping countless alleys with chemical bleach.

And the way was gray and lifeless and shallow but it mattered not – now I could look into the horror with unflinching resolution. My volition would extract a terrible price.

Anyone who remembers Thoreau will smile at this – but the single fact of *movement* raised me, bolder than ever, against the blunt reality of the State. Faster I walked, speed upon speed, hale and vibrant to a *purer* end.

Aye, the hours passed and I clenched my fist in growing apprehension, for what lay ahead seemed like a monstrous task to undertake. Don't you see!? For this role I could wear no mask, could never, ever fake my way... for *she* would know.

... and I was brooding on the eventual possibility of failure when I strolled down some central boulevard guzzling with activity, where yuppies lapped ice-cream cones and talked about the next elections.

> There they stood, and I shivered in anticipation: The doors to the *Übermensch*.

Lies, lies spoken Inspire me a lost emotion

- Sebastian, Corpus Delicti

VIII.

"Another glass o'water mate?"

The bartender was standing before me, all dynamic and springy, beard short and patchy – make-believe neglect. Oh, and he was wearing a beret. The poser. Now, why do I always notice these things?

"No, no. I'm cool. Eh, eh."

"Suit yourself, you just let me know..."

The air was tangy with the scent of newly ground coffee beans. I could have killed for just one sip. And who?

"Eh, mate," I asked. "Ever seen a girl here looks kinda strange, carries a white rat on her shoulder? Laughs a lot." Who am I kidding... she's never going to show.

"Hum," he said. "Spooky kinda gal, right?" He was grinning. I resented that look. That fucker *definitely* knew her.

"Yeah, sorta. You seen her around?"

"Maybe, why do you want to know? Ex-boyfriend or something?"

Fucken idiot.

Fucken stupid smart-ass idiot.

"Wait," he suddenly added. "You with the Disorder?" *Disorder*?

"Nah," I feigned. "Just talked to her a couple of times, you know." *Bastardo*. "Anyway, it's cool if not –"

"Wait," he said, pointing at the back of the pub. "Go talk to Daeva there, she might know."

> Daeva? I thought. Where did I hear that name before? Without hesitation, I leaped into action.

> "Ok mate," I said. "Triple espresso. Make it long."

[...] the master... being a master... I don't seek, I find... the master... mastering... Produce, produce... He only knows how to work, can't do anything else. The dead souls! [...] I can't use words. Sometimes, they can be of use. But what's essential they can never say.

- Bram van Velde

IX.

Thick cigarette smoke twirled and billowed around a dark and lean figure, there, looming over piles of paper and pencils, absorbing some essay, perhaps, or a poem – she sat, lost in a vortex of reflection. A silent figure, frail limbs clothed in satin black, wrists and ample neck void of ornament - thin nightshades across the grey, death-like mask that was her face, next to the acute cheekbones, closed lips, and intent frown: all the stricken features of her mortuary visage. She just sat there, timeless, smoking cigarettes by the score, sipping at a great pint of stout.

Black venom coursed through my flesh, I quivered and trembled and laughed. Unfettered by the ardent blade of intoxication I kissed my cup and hearkened to the astute vibrancy of a dying summer's eve. Hark! The *Übermensch* roared, its house became a shrine of darkened desires. Everything... so clear now, yes. Crystal and limpid. Chaos in motion... whence I rose in vitriol to *her* side, she seemed implacable, *present* – my instincts recoiled at the mere sight, so undaunted was she by the surrounding ambiance. For an instant I remained, recoiling, wondering what to say.

"Evening - "

At which, without ever leaving her notes, she riposted with chirurgical precision:

"*Chirp chirp chirp*, said the little bird. Feed me the worm. The Womb of the Worm for my tiny tummy."

"I'm sorry, I -"

"Who are you, little bird?"

"Hum... am I disturbing you?"

"Disturbing? What would *you* know about disturbance? No. Not quite. Not yet. Answer me, little bird."

"What - I don't..."

"Question is: why do you presume I actually *spare* Time? Tell me. "

"Tell you what?"

"Just tell me."

"My name, or - "

"What!"

"Ok, Aethel. Guy at the bar said he knew her. Told me to go ask you if..."

"Mister Sportynuts? Ah! Did you notice he wears a beret?

"Aye, that I did. Think I saw a cellphone on him, too."

"Well well," she nodded, disapprovingly. "Off to the gulag, then! As for Aeth', Just 'cause he wants to *plough* her doesn't mean he *knows* her. Per say."

"I –"

"No, no, you'll have to tell me *why* first. And don't skip out on the nasty tidbits..."

"Nasty..."

"For instance, what is your name, little bird?"

"I – Dim."

"Dim? What the - oooh, an action name. D-I-M. Wait now, don't I know you? Holy Fuck! You really are looking for Aethel. Welly welly welly..."

Very slowly, she left her books and looked up to me. Her shades were opaque. Enigmas written on her traits – I couldn't make out her expression, but it must have been bleak.

"I was messing with you. I see you're not from the People's Alliance, then. Sorry about all that. I wear an... Anathema, you could say. This happy fun-time reunion of Christians and Materialists and Holists and all type of 'ists' do so love to throw their festering, wanton little pasquinades about this intolerable beatnik pad. Mind you, I only came here for the stout. Anyone from the People's Alliance deserves overkill. If just one more of these hypercretins asks why I don't kill myself, I – " She sighed. "Dim, what I mean is, err, sorry about all the bullshit. I don't require arrogance to be *coerced* into communication. Now, do you?"

"Ah, no, no."

"Doubleplusgood. Have a sit, then."

As I sat, she removed some of her books, then nudged her pint glass slightly in my direction.

"Lieben Nacht?"

The dark brew raised awkward memories, but I shook them off and accepted the offer gladly; laying my lips to the mélange and handing her back the pint, from which she in turn drank and returned the motion.

"So why does this *Alliance* harass you?", I asked. Stupid question, mayhap, as anyone involved in politics desires, by definition, extermination of some sort.

Yet she drank deep and looked yonder, reflexive. Thus she answered.

"Long story short. Symbols, Dim. It's all symbols. Every night, I destroy their world. And every day, they build it anew. Persistent little maggots. Their edifice of deceit", she drank deep, "would require my end. Yet I do not relent. But this is only *how*. The *why* I know not. Should stupidity be outruled?"

I smiled, jesting. "Obviously, you're a woman *and* you know how to read. You're just asking for it!"

"Obviously!" she snarled. "Damn. You have no clue who I am, now don't you?"

And I just shrugged. My ignorance shown through every pore – I had come to desperate means. Nervous, I drank again. The stout sustained me. I wondered. Could she even feel pity?

"Well, no bother," she added. "Why should you? Actually, that's good. I don't see you throwing truffles around. Fresh start. Now," she paused. I held my breath in awe, beholding the terrifying lore these black shades withheld from the world. "Where were we? Ah yes, Dim. Dim, how many crosses *does* it take to nail a Revolution?"

How the...

" - but you were so totally off on the concept of metaphysical revolt, though if you'd read any good Beckett, or at least some late Camus you could have easily bridged that. Fuck, if you'd read *anything* I ever wrote you could have nailed that for sure. *Nailed*. Ah! Nevermind."

"So you work at the University?"

Visions of Mr. Mandel erupted in thought. What to say, what to say...

"Meeeh," she gleaned. "Anti-preacher and judge. Executioner more often than not. I'm a researcher. I mean, sort of. Make that a half-lecturer. Man, I hate that word. Ah, *hate...*"

"Courageous soul."

"Perhaps, but why? To aim at posterity? Rather, it should aim at *us*. We... you have many enemies. Annabelle and her pasty pastel retinue, the Left and its new churches. It's pretty bad, now, but... you have nothing to fear from *me*."

And at that very instant I saw, distinctly, a faint smile emerge from the tight left corner of her lips. She was amused. But why?

"And," she leaned and hushed close, "I do know Aethel."

Rushing heat surged over me, uncontrollable – my visions had proven accurate – yet the implacable symmetry of her shades cleft me in twain! Daeva, clairvoyant, the Archdaemon! What bloody morn this eve would entail!

"You do?", I trembled.

I couldn't fucken believe it.

"Of course," she replied carelessly. "She's part of the Disorder."

The Obscurantis Disorder

I am gathering all the agony of the world together. Anyone who has a hidden worm gnawing away inside him, anyone dressed in mourning for the ideal, anyone who laughs scornfully at the ruin of the mind, may come.

- Bruno Filippi

I.

The Circle had gathered at the farthest end of the deepest graveyard of the Maze, next to a thick strand of elms, oaks and cypress trees – the outskirts of some other wooded park.

'Round we sat, nine of us, some leaning against old tombstones, some sprawled out... patient, silent.

And I – I unlaced my boots and lay my head against the bundle of my backpack. Thick grass tickled 'tween my toes.

Bliss.

A purple sky trailed o'er this brisk afternoon – like a drape it hung, misplaced, lured into the unknown, elsewhere. Blithe, it faded as aquarelle, void of restraint and order, foreboding the eloquence soon to take place.

Silently I watched the clouds roll by, listening to the murmurs of my peers, mesmerized by the infinite composition overhead – all taints of whites and pinks and blue-grey plumes, scattering, billowing, merging in intricate patterns.

In the middle of the Circle had been holstered half a dozen bread loafs, an earthen jug of mead completed by a various array of cheeses and fresh fruits. On these the alterns feasted, darkly clad and serene.

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"...but what truth concepts reach beyond their abstract extensions can take place in no other theatre than that of the oppressed, hated and rejected by the concepts."

Daeva was finishing reading an excerpt of Adorno's *Negativer Dialecktik* when she at last raised her shades and asked around in a soft tone, smoking cigarette 'tween her teeth:

"So are we waiting for Clare?"

Clare, I thought. My old comrade.

"Nah," answered a pale lad with purple dreadlocks, "Could you believe she's back in the Asylum? Ming drove her in after another 'episode' last week. Sad thing. Diagnosed psychosis. Probably permanent, not sure."

Clare... Clare!

"Damn, Blix." Daeva's tone hinted familiar sorrow. "To think we warned her about all that weed."

Blix was shaking his head. "Well, now it'll be generic fluoxetine and some other undisclosed neuroleptics. Poor Clare. Let's hope dyskinesia doesn't strike fierce..."

"At least it's not a prison cell."

"That all depends..." Blix was apparently down.

Furious and vain, I bore myself to ask: "But what about Aethel? Is she going to show?"

And he replied in a gentle tone, probably hinting on my own blunt desperation.

"Well, we sort of never 'wait' for Aeth'. We tried. 'Tending my flowers,' she's always saying. Some would argue that she's simply too *shriven* to interiorize the conservative tradition of, let's say, meeting at a certain time in a certain place -"

"... anyway," broke Daeva, "seeing as though we're sort of all here and there's still no sign of security, I propose we start where we left off last week, which, if I remember correctly, was entitled 'undeath in the absence of God'... or something like 'Gnostic ambivalence in strict nihilistic praxis, confounded'."

"Sounds like it," whispered Blix. "Now would be a good time for any closet Born Again Christian to come forth so they can be sodomized in favor of our heathen goddesses." The small crowd burst out in a roar of laughter, ringing out across the lonely field. Then we timidly huddled closer to form a real circle and dug anew into the feast lain there.

"So," started a girl before gulping down a mouthful of mead, "the point I was trying to make is just – or the conclusion I've reached so far, anyway, is that when you get down to it, and I really mean... concentrate on the implications of the – I don't know – complete void of any superior conscience of Being or whatever, you think and you start to realize, sooner or later, the limits up to which you can expand your mind, right? We are strangers to the world. Now, of that uncertainty, that sort of grey, smudgy area, you can't quite encompass with even the greatest strain of consciousness, like, if there's no God, then what the fuck could possibly justify, let alone *hold* together existence?"

Many hands were raised to reply. The fire was set. Blix was the first to speak.

"But it's... no less absolutist to try and conceive God out of a *conjecture*. If conscience is limited and fragmented in itself, then any concept of 'superior conscience of Being', as you say, is still your own flawed, limited representation. Psychoanalytically speaking, metaphysical dogma is just compensation, integration of the whole, people trying to project a false self to deflect immediate relation with the only political subject, which is and can only be *other people*. But still, the debate is: how do you live *without* God, how to warm up to Chaos. I'm not saying there can be no God, I'm saying the notion, if it proved true, would still be too cruel for us to even *conceive*. Like monogamy. Or fucking Cthulhu!"

Chuckle ran through the Circle. Then it was Daeva's turn to speak.

"Well, in my opinion, saying 'God is Everywhere' as you put it, is an early and very potent paradigm of fascism, or simply, reification, which asserts for itself the possibility of conceptual order and self-existent hierarchy. Religion is articulate as the primordial stand against the Wild, which is Chaos, to be subdued with a makeshift Order. And in this, it

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states that our destruction knows no bounds – we'll never be *good enough*. This is Hope speaking, reminding us that every second is and must be agony."

She paused to drink some mead, then as more words seemed to pile up within her she burst out again, nearly chocking on the draught.

"But this is very interesting, 'cause you see, this is real, this is what humans go through. Fuck! Praxis requires that we undo these taints within us simultaneously. This is why we're here, why we do these Circles. I think we're all mistaken in seeing these fucken Judeo-Muslim-Christian-Buddhists and else as these rightist airtight titanium vessels who never question their faith. Rather, it's the other way around, that's why they've emerged time and again. The question is the problem of Faith itself, not the sects it spawns or the dogmas they build - though we feel them nonetheless. See, even the religious know very well what doubt is, maybe moreso than we do - having taken unto ourselves the perennial task of tearing the veil from grace. Any religion - not to exclude militancy or the almighty Left - acts on the foundation of Doubt, a doubt so deep and so pure that in order to merely function through daily life, it must be sustained through devotion - a very complete patch, in other words, totalized doxa - prayers and symbols and all celebrations of ignorance. They live to perfect the lie, and they can see it perfected, and they'd die to keep it intact. Progress. Linearity. Order. Purpose. Hope. Sill, anyone, and I do mean anyone, who can just look into this world with eyes open, be it for just one second, will grasp life, true life unmediated, unalienated, unmutilated - wordless and meaningless and sensual and raw. Faith doesn't fill existential questions, it erases the need of critique in itself. It offers the comfort of collective delusion, self-referential and total. Yeah, they're not right ... but being right is luxury: at least, they're not alone.

"As for us," she continued, "we *inhabit* negation, a negation so pure and so complete that the dust of lies can *never* settle. There is very little reconciliation possible. Negate to dissolve repression from within... sort through all

they've made us *swallow*, and deconstruct these lies one by one, 'til there remains no symbols, no reified abstraction; no History, Art, Language, Agriculture, Number... and Civilisation crumbles." She paused, then started anew looking in the distance of the graveyard, reflecting. "If our greatest nightmare is Theocracy, we should look, not hope, but look for a *truly meaningless day*."

A certain silence settled.

"Revolution!" broke the other girl, jesting.

Then Blix enquired, half-smiling half-reflexive: "And then what??

"We become what we are." concluded Daeva, grinning.

... and I was pondering on the significance of these last three words when, at the edge of my sight, scurried a wee little shape, furry and white and pinkish hued, all through the thick grass and unto the loaves and jugs and cutlery; sniffling, nibbling, whiskers atremble atop a particularly large piece of brie.

> I nearly yelped... Sir Antonius Block.

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The destruction of Hope will seem excessive, useless and more so depressing to those who fight against the exploitation, domination and servitude of man. But despair, our despair, stems rather from the futility of these struggles against human experience.

Lawrence Olivier

II.

Her silhouette rose in to snuff out the waning light. Yon the crippled tombstones translateth *she* to our Circle, a herald of dusk: guised in some makeshift patched leather trenchcoat, mudstained and weather-beaten, ornamented by a flow of pale white locks, half braided to her waist. A naked, milken gorge showed the wrack of that selfsame, dangling black star. Confident she strode, laced in ironshod, buckled boots, tightly drawn up to her knees – crushing the very grass underfoot.

In motion she sat next to me, careless, and ripped a piece of *Dinkelbrot*. Then she handed Daeva a square piece of paper and mumbled in deglutition:

"Oï, got a jiffy. Six of'em. Culture jamming – passing 'round leaflets with a couple of our names on it. Uh - some pictures, too. Look, Daeva, what a nasty mug shot! Hey, says the OD's an enemy of the 'People'. What fucken people!?"

"Nevermind that," answered Daeva.

" - made some very uncharacteristic remarks, too, 'bout Hallow's Eve or something. Very anal retentive."

"Aeth'," interrupted Daeva, slightly aggravated, "are they coming over?"

"That they are," answered Aethel. "Just take a look. See?"

But an instant lapsed and I leaped unto my feet, up and atop a large granite tombstone. Squinting across the morbid fields I did behold *them*: half a dozen jocks handing out papers to passersby... and triumphantly walking this way. And I saw... I saw -

"Is that fucking Jöns?"

I didn't realize I was mumbling outloud.

"What?" asked Daeva, her tone barely hinting at some very well concealed anguish. "You *know* one of them?"

"Aye. Sort of... not anymore. Fucken hell!"

"Well, he's in the Alliance now."

"I can see that."

"So what do we do?" enquired Blix.

Aethel, ever so graciously, got to her knees and crouched on all fours, lovingly snuffling her nose against the albino rat's quivering whiskers.

"Let's set Tony loose," she said, "take care o'these pigfuckers."

Blix was up on foot, packing up. "Aeth', you *told me* he wasn't a plaguebearer."

"Did I?", she said, laughing.

Laughing.

Losing sense, I scrambled to my boots and started lacing up, composure failing, fingers shaking. *Fucken hell...*

"Alright," Daeva stood. She was in a rather *sour* mood, to say the least. "Let them think we're afraid. Let them think they've won. That'll give us time for our next move. Next Circle is strictly word-to-mouth only, 'k?"

Dispersion, I thought. Ah, damn it!

When all the dark silhouettes started scattering to and fro I found myself in a moment of pure *dementia*, yes, all were leaving by this way and that, Daeva and Blix and everyone and, and... and to lose... to lose – to lose

- yet *a* hand caught hold of mine - fragile and frail as river lilies, pulsing in adamant warmth: a hold so delicate, a vestal caress...

- and her eyes locked into mine - the amethyst orbs of dark desires and unrestraint, insane and willful and brilliant...

The eyes of Aethel.

"League with me," she invited. "A storm is closing in. The night is ours."

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Enwrapped in the scent of demonic flowers I squeezed back her hand, hauled on my backpack, and together, we flittered into the woods...

Shadow upon shadow.

Terror is not the sight of death, it is the fear of death. What is the fear of death? Terror of the unknown. Is it these eyes you peer into? No. I am not the unknown. You an I are closer kin than you and it were.

- Pisha dialog from *Vampire: Bloodlines*

III.

We scrambled down a knotted path, 'midst surfacing roots and erratic rocks. Dense foliage snuffed out the light – in the woods we roamed, and the day lay dead therein.

Aerily leapt she, footing sure, hither and thither, under branches and across the unseen depths of the forest. Tony was still on her shoulders, claws sunken into the wornout leather, grappling with all his little might not to be wrenched overboard.

"Wait," I hastened. Her pale hair flew erringly. "Aethel, I'd been looking all around for you..."

"You were?" she spoke in a low voice, hardly audible through our footsteps.

And she laughed, merrily.

She laughed.

Clasping my hand in a tighter grip she rushed with renewed vigor and lured me ever so brazenly into the shadows of the coming storm.

And we ran like wild witches.

Blast! Where were we going!? Burning questions tumbled, cloggered to my throat with dense ramifications and deadly implications – what happened while I was gone – why is Clare... and Jöns – Who, what are the People's Alliance, and why the fuck are they so pissed off at you!?

Doubts - distractions. Nay, all my thoughts I laid to waste and resigned in silence. The wavering locks of Aethel

bounced at her every footstep; she ran and her very presence cast all else aside.

I would follow.

...besides, when we surged into the open glade *it was* far too late for words.

There stood the clearing, surfaced in strands of deep blue moss and grayish lichen, oft pierced by the eroded stone ruins of what might have been some olden crypt or chapel.

We plunged into sheer surprise, rounding the glade in wonder, tasting the surreal atmosphere - an *air* charged with electricity, a palpable aura of uncontrollable *strength* which flowed from no perceptible source - rather, the very ambiance had become heavy and *wicked*, pulsating our instincts, sharp.

A storm was coming.

A storm...

Overhead, clouds rumbled asunder and grand webs of lightning soared and rent the sky – great cracks of thunder rolled from the depths and down across the Maze, unto the humid shadows whence we then stood; leering upwards at the ebony spectacle, writhing in anticipation.

And when the first, cool droplets of rain did fall upon our contorted faces, we howled in pleasure and, extending our fingers to the night and to the storm, *yearned for more*.

Tony skittered down her mistress' rags and out to the rocks for cover, but we – we lay motionless in the curtain of falling rain.

In the dark and cold, I could still make out her traits – the silken neck, the black star. Gently I embraced her delicate form 'twixst my arms, lacing her waist amorously – these delirious eyes *held me* for but an instant, for she drew closer yet and whispered to my ear:

"Where were you all this time?"

Where...

Where was I!?

Bemused, Aethel enquired to my days yet I did not wish to speak... words... ah, no. Secrets on all sides, yes. Visions... Squeeky's, Vic, Saffron, and Cherry – Cherry... the Slum Safari. Resilience to answer. "A horrible, horrible place."

Her laughter rang at my answer, fiercer. That gaze fell into mine and I could see its maddening clarity, consuming desires gleaming in argent flames. She held me into, dimly in the obscure theatre of the glade.

Tightly, she bit her lip and seemed to flinch, to wince but for a second – and I beheld malicious designs in her eyes, after which I knew and foresaw the coming play. Madness was there, shapeshifting.

And lo! Loosening her embrace, the Scarlet Fae took a step back, softly, revealing the thinly slit wrist, the other hand which firmly gripped that double-edged blade, now dripping in red waters. How did she –

Dare!

Fangs bared, she lifted the blade high up to my lips, from which I savored the dewy drops of blood as they fell, one by one, unto the gaping hunger of my tongue.

Dare!

My veins did pulse me into a trance, savoring the delirious eyes, and I neared her smiling mouth and there landed a chaste kiss – bloody, but for an instant – then ever so delicately raised her wrist to my lips, and paused, cruelly, to delve into her stare once again, savor the brilliance there, and there I *knew* that she willed me on. Triumphantly, I leaned closer and shut my eyes.

Dare!

And as I bit into her tender flesh, her lustful sighs echoed in the storm, higher, fiercer, into one, brutal moan which was swiftly drowned out by the rain...

And died away.

'O look, look in the mirror, O look in your distress; Life remains a blessing Although you cannot bless.'

Up the stairs I strolled, humming some Auden to assure myself of the adequacy – nay, the alacrity of my purpose here. Deeply I breathed in all the stench of the corridors, just to make certain I'd remember.

Courage, Dim.

Eventually I caught on to the door of my shite-flat and entered and ran in. There was no trace of the double deviants, so I hurried, quite intent on getting the fuck out of there as soon as humanly possible...

Yet how great was my surprise to march into my room and see sweet Cherry sitting there, *waiting for me*. What, three hours early? Had she come to help me pack!? Oh, seeing her on the edge of that dirty mattress, fumbling anxiously at the strap of her vinyl purse, all alone in the world... seemingly filled with such *sorrow* – it... I can't say.

For a second I was certain to regret the simplicity of the Slum Safari.

Yeah, I pitied these people.

"Heya Cherry..."

"Hiya Dim," she replied, "so that's, I - came to help 'ya if you, or whatever..."

Sweet, sweet Cherry.

"You gotta cold or somethin'?"

Aye, my nose started running again so I just wiped at it with the back of my hand... The rain – the grove... ah, no, no.

Weak, weak Dim.

"Sorta. Kinda quiet around here, eh?"

"Well," she blurted all out, "Vic's been gone for three days now. Gwen's talkin 'bout a hit but you know what I'm

IV.

glad. Never liked the way he's to look at me. And's always saying 'penis', d'you ever get that?

"Eh, what about Saf?"

"Backed up in's room since yesterday, like he ain't been sleepin' no long. Says he got keylogged bad, wha'ever the hell *that* means..."

"Aye..."

"So y'need help to pack right?"

"Well," I began, "look around this place. I own next to nothing."

Tears welled up in her eyes. She swallowed them down.

"D'ya quit yer job? Wher'you goin' to live?"

Guilt and answers...

"I didn't quit Squeeky's, I'm just not going anymore. Figured it was the last thing I could do to optimize the damage. As for *living*, if you can call it that... a new friend of mine offered, guy named Blix. Boyfriend just ditched him. I'll be sleeping on the couch, but it's downtown, so..."

Stealthy lies. Bullshit on the spot, really.

"He's gay!?" She was trying to fake anger of some kind. "And what kinda name is that aaanyway? Bliiicks!?"

"Well," I started calmly. "Not gay, queer. As am I. And what kind of name do I have, love?"

Cruel, cruel Dim.

"Jeeesus, I'm sorry, I... uh..."

"Speaking of 'Him', here - I brought you this."

Seeing me unravel a present, Cherry stood up, lower lip trembling. How old was she anyway?

"Symbol of St-Jude," I explained, handing her the necklace. "Take it as a parting gift."

She held it aloft, dumbfounded. Tears started streaming down her cheek.

"Don't go," she started desperately "I mean... won't you stay, juss one night, baby?"

Disdain: disdain and loss. For a second there, I *almost* broke, *almost* stayed, but the darker road lured me in. See!? I was possessed.

Gently, I lay a kiss on her brow.

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"Thank you, love. You've always been kind to me." Silently I looked away, packed a couple of things in haste, then went to the kitchen, opened the fridge, grabbed a beer, popped it on the counter... And left.

> 'O stand, stand at the window As the tears scald and start; You shall love your crooked neighbour With your crooked heart.'

Dear, would it be clear now Wed to an image in my head Is it true that you could bring me closer To the dying sun The next assault may be the lucky one And it's not enough And it's not enough But I live for the touch

-Jennifer Charles

V.

A pale clarity shone through the open window: dawn was rising at a languid pace.

Thick, velvet curtains rustled in the October breeze, blackly hued. Every now and then, the wind waltzed in and swayed the drapes to part, at which pure morning light seeped from all sides and into the chamber. Like streams of water it ran, on and again: a trickle of thin rays faintly flittering down the scarlet walls, reflecting on the battered hardwood floor and up through the purple gossamer which traced 'round Aethel's four poster bed.

Yes, the light was very faint, but unlike that fey creature slumbering next to me, I'd grown quite intolerant to the sun's incursions – quite sensitive indead.

Taunting, the relentless siege on my senses slowly reached to the bottomless sea that was my sleep – void of dreams and nightmares alike.

Breathing deep, I found myself assailed, haunted by the lingering aromas herein: perfumes of incense and scented oils, mostly myrrh and lavender, undistinguishable now from the bed curtains, the blanket, the pillow on which I lay my head – an eldritch ambiance confounded in the very scent of *her*.

A beauty in torpor... she lay besides me now, lying on her side, facing away. Her form blanketed by ebon sheets, resting delicately to her waist – so peaceful, then, through this jocund morn... timeless. Strands of finely braided hair

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covered the pillow, down in cascades to her shoulder – naked, almost, but for a single, finely knit strap of cloth, which held the reddish damask gown she nightly wore – darkly, ornamented by the subtle design of interwoven lotus flowers.

Ah... such nameless beauty. The sight of that round shoulder alone caught my attention. How to say? Splendid and awkward it was: the milkwhite skin, softer than satin, ambiguously traversed by that fine line of fabric – espoused, merely, to rest, asymmetrically, against the paler canvas of her backside.

And I savored that tender sight with my loving eyes, drinking its compelling sorcery, *unable to tell exactly what I saw*. Words would never suffice. It was delicacy incarnate, yet the message it spelled lay out of my grasp. I could not weep, nor laugh or even whisper, let alone *touch* her – any incursion from my clumsy, imperfect part would taint the image. *Oh*, *I knew*.

> And I sighed And I succumbed to her beauty

> > in silence

I – the helpless spectator.

Why defend that to which we are held hostage? [...] Only a negative "community", based explicitly on contempt for the categories of existent community, is legitimate and appropriate to our aims.

- John Zerzan

VI.

"So –", I began, when Daeva cut me short again – a nasty habit I must say.

"Was even married, once..."

It might be worth mentioning that she was down to her fourth pint, smoking by the score, which all worked wonders to loosen her tongue (and tighten mine). Mr. Sportynuts appeared to be courting some tanned surfer girl at the bar. Hence, the fifth round would be delayed. Pity, thinking back on it.

"Can you believe that? Six years total. Condo near the village, shiny new car, self-cleaning oven, a couple of Giger prints, one fucken huge tatami. Nice guy, too. Clean. Fit with the furniture. Perfect teeth, kinda gung-ho. Never beat me, never slept around. Eh, maybe he should have slept around... t'would have taught him something. Anyway, 'loved him 'cause he seemed pure. Can you imagine that? Pure. Always tried to cheer me up. Now what ever made me think he could love me? It seemed like he was listening, but... all along he never really understood a single fucken thing I said."

"Then what happened?" I asked, dubious.

"Well, I was stuck in my second post-doctorate redaction – some botched up piece of *Entzauberung* in situationist theory – and he just came in one night and sat down with me... interrupted my work. The look on his face, I tell you. Pathetic little whelp." Then her voice wavered. Defiantly, she looked up. "Said I was *too dark* for him. Too cold. Too... heavy."

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"Harsh."

"And I wept and wept until I could weep no more. I embraced him one last time but... it wasn't him I was saying goodbye to. It was Hope."

And I couldn't help but smile.

"Yeah I know," she chuckled, "Adieu! Pah! Can you believe that? Some nights trail on like infinity. The naïve have always horrified me, but that was worse: the illusion had crept up to my heart and... turned it utterly *black*. I saw then what I see now: Light is fucken trite. There's nothing behind it. Nothing."

"But..." I felt sorry for her. "Didn't you feel like you needed to mourn him, I mean..."

And then she handed me one of these crooked grins; thin lips hooked on the malignant twist of cynicism.

"Mourn!?" She beat a frail fist against the table. "Mourning is becoming. Besides, how could I stand that skullfucker?"

Suddenly, Sportynuts came over to our side, at last, all muscle and musk, with another round of *Lieben Nacht*.

"Merci, merci." She told him in a faint accent. "L'enfant-roi nous prodigue ses soins! Ça y est, garde la monnaie et cours vite jouir sur tes mensonges."

Ignorant, he cocked an eyebrow and made some joke about croissants, then took his money and left. *Mainstream piece of shit*.

Instantly, Daeva raised her glass.

"Skål för älska!"

"Skål!", I yelled.

And we drank deep.

"You know," she began anew, "you're never really free if you haven't lost it *all*, just once. Orwell said being human is accepting that Life will break you eventually. I disagree. Life itself is everything, and it is sweet and painful and true. I love Life. But what's become of it is... somewhat of a nightmare. You've seen it, haven't you? There is us, and there is the mirror – the pool of lies, the self-replicating illusion, engineering us to serve and make serve. Opaque. But there's a way to plunge through, break the mirror, reach the point of no return, and appreciate, truly, what Life is. But only then, Dim: only once the White Rabbit stops running and sits down for a cup'o'tea. Watches the clouds billowing. Savors the moment. But you need more than words for that, you need more than frustration. You need to carry on your thoughts to their logical outcome; articulate dialectics to the reactivation of your origins. Let the non-existant be nonexistant, don't produce, create!" she sipped and gazed up into my eyes, grinning. "still, what we get is a work in progress. The actual irony here, with us nihilists, is when we manage to survive. I have survived. And how? The others are afraid they'd kill themselves once they've rallied their composure to the obvious. 'Suicide', they keep repeating! 'Suicide here, suicide there! Suicide suicide!' That one argument, over and over again. They're amazed how the Dark can still resist ... they don't know how thinking against Thought can be such a powerful catharsis. Ah... Undead nihilists... we match the horror of this world... Black Rabbits are laughing rabbits."

Her voice hinted on remorse.

"And so the others - these positivists stifle on the bane of benevolence into yet another form of fascism, pushing their arrogance to tumble and melt and twist and turn, unerringly falling on what stills eludes morality. But let them pray, say I, let them beg to whatever 'Maker' they please! When they're truly unconscious we'll pick what pieces we like, be they coated in blood and pus and drool and cyprine." Her gaze wavered. Man, was she drunk. "Of course, t'would be senseless ignoring my own anaemic state. It's been tough, you know. Fucken situated... through the years I've seen spirits flare and be snuffed out, felt the disease. Buried some friends, bailed others out of jail, escorted a couple to - and sometimes from - the insane Asylum...the broken" she looked at me intently, then, almost lovingly, "come to me because I am a specialist of despair: there is no wound I have not yet taken."

Clare, I thought. And how many more ...

"Still, suicides by the score. Sunny people, happy people, everyday actors, healthy squandering fuckers, like

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Mr. Sportynuts back there. At some point they saw fit to brand me and my kind as *rejects!* ...then they've slit their wrists or blew their brains and here we are drinking."

She sipped and clunked an empty glass on the table... then lit another smoke.

"Imagine that: resilient abominations dying of Truth. The fact that we still live is proof that Life has no meaning. It can't..."

Aye.

Daeva... the Archdaemon.

"So", I picked up my trail of thoughts where I'd left them some one and a half pint ago, "you're saying we should stay passive."

Twin black shades reared at me squarely, then, unflinching. Static, cruel mayhap.

"That all depends," she replied in a rather stern tone, "the Disorder is bent on death and despair *in thought*. Until now, the moralists were kept at bay. Now I wonder how much time we still have – they are building *different* prisons now, moral prisons for themselves with plenty of room for us. But they'll be closing in as we struggle, like squirrels caught in snarewire. Dim, *why* the fuck would you want to retaliate? Knaves and simpletons, Right and Left. They're not worth it. Not yet. Besides, there's so many more people to *corrupt...*"

"But the Left," I raged, "they're tailing us. They won't - "

"Oh, I saw," she cut me again, "I was there at the Anti-Cap gathering, I laughed then, when that tartist Ducharme made that proposition – but many others did not – they were still too naïve – and then came the new weapons, the mass arrests, ad absurdum. Some ideologues got into reading Gramsci, lost their nerve and reconsidered, somehow. Idiots. Contacts were made. Closet rutting and theoretical incest, piling to greasy depths unknown. Still we can hint at one common denominator: the promise of power. Every marxoïd organisation and party cleaved to it, which of course is pointless to mention as that's the only fucken thing they respond to, besides platforms, but a substantial part of the

anarchist sub-sub-culture *also* filed in rank for the capitalist gangbang, which I didn't think was fucking possible..."

She was saddened, somehow. But what expectations could be harboured by one as dark as she?

"What does that tell us? What do we learn, Dim? Dissent grows like syphilis: the first symptoms fade quickly but the infection *festers*. Then the second phase settled in. We saw what was going to happen, so... Blix and I sought out the last radicals and created the Disorder. There *are* others, of course... who wouldn't succumb to the Alliance. Mostly black'n'greens. Brilliants anarchs, they. Anticivilisationists, postleftists. Sensitive, at least. But they're not with us, now. They haven't realized how truly *close* we are."

Daeva held her breath, then, seemingly calculating some third degree implications and so forth, "Dim, don't worry about the Alliance. One of us has gone *under*."

What?!

"A mole?", I blurted out.

I couldn't believe it.

"Yes," she replied casually, "the Nematode. Our insider."

"I...I didn't know we –"

"Of course. Security."

"So we're waiting for the right time."

"We're waiting to see if there's *any* reason to strike. Blunt revenge could *strengthen* them. And they might fuck it up themselves. Left like Right. Worthless. They're constantly searching, but can never find the Perfect Lie."

"But to stay passive..."

"Dim! We've already won *ourselves*. And we're becoming everything they're not. Autonomous, subtle, swift and *disturbing*."

"I just thought -"

"Do bear in mind: *they* don't understand us. Don't *ever* expect them to. No matter: sooner or later *it* must understand them."

"Nihil?" "Ah, yes."

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Naive little pieces she thought that they could see her but soon the Desert Pigs will know she's holding in an arsenal

- Free Dominguez

VII.

"Man, I feel like an idiot..."

E wing, G wing, DS main, M G 1 2 3...

Dare!

"Damn, Dim. That's the whole point."

The linear halls trailed one after the other, maze within the Maze.

Dare!

"Still, Aeth', that fucken patchouli!"

The smell was everywhere. We'd fucken soaked our clothes in that stuff.

Still she laughed.

"Now we're like them. Social actors. Ah!"

Arh, nausea – nausea, that disgusting cold light, fluorescent – seeping unto on the endless white ceramic tiles. I winced. There and back again: trailing inside the University with new ideas of retribution.

"Yeah, what a warm feeling." I snarled.

And to tell you the truth, I could hardly recognize her: the Scarlet Fae had donned some green woolen vest and a pinkish pareo, hardly fitting in the autumn chill, complete with straw hat. A fucken straw hat!?

And I – I'd squeezed into some worn blue jeans and a yellow fucken dashiki. Over my shoulder was hauled a large jute potato bag where in all the goodies were stacked. It was a really heavy fucken thing. Oh, and did I mention I wore a *beret*? Yes, yes, a beret. Me, the working class hero. Don't tell me, don't tell me... See, for the time being, that mattered very little. Such worldbeat hypocrisy would discreetly blend in the grey dullness of the University: After all, *it* swallowed such creatures by the thousand every day.

"Eh," she whined. "Isn't humanism crippling?"

"Wait!" I suddenly jerked her arm back. "What time is it?" Startled, she took a quick glance at her watch and hastened anew.

"Relax," she answered, "she's in the clear now, let's go..."

She was referring to the Nematode.

"So the slime is in."

Slime. Drugs. Dope. Home cocktails. Hallucinogens and other acid implements.

"Can you imagine?" She gleaned. "in the guacamole, the salsa, the tzadziki, even in the fucken sag panir."

"What, none in the couscous?" I feigned frustration. "Didn't we have an agreement?"

"Nah," she replied, "figured it was too bland anyway. They might pick up the taste."

"Aye."

So I shut my mouth and trailed along. Unspoken doubts piled up in my head like landslide rubble. Seriously, our plan was rather fucken weak, if not conceptually suicidal. First conceived by the twisted ramifications of some twisted urges, now it seemed to split against the University's impregnable stature. Nickel's words rang through my head again: *imagine inanimate violence*...

Thin, yes. And more importantly: Daeva disapproved. Still, she always fucken interrupted me! Who knows, if I could just explain... and if our plan pulled through... ah, if it pulled through...

"Over here," Aethel whispered.

And if it didn't...

"Let's go."

Underground, then, though I can't recall the exact location. FB115-A, I think. For sure, we were deeply drowned under – some lonely hallway, ranked by two dozen grey doors.

And not a soul in sight.

Aethel suddenly produced a key from her vest pocket and unlocked one of the doors. It was pitch black inside. Welcomed in truth, we went in and closed the door. "Alright," she said quickly, "let's get through," at which she turned on a small flashlight. We appeared to be in some underfurnished office. Probably unused.

Acquiescing, I hauled down my pack and took out the two white skimasks: one for her, and one for me. After we'd taken off our hats and put them on, I grabbed the sledgehammer with both hands and fucken roared.

Action!

With all my strength I swung against the backwall. Swiftly the plaster broke down and toppled asunder like some dusty cardboard collage. Again and again I struck, forcing a huge fucken dust cloud and what must have sounded like total obliteration.

"Imagine Ducharme", glowered Aethel, wicked, "just imagine *her* at that splendid little speech, five years' study in Communications and she'll be raking it all in, oh yeah, she'll be format-fucking the media with words like *justice* and *people* and *welfare* 'til she's got 'em turned on to *vote* – that... fucken demagogic whore, all washed in a hail of flashes and applause..."

The debris sent smoky beams of blinking lights through the room, red and orange and yellow. At once we crawled in, already smudged with dust. On the other side gleamed something I'd never seen.

"...and everyone of these left-wing fuckers," she went on, "bellies full and jolly, just so serene, you know? 'We're doing it', they'll say, 'now we've got it! We've finally got it! We're gonna change the world!' And then, out of nowhere, just out at the *exact right moment*: a slight tingling, just a funny little feeling at first..."

Still holding on to the sledgehammer, I gently let the bag in through the hole and went in myself, after which I helped Aethel set her footing... only when I'd smashed out the two security cameras did I take a good look around, gasping for breath.

Fucken hell.

Boards of high-tech gear walled the room on all fours, grey-blue metallic and black. Tiny lights gleamed and blinked and you could hear, almost *feel* the low buzz of some twoscore harddrives rotating. Fans and different airconditioning devices also hummed in the background. The very aura of that place stank of metal perfection.

Still, Aethel went on, digging into the bag to set up the gear. "'Is it the wine?' They'll say. 'Or maybe I've danced one meringue too many?' But ah, no, no no, that can't be it. When the first *vision* comes they're still gonna try and fucking *reason...*"

All of a sudden I remembered my first night with her - and the feeling... the...

"Ah!" Aethel nearly purred. "We'll fucken *impale* these Christians from all fucken sides."

Without hesitation I grabbed the can of red spray paint and went to work. There wasn't much of a wall so I just went over the metal boards. There, in bold print:

Repent !

Jesus Saves !

All at once, Aethel took out the crowbar and that heavy, rigged car battery I'd carried on my back, then set herself on a low case, trying to ply the cover open. Between clenched teeth she hissed:

"Let them taste blood."

The screws came loose and broke off, tinkling to the cold floor. She hacked at the lid until it came off then started fumbling around with the wires. When she finally found the one she wanted, she pulled it out to a great length.

"Don't worry. Daeva's going to like this one. Central servers, hubs and intranet routers. Thirty years of Union Archives. And every record of the People's Alliance to nothingness..." she wiped her dusty lips as she grabbed the booster cables, "Oh, the Left is gonna *feel* this one."

Triumphantly she snapped the cables together. In an instant *chaos broke loose*: great sparks flared up on all sides, followed with an agonizing electronic *cringe* that seemed to trail all across the walls and through the very ceiling. For a second there I thought the room would fucken collapse – but

all noise slowly faded away, fans died down and there remained absolutely nothing.

A cold silence settled in.

Nearing Aethel's palely lit figure, twin amethyst eyes locked into mine intensely, awe stricken. She was afraid. Oh no – no – I hadn't heard, you see, and when the sight of her struck me motionless I finally understood the reason of her fright...

Voices down the hallway.

"Hurry", she grabbed my arm and drew close. "Let's get the fuck out!"

The next instant we jumped through the hole, barely clinging on to our stuff, and crashed headfirst into the office. The flashlight went out. I grabbed on to the sledgehammer, not quite sure what I'd do with it. I mean, what *could* I possibly do with it!?

Ah – in the distance we heard footsteps, hallway doors sprung wide. Hoarse male voices thundered like a pack of dumb fucken beasts, amongst which I distinctly heard:

"Over there, oï!"

It was Jöns' fucken voice.

"Jöns," I whispered. "Oh, fucken hell!"

All of a sudden I felt Aethel going through the bag again. Oh no, I though. Fuck no!

"Plan B," she hushed in a fierce tone.

Ah no, not Plan B!

Knuckles white, I clasped the hammer tight as though it were my last chance of survival. Shivers ran all the way through my bones. *That can't be fucken happening...*

"Dim, listen," Aethel hugged me close. "Dim, get a grip, now, *I need you*." In one hand she held a lighter, and in the other...

"Listen," she repeated, "we've only got seconds, now we're getting out of this, *I fucken swear*: now there's a lightswitch just across the door, *ok*!? I need you to turn it off as quick as you can, now grab the bag and go, GO!"

Alright, I thought.

Alright, motherfuckers.

All at once I sprang into motion – nerves hooked and muscles tense – plunged forward into the door and slammed it open – *she*, did she... *laughed*, I – the fluorescent light *burned my eyes* but it was too late; some four or five blurry shapes appeared in the corner of my sight yet I flew across the hall and crashed my fucken fist against the lightswitch.

And all went dark.

O darkness, glorious Darkness!

On my side flared sudden blue fire, shadowing the shape of the daemon which then stood at my side. Defiantly she faced the ones who had come for us. The fuses hissed so intensely that I couldn't make out what the others said – but it ranged on pure *horror*, yes: from where they stood they must assuredly see that she held aloft half a dozen pipebombs, three in each hand, all lit and smoking, *ready to blow*.

Distinctly I heard her say in a calm, steady voice:

"And only when they're running will they come to understand..."

She was quoting Filth.

And...and they ran like furry little White Rabbits! Ah! All at once and out for escape, but she surged forward and threw the eerie flames on – first three to their feet, last three down the end of the hallway, right in front of the scattering silhouettes. The blast was coming, and with it the shards, but – a second, a breath and a beating heart – when the shrapnel exploded, we two had already turned our backs on the scene and were running fucken wild.

... So ends the pitiful reign of Man.

Interludium

Natt Stjärna

Hear that hissing now on the breeze As through the plundered groves of the carnal garden A fresh horror blows but ten billion souls Are blind to see the rotting wood for the trees

Dani Filth

I.

Luckily, the windowlock was fashioned in generic industrial craft. A homemade, somewhat cruder device would assuredly give me more trouble, taking more time to elude, and would have produced greater noise than the Maze's nightly agony could possibly conceal.

Ah yes!

The blade wedged against the windowsill, and there just a slight push – precise – wood chips, paint peels and iron bends, there it slides in and gently loosens the lock sideways in a cute little *cringe*. The window slides up, a gulf of chill wind entering in, sending white curtains aflutter. Aye, the dwelling of the one revealed, my own personal gate to the underworld: the silent room yon, dark and pitch black, silent and reft of life.

Time, is there - I must... no. And I've thought on this hard and long and fast.

Action.

As I put on those gloves and don that back-end stench'd cagoule – like some morbid executioner, some sadistic public personality – I can't help but bless the Nematode's vibrant prowess. We have purchased this wrack together, *it* and I, and I... no. Ah, *perfect*.

There I slide myself in, carefully, making sure not to scrape a single thread of cloth, let out a single wisp of hair or even the slightest morsel of my daemonic self – nay, I can not be found. I must not be found. Not now.

Footing falls on a set of creaking floorboards, and I clench my teeth at the very tremor. *Fuck!* No matter, no matter! Soon all clamant cries will cease, I have come for her, *I have come for the achromatic Maze itself.*

- there in the orange streetglow I can hardly make out the furnishing, the double bed, the pantry, the desk, some particularly large cactus tree and an old-style looking glass. Interesting. An impressive set of bright coloured candles that have never been lit. Some sculptures, too, it seems, one of what appears to be a wooden phallus, over one meter high. Oh my. Probably mahogany. And there, just behind - double sliding presswood doors, decorated by some poster of Simon Bolivár.

Aye. Totally obscene.

There I make my way across the room, on tippy toes, back arched like some ghastly ghoul. *Ah*, *ha!* There, that bed, fluffy pillows and a pure white duvet. Now there must have been some pretty horrid scenes, don't you think? *Ah*, *ha!* That - there, finally I get to the wardrobe, (try and sneer away from Bolivar's luminous fucken face), slide one door open, take a deep breath and plunge fucken *into* that bunnyrabbit hole and slide it back behind me, but – all rolled up like some pesky centipede, comfy comfy but – is that – ah, no, no – patchouli, *patchouli!?* – urgh, that fucken stench, it's... everywhere, everywhere! like at the University, argh – no, fucken, *fuck!* – argh!

Bloody hell!

... swallowed in the shallow enclosure, I must wait, wait - argh, huddled unto myself into the horrible fake scents of cinematic delusions. No, no no. I am a worm inside the beast, I am a worm of squirming deeps, I -

I lay my trust upon the Nematode... yea, *it* is the sole string of my puppet comedy. I wish, now, that I knew *its* face. Phantom shapes will not console me in my hour of need.

Now I must wait. Not long, I hope (ah, hope!?). Just long enough to decide what I'll do with *her...* aye, wicked, *wicked*, yes. Noose and knife. Maybe tie her down, then, with the seven bandanas of the seven colors or her *sole* fucken rainbow!? Ah! Clasp her in a sturdy snare, yes – force her to hear some excerpts from *Elements of Refusal*? Would she be undone by words alone, or – ah, no, so much finesse for such a hypocritical trollop would be utterly wasted. Plain yucky. My thirst, I – perhaps just settle and jab her outright in the neck, yes, *bleed her silently like some wayward stag*, defile her essence and make it wholly mine. Steal her strength. Reap that fell gift from her bones and claim my retribution.

What an image! But no, too masculine for me, that thrust – besides, there's always a chance a single lap at that stuff would distort my veins and I'd end up crying Reform, Reform! Compromise!

Ah!? Fair enough, I'll wait, oddly at ease in the soft darkness of her lair, assailed by the nauseating smells and visions of crippling satisfaction, I'll wait. Nothing can stop me. I shall not recant.

See!?

My dark vengeance nigh to be.

The Daemon Flower

...for those whom Will still animates, what remains after the total suppression of Will is assuredly nothingness. But, in reversal, for those who have converted and abolished Will, it is our world, this world so real with its suns and milky ways, *that is nothingness*.

- Arthur Schopenhauer

I.

"Certain things are not to be discussed, of course..." Aethel began, her hands gripped on the wheel, gaze erring to and fro the odd country scenery. "For starters, my father's practise, or anything remotely concerning Law, or... anything about politics for that matter. He gets... *defensive*. Also, you want to refrain from any reference to what I do. Just follow my lead."

"Sure," I yawned.

And the car rolled on.

Damn I was tired... we'd left at dawn to make sure we'd get there around noon, that is, *if* we got there. Aethel drove this broken ride with explicit brutality. Still, it carried *certain* charms. For instance, no matter how fast we went the speedometer was stuck on *one*, which even after all this time I still think was fucken hilarious. Also, there was a humongous hole in the backseat floor, probably due to rust or something. I swear it grew every time I looked at it.

Sir Antonius Block leered at me from the dashboard, little pink eyes all aglow, whiskers aquiver. Triumphant, he was crouched atop a very battered copy of the Amurgul gândurilor, aside from which gleamed the perilous sgian dubh. Strange collection, those three. The book, the blade, and the rat. And they all dangerously clinkered and rattled from side to side at every fucken curve -

Meanwhile, Aethel and I were listening to some Nick Cave tapes, watching the landscape roll by, a brave display of early October, all brown and yellow and dormant. Intoxicating, slumberous. Against a light rain the flat country rolled on, poplars lining the fields, farmsteads spread in the distance. Some wooded hills to one side.

...and I was trying to follow the Scarlet Fae's instructions closely, gulping on large quantities of some dishwater shite coffee we'd picked up on the way. *Creamy irish walnut* or something.

"Holy shit," she said, looking down at it, "how can you gulp that bowel-twister?"

Rank stuff, but it seeped through my teeth ravenously. And why not?

"Not so bad, really. Eh, eh."

Liar. Still, in all fairness I would have settled for worse... even a cinnamon Chaï tea. Hell, I needed strength. I mean, the Estate and the Mansion... who knows? And so what!? Bring on the ulcers! Bring on the kidney stones!

"Anyway... most importantly," she caught up, "careful not to mention my mother. Ever."

"Why," I laughed, "painful memory?"

And she looked away, dispassionately. Ouch. Slurp. More, more coffee!

"Ever since she died," she sighed, "the old coot'll just whine on for fucken aeons, I just can't bloody stand it when he gets like that."

A strange silence settled in. I wondered how many more of these little secrets she was trying to conceal... and most importantly, why she was still trying to *pretend*. Seeing Tony atop that book, I suddenly wondered if she ever read someone aside Cioran. Pretend... well ok, maybe I didn't have the slightest clue.

Still...

"Still," I broke in, "Caitlin's a wee pretty name for such a bonnie lass as ye."

And she grinned, black star dangling at her neck.

"Still is my slave name. Fuck it. But..." she looked at me, then, with *these eyes*. "What do we call you? Seems only fair that I should know your *real* name too..."

Aye. I'd been trying to avoid that... still thinking on Jöns and his crew, probably blown to mucus shreds. Resist! Oï, oï...

"Err, why don't you call me Dim still? Say it's foreign. If Hector's as senile as – "

"- well," she cut in, "almost, but mind you, he mustn't be underestimated. Some aspects of his former self remains. He still retains some... manner of a... former stature. He's declining alright, but he's still the brass-balled Patriarch. Trust me."

And I could see that her life had been marred by such rivalry. She went on:

"He won't see through me, though. So alright then, Dim. Your choice. I guess we don't have to worry."

But will he see through me, I wondered.

"Damn, I still can't believe your father's a senator..."

And Aethel laughed outright.

"Me neither! Fucken fascist... Each night I pray for a swollen prostate or some bulging artery."

And I smiled, too, finally at ease. Humour and lightheartedness, ah yes – simply to rest, yes, and savour the instant – laying my head against the window, letting my empty cup fall to the floor against the other junk littered there.

The October rains stretched out from view, out there, with the pale yellow grass of the barren fields, the stacks of wheat and barley from a late harvest...

And old Cave sang low.

Walk with me now under the stars It's a safe and easy pleasure It seems we can be happy now It's late but it ain't never realities less than air, please expire the term. She hangs on a cheek of night, Aurora, Aurora.

- Krys Force

II.

But I could never forget.

I remembered some night ago, lost in the drapes of her room, enwrapp'd altogether in the sweet witchery of incense and candlelight, an empty bottle of spiced wine and the eldritch ambiance of wavering gossamer curtains – how we kneeled, then, unto her bed, naked flesh incandescent, aching to be consumed – how that wicked blade gently slit against my forearm – how it bit into my flesh like the sharp piercing fang of a rattlesnake, almost lovingly – yes, and *how she* rest her lips on the wound and drank *deep*, suckling on my veins like a new born babe, discovering the world.

And when she raised her head anew, locks tumbling down, chin and neck all drenched and gorged in blood – her eyes, and a mouthful overflowing in vitae – I heard myself whispering, shaking, *Please*, *please Aeth'*, *take me away from here*, *just take me away...* and she'd smiled, then – how she'd smiled – I will, beloved, she softly sang, I will, and she'd wrapped her still dripping lips over my gaping mouth, luscious tongue twirling to lap.

I will.

The Enfeebled provides the fool The Disabled provides the tool The Apathetic demands the affection To those suffering from their own satisfaction

- Silenoz

III.

"More potatoes, Dim sir?" Maria's breasts brushed against my shoulder as she leaned over, dish in hand. Her accent was perceptible, if not identifiable. Where was she from?

"Ah, *varum nicht*?" I replied, jesting, at which the maid broke into a sweet ignorant chuckle, delicately scooping me some more of these small sour creamed potatoes with fresh basil and sea salt on top. A regional specialty, probably.

"Well, Dim lad," started Hector, the august, deep baritone voice rumbling from all the way across the richly laid dining table, "you certainly take a liking to our dear Maria's cooking! A good appetite is highly profitable, I always say, be it for good men's counsel or simple merriment, and between this, that and the other, a full stomach shall always warrant good moral judgement, God willing... any natural *dearth* will turn good men into packs of bloodthirsty animals."

Certain panic, certain delight. I was way out of my league, obviously, yet... I sure seemed to hold the old fucker by the balls. Err, so to speak.

Now, the hall was grand and furnished in what promised to be generic Victorian apparel, golden and white in the ample crystal light. A great fire roared in a mansized enclave off to my left. Everything seemed so huge, so disproportioned... even the dining table, great as it stood, seemed utterly grotesque to be manned by us simple three... sad, somehow?

Aethel stood between us on one side of the table, smiling, serene. Disguised again. I, in some formal black suit, complete with white shirt and blue tie; her in some rather chaste gown of a lovely radiant red. She'd even taken off the

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black star, to be replaced by a single ruby rose pendant. Aye, different alright.

Alongside hurried the maid with the dishes, to and fro the kitchen – one of the two sole servants of the house. The eldest, Sergei, was apparently off to some household task in the basement. Needless to say, he wouldn't have sat with us anyway.

"Reminds me of a tale of sort," began Hector, in between mouthfuls of peppered veal and *valpolicella* wine, "about the great flood some years ago, how many now, sweetling?"

"Fourteen, father." She answered leniently.

"Ah, yes, fourteen years already," Hector breathed deep, "now you see, Dim lad, the rains had been pouring since early July. Quite a peculiar phenomenon, as strange as widely unexpected... and tragedy followed, as it most certainly does when Mother Nature elects to present Her most scornful temper. Anywho, a certain multitude of happenings did sprout in consequence, namely the destruction of many a good harvester's crop. A most terrible plight, that. Ah, come to think of it, it was around this time of year that they... how odd..."

Hector seemed to lose his trail of thoughts for a while, dumbly fumbling at his silver salad fork. Suddenly he raised his voice again.

"Now... the country folk with their... backward culture, mired in pervasive superstition and a rather *standoffish* sort of mentality, seemingly strained against the providence of empirical reasoning... did react to their misfortune in somewhat *unwise* counsel. There rose some sort of disagreement amongst the villagers' legislative committee regarding the use of certain lands in my name, mostly due to some questions of water draining and rent value. Still, as lead chairman of the Conservationist Society I was indebted to a certain code of ethics regarding the use of my property, mainly to ensure the protection of the many species' habitats which do find haven there... my tenacity, so to speak, was ill-received..." Maria waltzed in to fill our glasses again. I must admit, with enough potatoes and more of that wine, I would have listened to any old men's tale all night through.

Aye, that I would have.

"... needless to say, my grasp on the situation was rather near-sighted. Indeed, while I worked away at various duties concerning my rank and station, the country folk conspired against me, muttering suspiciously behind closed doors like a band of cowardly rodents, and so chanced one another into some dreadfully whimsome labels and a fairly hasty, hand-tailored casus belli - all seditious themes which turned distrust to anger and anger to transgression, whence a single handful of ... agitators somehow convinced their wouldbe peers that my assets and, more importantly, my right, had somehow worsened their condition. Animals. But still, October strolled in and the rains kept on, wherein a congregation of sort was held, whose ... linguistic flourished portend on certain schemes and intentions, to all spontaneously sprouted and quite ill-advised in all regards. That... mob", he seemed to choke on the very word, "elected to come to my gates with sticks and stones and fists up high, apparently willing to sink to any God-forsaken low to do us down."

He paused, gazing into the darkness of his wine... some theatrical stance, or maybe the memory was still truly vivid. Finally he raised his head anew.

"When they came I was caught unaware, if not ultimately baffled. All at once I felt convinced that certain precautions had to be taken, erst these savages, these criminals would go to any length to achieve their ambition... hence I was speaking on the phone with the local authorities when, all of a sudden I happened to glance outside the kitchen window and... so suddenly heard myself yell out 'By Saint-Sebastian's Arrows!"

Aethel's lips doubled the old man's word very discreetly, perfectly lipsinked. She knew that tale by heart. Still the old man went on, oblivious to his daughter's blatant mockery. "There she was, Caitlin's mother – God rest her soul – walking outside in the cold pouring rain, not a coat on her shoulders, right at the very gates of our Estate! By God! I thought her... condition might have worsened and so could ill conceal an overwhelming sentiment of *terror*, needless to say."

Condition? What condition?

"But you see, strangely enough, she strolled out before the mob as caught in a dreamlike state, and the... *beasts* did seem to halt at the very sight of her. Then I felt certain they would stone her to death before my very eyes... Lapidate her like some rabid dog – she, my *beloved wife...*"

And Hector raised his eyes to a fine portrait above the roaring fireplace – an old oil painting whose subtle lines were lit by the flames' dancing glow. A graceful, serene women, richly clad... whose pallor shone white in the vast dining hall. And her eyes...

Portrait of a dead countess.

"The mob silenced its cries when she leaned over to their side, soaked to the bones. I saw her then, as I see my Caitlin now... and she was *speaking* across the rain curtain, addressing that band of scallywags for but an instant it seemed, yet I *too* stood motionless, as if caught in the selfsame imagery... compelled not to intervene. Eerie."

His gaze was fixed on the portrait.

"She had daunted them all. Something in her words, or in her mien, liefly carried across the rain and the iron bars to the souls and hearts of these men... like autumn leaves, gently broken by a wayward wind and wavering down, somehow, unto the barren soil where Fate had willed them exactly."

He paused, still in awe.

"One by one the villagers simply turned... and left."

Aethel rolled her eyes at me, then, as I was apparently confused by the old gaffer's tale. Her laughing eyes said many things, not unlike *I told you so*. Her father became very stern again, as if his own trance had been broken.

"Now, Dim lad, err," he picked up his thoughts, "the lesson here is that, oft times, an honest glance can bring *order* in the hearts of men, far more swiftly than the sternest rule of Law. One must look to oneself before turning to his brother, be it in hunger, kinship or... *malcontent*."

Aye... I couldn't keep from asking...

"Well... pardon my indiscretion but I simply must ask. What did she *tell* the folk?"

And he stayed on the painting, transfixed in the recollection of untold souvenirs.

"Who knows, my boy? That secret lies with her, now, alongside all she has chosen to take beyond the realm of Men..."

And my gaze erred to my empty dish, to my empty glass, to the soaring flames and lastly settled on the portrait of the dead countess.

And I, too, couldn't look away.

Come desired nightfall Enchant my grievous loss Life bewailed at sunset Trespass the shadows in my heart Arise before me Bequeath thy grievous loss Dark at heart I mourn thee Replace the vigour she once lost

- Mortan Veland

IV.

Meaningless, so meaningless...

We'd decided to hold our tryst upon the witching hour. By then, Aethel claimed her father would be sound asleep. And when I'd enquired as to the discretion of the employees, the vehemence of that Scarlet Fae's laughter swiftly silenced any lingering doubt. After all, she was from here.

Ah, Life is meaningless...

Still, precautions were required, as I didn't particularly wish to have a load of birdshot fired up my arse by some over-zealous father figure in the middle of the night, right!? Still, that didn't explain why *she*'d chosen to show up *late*.

Meaningless and beautiful...

... so I was standing at a balcony from the main hallway of the Mansion's third floor, wrapped in my overcoat, a woollen scarf twice rolled 'round my neck, trying to keep warm. Belly full and merry with wine, I braced myself against the October breeze, unexplainably euphoric.

Before me stretched the greater part of the Estate, the frozen garden below – Aethel had been quite verbose in its appreciation, constantly lauding Sergei's efforts to effloresce all those various chrysanthemum, orchid and Havelock arrangements, not to mention the legendary aroma of a fairly ambitious lily shrub. Of course, at this time of year, it all just looked like a derelict set of surprisingly organized twigs... Beyond rolled the fields, overlaid by a thick hawthorn patch, broad in stature and darkly overcast in the autumn night. To the East flowed the black, billowing shape of a lake, the width of which could not be guessed, as it stretched out far beyond my sight. Yet I could easily distinguish a straight grey mark traversing its nearest shore: that quaint stone quay Aethel used to swim from.

Now the western banks of the lake reached to the hawthorn patch and thicker, heavier strands of what promised to be some low maple trees or some denser species. And finally, just beyond, there rose the great haunt of the Estate, the earth-taint, that wallowing blight: the great swamp.

Fed by the still waters of the lake it grew, mooring and pestilent, festering, growling, lightless and vast. Aethel had spoken of that odious place in such abhorrence and yet... and yet, seeing it thus, I couldn't help but feel humbled, if not utterly driven, by its silent splendour. What could such a place hide in its midst, suckling and soft?

Meaningless, still. Ah, ha...

And I was musing on such erotic visions of mud and rutting filth when the minuscule white shape of Antonius Block did run across my feet and out to the railings, rummaging as always.

"Hail Milord," I greeted him. He looked back at me as though I'd somehow scared off his game. *Reproach*!?

Instantaneously there came footsteps across the corridor behind, and they sounded both light and lithe and *I knew them by heart*.

Twin arms enfolded me gently.

"Ibi cubavit lamia," she sweetly sang, nose snuggling in the scarf at my neck. As with the windfall of her approach, that witching perfume of hers overcame me through the chill wind and I felt dark themes writhe anew.

"Do you like it here, beloved?" she breathed, softly.

"It's... surreal."

What to say? The fierce ghosts of a decadent family were storming my walls.

"I haven't seen such beauty in so long... I had no idea it – I can't believe you were raised here."

Laughing, she kissed me on the cheek and roared.

"I can't believe I made it out."

"Yeah, that was *some* tale..." I retorted, still haunted by the painting of that senator's dead bride. Now *why* did I ever pity him!?

"Yeah", she snarled viciously, holding me tighter. "Always wondered who were stupider, that old coot staring out his window or the mob who just turned back and left? They should have ransacked the place."

"So what *did* your mother tell them?"

Yeah, I know. I just had to ask.

Delicately, she released her embrace and came to stand at my side, holding my hand, gazing out into the darkness.

"What matters," she sighed, "is that I've survived."

Survived...

Silently, she turned away from the sight of the lake, the fields, the dreadful hawthorn and the vast swallowing swamp, and came to face me. Only then did I see clearly: her pale brow, her tumbling locks, the black chocker at her neck and the star that hung there, a verse I knew so well –

Her soft touch sought release from mine and she graciously raised her hand – raised it adamantly, a caress to the autumn breeze, though I expected *in a second, a breath and a dying instant* – how I yearned to see the flashing blade, the inviting wound, the savoury drops of scarlet vitae – but I swear, all that which would have killed me, then, I swear *it would have fucken killed me...*

But no. She simply slid her hand inside the folds of my coat and pressed her palm over my heart.

Delicately.

"Dim, I know you're lost."

I... I –

"It's alright", she whispered, "we all are. But we're together now. No reason to part. This place," she hushed low, gazing to all we beheld, "is *ours*, beloved. Soon. Ours to subvert. Ours to warp. Trust me. Be *true*." How could she...

Still she took me in her arms and whispered in the most beautiful melody:

"I will not forget."

Her warmth! Ah! Still I *held* her, my Scarlet Fae, the sweet witch of my heart! Tears arose in my eyes and I returned her embrace all at once, passion aflame, enamoured with the full force of my bleak despair. I was saved – saved at long last!

> Oh... what promise! Meaningless, my thoughts echoed. Meaningless and beautiful.

Daylight awake to a puppet world No strings attached to this body of mine Folding crumbling withering oh well The punished pushed along the line All my actions, all my moves A life all mine to lose

- Anneke van Gersbergen

V.

'Ere dawn had risen over the Estate I'd already strolled down to the ground floor: a new man, born again to the Dark. Nothing would stop me now – shriven in violation. *Promise* was written on my lips, oh yes, promise and bliss in every sight: the pale dawning light of October in the distance, invading every window; bride of a forecoming Winter.

Let it come, I mused. Oh, let it come.

Majestically I clambered down that flight of stairs, cleanly shaven, hair tied in a knot, coat all buttoned up.

When I got to the lobby I headed straight to the dining room where Maria was arraying the table for breakfast: three large bread loaves, half a dozen small jars of marmalade and different wildberry jams, alongside a generous morsel of butter placed upon a stoneware dish.

"Guten Morgen, Maria!"

I must have startled her, for when she turned to me she was blushing.

"Good morning, Dim sir." Her smile shone with the light of faraway lands. "I'm sorry, breakfast isn't all ready yet -"

"Oh, that's quite alright, thank you", I replied, tightening my scarf. "I was just going for a morning walk... Caitlin has told me so much about the garden!"

She laughed. "Yes, Sergei takes care of it now that she's gone, he tries so very hard you know..." Carefully distributing different pieces of silverware cutlery, she finally added: "but you would like some coffee now, perhaps?"

"That would be lovely, thank you."

While she poured the stuff, I caught myself looking around the room, just wondering... trying my best to keep from staring at the senator's dead wife.

"There you go," she said, handing me the small porcelain cup, fresh and still fuming. "Will you be leaving today, then?" she asked.

I kindly thanked her, mixing some cream in the black pitch. "Sadly, yes. But something tells me we'll be back pretty soon..."

She nodded, half-smiling, still going about her routine, slicing bread. For a second I brushed aside the thought of even helping her. Soon, though, she'd be *free*.

Careful not to let my – our – designs show, I simply took my cup and made my way across the rooms, 'til finally twin wooden doors opened wide...

And I wandered out into the sleeping garden to greet the day.

Heir of conspiracy.

Before the phone rang -

"Your turn," she said. "But my peons will gangrape your cavalier. Forfeit now and I might spare you to scrub me buckets."

She laughed, laughed.

"Not unless my tower... or maybe if..."

"Ah, no, no, no..."

Damn it! I couldn't be beat three times in a row!? But my queen had fallen and Aethel was fives pieces ahead. My crafty advance was now reduced to a pathetic retreat. All these precious plans, in tatters! The agony! I needed a miracle.

Desperately, I sought out Antonius, who was scratching about my lap, apparently oblivious to my dismay. And why? Maybe he knew something I did not.

"Please, Milord, I beseech thee... I need counsel... the League is broken! The Enemy is within! Who to trust? The dastard, the tower? We both know the king is *impotent* – "

But he just handed me one of those nervous looks, like he was afraid to speak his mind. What an advisor!

"Blast you!" I raved, "Weakling! Begone!"

And Aethel laughed hysterically.

"Curse you, bloody princess," I sighed. "I surrender... please be gentle..."

She yelled out, triumphantly: "Ah-ha! Grovel, now: no army of Men can rival the Righteous!"

And then the -

VI.

Time hath stopp'd -Yet for others ne'er halteth; For me the Pages of Life do not turn, Lo! - on the funeral pyre they burn. The oh so eathing Velvet Darkness they fear -Heed! - wherefore delve a burrow, When in my arms "O! Come here"? -I say, elsewhither is naught but sorrow!

- Raymond J. Rohonyi

VII.

Noxious unto the Maze, we roamed the endless streets in haste: two buckled freaks coupled for insurrection. The vague impression that naught would avail the coming trials certainly lingered, still anguish spelled doubt at every step: it was night and winter was settling nigh – any trembling of our scheme would certainly be second death.

Aye, it would for me.

"Can't believe she's called us out so late," I groaned, "seriously, what the fuck!?"

Aethel walked besides me, boots laced high, trench buttoned up, Tony huddled in her purse. She too seemed... aggravated by our predicament. Daeva had no reason to summon an Obscurantis Disorder's Circle at such short fucken notice. So why the fuck –

Ah, head-on, head-on! We made our way steadily to that appointed place and time, whilst every beat of iron-shod boot on frozen pavement hoofed *Annabelle*, *Annabelle*!

"Might be serious," Aethel replied, "Daev's giving a lecture tomorrow morning. Scholars need at least five hours sleep to operate, that is a well documented fact."

"Yeah," I agreed, "Well at least four, plus a double mocchajavafrappaccino, otherwise their discursive methods do tend to devolve back to coarse *post hoc, ergo propter hoc.*"

And Aethel laughed.

"Hegelians gone wild, volume three!"

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"Still," I replied, somewhat severe, "Daeva knows what she's doing. Scary little *punctus*, don't you think?"

"But..." Aethel started, then stopped all at once. What-

...we'd strayed from one boulevard to the next and I wasn't sure where we were, 'till she pointed in the direction of some familiar cross street. Grabbing my hand, she pushed forward in that direction, wilfully.

Between clenched teeth she hissed:

"Lo and behold, Doctor Huey! I can't fucken believe it..."

But I soon understood what she meant... and I too fell into her bloodthirsty swoon.

See!? There *he* was, sat against the granite wall of some franchise venue, hardly recognizable in the fake orange street glow. Oddly wrapped in some small greasy fleece blanket, he was holding a brown piece of cardboard where was written in bold, black marker letters: *Give me* 25¢ *if you masturbate*.

Yeah, it was him all right – everybody remembers Doctor Huey – pants all shredded and sown with tens of dangling pins and washed out patches, that unkempt mohawk, the ghastly face...

He didn't see us coming outright – looking to each passer-by, begging for spare change. Following Aethel's lead, I came right at his side, hands into fists.

Closing in, she snarled, "You fucken snitch!" Then grabbed one of his arms, and I the other, and we dragged his sorry arse into the next alley. Nickel started to panic all at once, kicking and screaming: "Lemme go you fucking fucks! Help! Hel –"

'Til we threw him on the cold ground. The shock pushed the air out of his lungs and he just moaned, falling flat on his face, recoiling out on his back, leering back at us like some cornered beast. Sure, he was scared shitless, but that certain... alacrity, flickering behind his eyes confirmed to me that he recognized us nonetheless...

That fucken snitch!

"Hey, your – you guys, ah... Dim! What – what gives, mate? For fuck's sake!"

And we stood there, silent, judges to a punctual court.

When he saw that *we* weren't joking he braced himself aback, trembling. Pointing an awkward finger in my direction, he started to mumble:

"Is – is that blood on your chin?"

So suddenly did the Scarlet Fae swing down her purse and launch a direct kick into his face, the bottom of her heel crashing on his mouth like a fucken brick – straight into his fucken face –

The full force of her boot sent Nickel sprawling on the pavement. Chocking on his blood, he screamed again for help, barely able to get on all fours. Great gouts of the red stuff splotched out unto the frozen concrete.

But no help came.

And Aethel *laughed*, oh how she laughed!

"What now!?" she screamed, "call your pigs, damn under! Call 'em right! Call 'em good! Squeal, you fucken traitor!"

Not a second passed before I felt her raving glee surge up again to violence, and her able shape moving to strike out again – when all of a sudden, a wee white shape skittered in front of Nickel's battered form and he sprung into motion – too quick, *too fucken quick*.

Rising on unsteady feet, he faced us, braced for anything. His hands aloft, we could see that he held Antonius tight.

"Haaa!" he spat blood, "Don't you fucken move!" Caughing, a broken teeth fell from his swollen lips and clinkered unto the pavement floor.

And Aethel stopped laughing.

Harrowing moments passed, for once I felt the full force of her dementia: it rung through my very being in dissonant chords. Horror flared true and the *sgian dubh* shone in her hand, as bright as a midnight star.

"Let him go," she ordered.

Nickel was shaking uncontrollably; he looked to the rat, the blade and then unto me, all back and forth, on the

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verge of doing something very foolish. *Panicking*. He didn't move, didn't – but Aethel was clenching the hilt tighter, knuckles white.

A second and a dying instant -

"By Bakunin's beard, Nickel, just let him go!" I screamed out. And hearing these words, the old punk just nodded, dumbfounded. He grudgingly released his hostage very slowly, deposing him on the ground, watching us.

Then he, all of a sudden, just turned back and ran like a very ragged wind: away and out into the darkness of the alley.

...when Antonius Block came back to his mistress she hid back the blade. I couldn't help but feel kinda relieved. And I just stared at the rotten morsel of a scoundrel's patchy arse wandering out into the Maze, asking to myself how *anyone* can sink lower than cops.

"Intelligence didn't save him," I just thought out loud. "How depressing..."

"Neither did masturbation," concluded Aethel, affectionately snuggling her nose against the knight's wet, pink nostrils.

"Damn," I sighed. "Can't wait to be out of the city."

Four and twenty dead birds They bleed upon the nest There was no time for reason They had no sign of a threat Now it's too late, too late for me This town will eventually take me

- Yamaoka Akira

VIII.

The witching hour was long past when we finally made it to the Circle. Late, of course, moreso than I anticipated... as Aethel's consort, I was bound to revel in sloth, but this, *this*...

The Circle was held at some new squat in the western borough. Odd that the meeting would be held there, obviously, but then again, when the going gets weird...

A monolith of sort, Blix was stationed outside the disaffected building block, behind the rear entrance, whiling away, smoking what appeared to be some cheap clove cigarette.

"How quaint of you two to show," he spoke out as we crawled through the hole in the picketed fence. He greeted us amiably. We still had friends... apparently.

"We *three*," corrected Aethel in a rather promiscuous tone. "You folkel look as though you just found Jesus."

And dead silence ensued.

"Something like that," mumbled a very shady Blix. Now what the fuck was going on!?

"We were delayed," added Aethel. Delayed!?

Rendered inefficiently mute by the austere ambiance of the ongoing gathering, we embraced our sentinel and hastened inside immediately. He then lead us through several decaying hallways to a large, well heated room, lit by several small lamps stacked to one side and one scrap-fed fireplace at the far end. My, the squatters had done a terrific job. Still, I was more surprised by the amount of people who had come to the Circle: twenty-three youngins and counted, all darkly clad and less serene than expected. Now, were these wretched hordes to swell our ranks or yet more covert *unders* dispatched to order us?

Daeva stood there, as always, in a lean black velvet trenchcoat, lighting one cigarette with the last. Opaque shades transfixed to the room, grey features stern and placid.

Daeva...

"So..." she started, inflexible. "We're all here. Jolly. Ironic that there would be so many of us at such a time, and so we crowd the darker road..."

Some smiled, many others did not. Now why the fuck-

"Maybe we should go straight to the point, Daev'," started Blix. "We've a long debate ahead..."

Every head nodded in approval, save for Aethel. She seemed particularly *disinclined* to partake in any collective effort.

"Where to start..." spoke Daeva in a rather disdainful tone, "where does the tale begin? The Anti-Capitalist Gathering? Ducharme's proposition? The mass arrests, the new weapons? The beginning of the Disorder, the forming of the People's Alliance, their campaign against us, the double University coup -"

I held in my breath. Fucken hell...

"- we've received word this morning. Annabelle Ducharme has been voted Leader of the People's Alliance. Recent polls show substantial progression. Political immunity is assured by her uterus, needless to point out. More pressing matter is that her first *mandate*," disgust shown through every pore, she nearly chocked on the word, "is to meet with Central Sector's Chief of Security concerning the recent alleged terrorist attacks on the Party. That is one week from now. An investigation must follow... believe it or not, they're *begging* the police for help. For some reason, they're not convinced that fundamentalist Christians did the job, as evidence previously led to believe. That hypothesis aside, guess what orifice the fist of Justice will plunge in next?"

Silence struck the room deaf. Anguish, anger, consternation. Blix was the first to interject, spitting as he did:

"That, that *traitor*!"

Traitor, yes! Traitor! Traitor!

"Nobody knows who committed the actions. In fact, that's not even the issue!"

"It is for *them*," replied another member.

"The Disorder will be blamed," continued Daeva. "I will be blamed. And anyone who opposes them will be branded patriarchal or reactionary, as absurd as the claim would actually be."

Cries of indignation burst out from the crowd; people stepped to and from and moaned outright.

Betrayal! Betrayal! Argh!

"The Left wants more power," continued Daeva, "here is a 'window of opportunity'. They need a *lesser* foe to exclude and eliminate, since the system has already swallowed them with exigencies. And the State they so desire to invest must be *legitimized*. They'll find someone to punish, dead or alive, guilty or not. They must revert against the Anarchs: who else is there? We are the Dark, we will be excommunicated: we who first signalled the end of the Christian Era. Repression is the only outcome. Besides, the police must earn their pay and *function*. We knew *that* all along..."

Another woman spoke out, voice riddled with stupor: "This is fucking insane! The Disorder doesn't even *exist...* no papers, no numbers, no website, *nothing*!"

And she was answered by a very solemn Archdaemon. "But we've been *reified*. Reports were made. Order reigns in Wonderland. A daily set of decapitated corpses do suit the Queen of Hearts so well! Better if they're dressed in black. Since we don't play crocket, we will always be outcasts: undead in a dead world!" she snarled, sardonically, and some even grinned at her jest. *But why!*? Humour simply spilt over the Circle's most profound sorrow: prison was crueller to any of us than a dozen deaths over... seclusion for a lucid nightmare.

And I honestly thought the Clairvoyant could have picked a better fucken time for her little pessimistic lyricism.

"We can fight," urged another, "It's not the first time the State comes down on us. Fuck, they'll waste a lot to get to us, it sounds unreasonable, even to me."

Refuse, resist!

Dare...

Aethel's lips spelled fuck...

Dispersion, I wondered. Dispersion!? But where? There's nowhere left to run...

And then...

Surreal wisps of dismay shocked me asunder, the last walls were barred – I... I couldn't even conceive that so many socialists would ordain our destruction at the fucken police's arbitral whim. I didn't. All was lost. And whilst I mused apoplexy, hands were raised all around, details got sorted, interrogations were stated, propositions entailed *consequences* –

The game would go on accordingly.

Attack and defense.

Sturm und drang.

But I couldn't follow.

Words could never tell – they could never say that I – that we had failed horribly, and yet this was the sole truth of all my actions: partial praxis amounted to both infection and reaction. Now the second wave rose, and it was terrible to behold. The festering carcasses of past comrades spawned the new fascist elite. How could I possibly sustain the unbelief of a most despicable *flaw?* Cruelty in vain! Ah! We – our plans, our precious plans! The promise of sanctuary...

Only when I turned to the course of despair did I notice the absence of my beloved. Nowhere to be seen, nowhere! Where was the Black Star in times of need?

And I myself turned and fled.

Leaving the Circle, I erred frantically from the main squat hall and out to the dark corridors where laced the

twisted pathways of my psyche, rummaging in vain to salvage the charred remnants of my sanity. "Aethel," I cried. "Aethel!" Silent dance with death Everything is lost Torn by the arrival of Autumn The blink of an eye, you know it's me You keep the dagger close at hand

- Mikael Åkerfeld

IX.

Twin crystal glasses were placed upon the black table, whose perfect clarity reflected the soft candlelight arrayed all around the silken draped livingroom. Low Amber Asylum played in the background, bedevilling the very air with the haunting harmony of cellos and abysmal chants.

Aethel sat next to me on the auburn couch, thick wisps of incense billowing around her worn features – streaked with tears and exhaustion; a very scornful deity.

Silently, she raised the flask of absinthe, dropped white sugar cubes in the glasses and delicately inclined the decanter to fill them up to the rim.

A feast for the Noxious.

"Vengeance," I muttered. "Vengeance and loth for the one."

She sighed, caressing my brow lovingly. "Well, data is *scant*. The Nematode has salvaged all it could from the onslaught... yet *it*," she fixed me with a bloodshot gaze, "shall avail."

Images of loss consumed me - tears filled these swollen eyes anew, and still my lips turned and twisted with uncontrollable glee. As the tears rolled down my cheek, so did Aethel laugh and weep in chorus, coupling dementia, intoxicated with the vertigo of becoming. Soon the naïve would beguile a horrible price to have even *considered* plucking the black petals of the Obscurantis Disorder. Aye, murder and deception would strike *true*.

> "We know where she sleeps," she stated, "We know!" "But I'm afraid, Aeth'. I have to be."

With the back of a silken, pale hand she wiped off her tears and mine, 'til comfort gained my heart again and there remained naught but joy and more remorse.

"State your fears, beloved," she whispered affectionately. "I am *here*."

Softly she took hold of my hands whilst I fed on the malice of her eyes, trying to regain my composure and console that atrophied will.

"Our scheme is *imperfect*. The last hit didn't completely fall on the Christians, as we planned. Now how do we know we can frame the police for sure? Can we *risk*..."

Gazing into the candle flames she considered my question long moments before answering. While she reflected, I drank amply from my glass: the emerald substance raked down my throat and burned my flesh like frozen alabaster. Steadily, I felt unlife pulsing in my veins.

Still undead, I thought. That must suffice.

Finally, the Scarlet Fae came up with her conclusion.

"Symbolic inference is subject to constant alteration whose operation into mass consciousness is inconceivable. Therefore, our scheme is, must and can only be flawed. The *overkill stratagem* is perfect in its imperfection."

And I smiled.

"I lay my trust unto the Nematode. Of course, the only way out is to go farther in. We are worms of hidden deeps... unfettered by the flames of the Black Star."

And Aethel pouted and smiled and grinned altogether, straight on the brink of apocalyptic defilement she gleaned radiantly; a carmine creature of subtler designs. Reaching into the folds of her robe, she then produced the vehement *sgian dubh* and placed it in my hand. For once I felt the icy touch of the hilt.

"And if we fail," she whispered...

Bloody impressions caught my very veins at the possibility, the intractable noose that lay ahead: its names were Hope and Fate and Order.

Defiance! I thought.

And we are almost lost, almost - Dare!

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"And if we fail..." I repeated, squeezing the handle with my wavering strength. Two words she uttered, and in their truth my entire existence would end:

"Scorched Earth."

Solemnly I raised my glass and became one with the Dark. If I'm going down, I thought... if I'm going down...

By the Flames of the Black Star

I, I am the boy She, she is the girl He, he is the bear And we, we are the army you see through the red haze of blood blood blood blood

-Liars liars liars

I.

... blah blah blah, and so it goes, this is how I got here and there's no point in getting all official about it, ramble/babble and so on. Come, now! There is only this instant. Only now. And so my later years have led me here, to tread the Darker Road. So have I risen forth to steal what she has taken from me.

Acrid blood and trimethylxanthine have carried such eloquence in flood, such potency, now at least Chaos becomes me and I am completely free. And how!? Don't you remember? Ah! You actually think there's any escape!? No no, do not delude yourself: there can only be circumvention. And now it is done, the Maze slumbers forcefully, I am tucked away inside its throbbing, squirming guts and it can never stop me in time. Not now. Nay, I shall not recant.

She is to suffer.

All fairness, nay? Overkill!? Wilt thou judge me if I dare? Annabelle Ducharme is taking indirect arms against forces she does not understand, hence she will die tonight, and her retinue will be infected, corrupted, tainted and torn. With some luck they'll turn against the Police-State and we shall witness further betrayal.

Albeit, ignorance must foster humility, or sufferance entails: this is the one truth. O what jolly, jolly good! She has

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proved neither humble nor wise, hence she must die. We, on the other hand, have trailed *her* path long enough to know. When both doubt and hope cease does the Dark take hold.

No, no, there is not a single shred of guilt left in me: this is my glorious, my *final* jest, my absolute *triomphe*. There is only possibility. There is the truth of the instant and the hand that holds the blade.

The fact that she will die.

That my eyes are finally open.

And that I am glad.

Overkill or Scorched Earth: two edges of the same blade, woven in bliss and discontent. Nihil narrowed from a very crooked path, down to two invariable purposes; ecstasy or agony. Ah, yes: *shadow upon shadow*. Any second now they both will come walking through this door: Aethel in disguise and Ducharme in disgrace, and I will come forth in good sooth. Conscience obliterates language. So shall I cease to speak, and wait.

Wait.

Bring me the head of the preacher man On the blazing trail Heaven holds lonestar promise el dorado – The insane theatre, once more we rise To drain the last of liquid sleep The gift of chance

-Siouxie Sioux

II.

Hist -

Hist! A suspicious noise, definitely. Some rumbling in the corridor, what – oh, my, it's startling. Pity I can't hear too well in here, now is that Aethel's voice, or the traitor's... or, no no – that's not... fucken hell!? What the fucking fuck!?

- one scream, one pound on the floor, like a fallen stone or some heavy luggage, but how - there are steps, yes... steps running away, down the hallway. And then *nothing*.

Nothing!?

How can that be? Not a sound? What happened? Fuck! I can't scream out now, or I'd reveal my position, my *trick* – still, are they gone? What the, *argh*!

Ok, calm down, Dim. Maybe some drunk arsed beatnick, some polished concubine, some shitfaced grunt? Wait, wait and be silent.

Because if we've failed, if we've failed...

Only when I slide back the doors and haul myself up, blade unsheathed, am I finally able to make out the protruding *whimpers* echoing from across the hallway, like some wounded beast too tired to howl outright. Silently I make my way to the front door, careful not to be heard.

Yet again I can distinctly make out the faint moaning, trailing on, incoherently; a continuous lamentation mingled with *laughter*.

Laughter?

Without hesitation, I unlock the door, turn the knob and open wide. The sickly yellow lighting engulfs my sight and causes my eyes to wince - but I endure, step forth and out into the corridor.

Bleeding Earth! Scorched Earth!

A wee white shape scuttles on the ground ahead of me... *Milord!*? He's rounding the shaking form lying there, quivering on all fours, keychain in hand. She's wearing a brown flowered skirt and a long suede overcoat, a yellow bandana –

Crouched, head leaning against the wall, her whole body atremble, convulsing from one terrible spasm after the other. Shattering, she suddenly starts vomiting great gouts of black blood at my feet, laughing 'tween wet, chuckling moans.

"Fh, flah..." she stutters, "Ahhh ff...l – ah, ah!" Her voice trails on unevenly, breath hoarse and short. *The horror*...

Swiftly I fall into motion, grabbing a freakishly panicked Antonius Block, and place him upon my shoulder.

"Steady now, Milord!" I tell him.

Holding on to the wooden frame for support, I grab Annabelle by the shoulder and drag her body all the way in, kicking the door behind me...

"Flah... I'm... oooh!"

She starts to rave uncontrollably as I lay her down, forcing her on her back. In the gloom she seems to be looking at me – but no, no, her gaze goes up straight into the sky.

And why!?

Naturally, I turn to Block for counsel. "Milord, where is Aethel!?" I ask. "This is serious!"

"Flying!" Blurts out Ducharme, laughing hysterically, then spits a thick mixture of blood and saliva which slowly trickles down her lips and unto her cheek, ears and neck. "Flying, I'm ah... flah...*ah*!"

For an instant there I think about lighting a lamp or something, but no. I also think about slicing her throat but there's already so much blood involved, I –

"Ok, ok," I start mumbling, pacing the dark room to and fro. "Milord, let's be rational here. If *you're* here and *she's* not there and then the *other one* thinks she's flying, I mean, I'd like your input here, damn it!"

Then all of a sudden it hits me.

"Scorched Earth! Something went wrong, either she failed or she's caught. But how -" instantly I jump over to Annabelle's withering flesh, shaken in waves of pleasure, laughing, drowning in her own fucken blood.

"Where is she!?" I scream into her demented face. "What happened!?" Fiercely I take hold of her head in both o'my hands, dagger cocked in my palm. "Listen to me you fucken *tart*!"

And then her eyes finally get a hold of my presence. These eyes... these pale, blue eyes, so beautiful, so pure. I never realized, I – now what is hidden in their midst? Is that *fear*!?

"Flah... I'm, oooh, gah... God! God!" Suddenly these pale blue eyes start rolling in their sockets, agonizing tremors shaking her every limbs – I can sense her muscles tighten, feel her constricted flesh. She's dying, that's for sure.

"Aye, I *am* your God. Now tell me where Aethel is, or I'll fucking *smite* you where you lay, you pathetic sot!"

"Gah... I..." Chocking wails spill forth from her mouth, doubled in thin lines of blood, running. Somehow she reflects the upcoming void, just ahead. You can read it in her twisted features... and I'm starting to understand that she's not ready to die –

- when sirens suddenly echo, straight out from the alley below: a terrible high-pitched *screech*. Well, that settles it. Everyone must die. Everyone.

Scorched Earth!

Can it be so simple, I wonder. Already I can envision them - row after row of armoured pigs, jumping down their trucks with transparent plexiglas shields, semi-automatic machine guns, audiocom sets, bullet-proof vests. I can sense their trampling on the ground, barging down the doors, rumbling up and up the stairs - but to find what? To gain what?

Oh yes, Vae victis.

Reeling, I run back across the room. "No," I whisper. "No, not like this." I won't have it, this is wrong... wrong! "Come now, dear Sir Knight." Tony's whiskers flinch in approbation; he seems ready for a challenge.

Dare!

Nearing the window, we take one last glance at the People's Alliance intoxicated leader and head out unto the fire escape. I can barely make out her delirious panting when the rumbling Maze welcomes us again, with its chill November wind, its sickly orange lighting, and its *police sirens* –

"An ounce of leniency, Milord," I beg of the albino rat as I gently lay him in my bag. "There are more sirens approaching, the building will be surrounded. We must be quick about this *or end it now*."

In haste I make my way up the iron stairs, still cloaked by night, *shadow upon shadow* – two by two, rising in senseless defiance against countless foes.

Dare!

'Til I reach the roof and post myself on the edge. And I can see that the jump will be tougher to make, I had no idea that – arh. "Hang on, dear Sir Knight!"

Here I stand before the picture-imperfect metropolis, the labyrinth-Maze – there I see the remnants of my former life; the Helter-Skelter, the Slum-Safari. But the moon sickle above outshines them all, glowering in ivory splendour... and gazing into her light I understand that she *alone* is eternal. Ah! No more to this portrait than pebbles and dust. The sun will rise again, washed in tides of blood.

The wicked have wings.

Dare!

So I brace myself, look to the moon one more time, and take some steps back. Launched across this miserable land, I take haste and haul myself into the void – falling, hailing through the sky like a black swan, feathers torn to slather the night in malediction – falling, down, down – *crashing* down unto the gravel floor, the full weight of my leap squashing me against the hard fucken roof 'til I hear a distinctive *crack*, roll and shudder in earth-shattering *pain* – a muffled scream escapes my clenched teeth – ankle, my fucken ankle – and I hold myself like an infant child for what seems like aeons, tears streaming down my cheeks, barely able to keep from howling out in pure fucken atrocious pain ankle my ankle my my fucken bloody ankle No more the servants of the weak devoid of thought or light to seek. I'll leave no walls, no stone unturned. Every tower to be razed to the dust from which it came.

-Ronan Harris

III.

The buzzer was broken so I convinced myself to revert to a more simplistic (and certainly less mediated) technique of... *knocking*. There. In any case, Tony is with me on this one: we're fucked.

... so only when I manage to land a couple of knocks I just sag down, hunched on the porch. Now all I can do is wait. Yea.

Of course, I can't certainly claim that the pain is unbearable, obviously, if I've managed to limp all the way here, mumbling curses to every fucken god in the book, bracing myself on anything I could find to keep from fainting-

Interesting how dabbing sweat can turn a perfectly normal romantic November night into a chilly fucken neardeath experience, nay?

"Now, dear Sir Knight," I address my old comrade, whose tiny head pops out of the bag, curious, "I know we can't do anything about the pain *just yet*, but I would appreciate a minimum of cooperation on your part –"

Suddenly, a swift creaking sound erupts on my side: finally the door opens, still I discover to my surprise that I can't quite get to my feet just yet.

"Dim!?" a low voice starts, "is that you? Now what the fuck..."

Daeva is standing in the enclosure, still sleepy, wearing a long, black bathrobe half-opened to a pair of pants and a t-shirt that spells *FUCK* [blank].

Pale, hazel eyes uncovered by the usual shades, she stays there, undaunted. Her aura shocks me right into lucidity.

"Evening, Daev'. So sorry to wake you..."

But my voice betrays me: it breaks at every interval. Seasons of anguish fail out of my crackled lips.

"Let me guess," she speaks whilst helping me get to my feet. Agonizing. "You've come to dissert Gorgias' third thesis, right?" Her tone hints on accusation. And how...

"Of course," I snarl. "Diogenes is right out back getting crumpets. Soon as he's done we'll sort out this mess and be on our merry."

All at once, we limp together back in her apartment; an ill-lit flat, bookshelves stacked wall to wall. She lays me down on some old couch and disappears into the kitchen. I can hear her grinding coffee beans, lighting the stove, pouring some water.

Blest Daeva!

"You know, you could have called," she says, waltzing back. "Or then, maybe not." She almost smiles, then. Before me, she gently puts an array of ibuprophen, acetaminophen, codeine and one fucken tall glass of water.

"I'm, uh... fucked..."

"You know," she gleans thoughtfully, scrutinizing my battered carcass. "I always thought something like that was going to happen, some night. Now, *you* are very much inclined to disaster, darkling Dim."

Quickly I gulp in a couple of pills and gorge down that water. Daeva continues her inquiry:

"I assume Aethel is at stake here."

"Aye."

my ankle my ankle my fucken, fucken bloody fucken, fucken ankle

Sighing, she looks up to the ceiling, seemingly discouraged. "Well, there certainly is a *method* to her madness."

Resting, I finally bring up the nerve to ask. "We need help, Daev'."

"So??" She replies, painstakingly. "So?? You tell me nothing and yet expect me to barge fucken in? With what, word and tongue? Cunt and lace? Wit?? I don't know what you pulled against the Alliance, I don't need to know, but the consequences are *real*. Fuck! You show the same symptoms, Dim, the exact same symptoms..."

I... what? Is she referring to...

"Intellectuals, and I mean true intellectuals – radicals, able to escape the binary dialectical discourse of the apparatus... any *sensitive* thinker is prone to intense suffering, locked in stasis and unable to act because of the Prison State's repressive mechanisms. So you wander from pain to lassitude, overload and boredom, spectacular data, sustained overanalysis. Projection into the secular and negation of the sensual. Classic case fucken scenario: *stand-alone complex*."

"But I'm still me... I'm here, Daeva."

Arh, the pain -

"Are you, truly? You come for counsel, *like they all did*, like they all..."

And sudden tears... start falling from her eyes; faint crystalline droplets down the grey-like traits of her mortuary visage. Daeva!

"But do you," she demands squarely, "do you pretend to understand *my plight*!?"

"I think you're lonely..."

"Obviously," she spat, "but that's not it! See, that's a consequence, no more. What is the cause!? Dim, what is the fucken cause!?"

"I don't know..."

"I am... weary, Dim. Burnt fucken out! Every year I grow... restless, neurotic, weaker... I don't readily know how long I'll last. Years and years I've annulled Hope and still... disappointment is killing me, somehow, I... keep testing you people..."

Testing? Testing!?

"And you keep *failing* me. Ah! Do you have any idea what I've sacrificed to create the OD? The hours, the energy? Not for the image, but for Aethel, for Blix, *for you*!? A beautiful masquerade, this... but masks come and go, always. So why can't I keep those dearest to me? Because you're still trying to save a world that has *rejected* you. You're still putting your fucken heads on the fucken stump, waiting for the fucken axe to come swinging down! And then you come to *me* – hurt, as I know you will. And I talk and talk, *but you don't listen.*"

And her eyes well up in tears, hands to her face, and she weeps, oh how she weeps!

"And I wanted to make a break for it," sobbing. "Can you imagine that...how fucken pathetic..."

"We can still..."

"Perhaps," she cuts in, looking up at me, eyes swollen and red – incisive intent in demented lore, *she is human after all.* "But no more bullshit, Dim. Don't use me. I don't pity you, you're not a victim. Therefore my love is unconditional: either value that or leave me alone in the abyss I've created around myself. Cause if you're here, Dim, if you stay: be true to me. I ask nothing more, and I will give the same in return, which is everything."

"Aye, fair enough," I whisper, gulping down more pills. "Fair enough."

"Then we've a lot to discuss," she sighs, drying her tears. "I'll go get the coffee."

"- Daeva..." I cut in.

Hence the Archdaemon rises, towering over me, staring back patiently. For the very first time do I understand *what* she is.

"... we truly are Kin."

Never to let this lose me grace But rather bring you back to me: Amongst all mortal women the one I most wish to see.

-Sappho

IV.

Backpack hung with twelve safety pins. Probably won't hold for long. A bottle of stale water, check. A handful of dark roasted coffee beans. A picture of Van Velde's Nocturne. Check. Re-check. Keats book (page marked at To Autumn). Check.

Two Molotov cocktails, cooked up in empty wine bottles, homestyle: mixed with soap and bits of styrofoam (to make it stick). Some gasoline-soaked tampons are strapped tight unto each bottleneck, safely wrapped in several layers of clingfilm. Coarse work, at best, but sufficient. Check.

> Two lighters, just in case. Check. Black bandanas (you never know). Check. ... and the blade.

> > Lets go.

Deep abysses I sink into And behind the light I go My long journey never ends But I will receive what I send Nox, the night and key I will open your old mystery

- Thomas Karlsson

V.

Three hours 'til dawn.

Somehow, I'm still alive.

The forest is suckling me in like some fearsome omen: thick woven branches hindering my every advance. Vying blindingly to part these fucken twigs, they just sway anew and scratch my skin bare through every stroke. *Cold, so fucken cold.* And whilst my feet desperately seek footing to go forth – soaked in frost-rimmed puddles of mud – every angle of the uneven ground twists my fucken ankle again, exerting frantic gasps of pain from an already aching throat.

Beyond the branches I can see the autumn sky, clearly. An endless mesh of stars illuminate the night, to which the moon sickle reigns absolute, outcast by the deep, velvet darkness yonder. For a second there, I can see a world that once was. Cruel temptation – still I must go forth.

I'll make it, I fucken swear.

When finally there rise the gates to the Estate, it's a very battered daemon that creeps out from the forest and out unto the road, raging and soaked in bloody sweat. There the earthen gravel does greet me at last, scraping my knees, and I lay motionless for an instant, trying to ignore the stifling, pulsing waves of agony that tear up my leg.

And there.

Two police cars stationed in front of the gates, engines running. Doors open, lights flashing – empty. From

the distance I can make out the radio, screeching some endless sonic rubbish.

Swiftly I unsheathe the sgian dubh.

"Now, Milord," I tell Antonius as I delicately scoop him out of my backpack and appoint him on post atop my shoulder. "If ever there was a time for courage, this is it. And I would understand if you wanted to go back. We're clearly outnumbered here."

But he just looks at me with his little pink eyes, wiggles his tail a notch and simply nods in the direction of the Mansion.

"Aye, brother. Montjoie!"

And thus armed I set off upon the road, dragging my feet. Rapidly, I make sure the patrol cars are really deserted, then go past to the thick iron gate barring my way. There I stand where the villagers once stood, yet I shall not be silenced.

Escalading over, one foot loose, taking precaution not to rattle the lock as I gently swing myself to the other side, easing down very slowly to land again on the road.

Above does the Mansion stand, luminous and implacable; a stone fortress of architectural splendour. Dozens of windows, balconies, chimneys and all. Most rooms are lit, now – impossible to tell where anyone might be. Fuck. Now I have neither speed nor stealth, let alone strength. Fuck. Limping atrociously, I make my lonely way up to the front door, test the knob. Unlocked. The hinges are rusted and, turning, nearly blow my cover. Still I slide myself in and close it behind me.

And lo and behold, the Mansion...

"Oh, Milord..."

What the hell happened here!?

"Hold fast, dear Sir Knight..."

Treason breathes through these walls, these lofty battlements of yore – trickery wouldst bespeak for aught: at once, deep softness and warmth welcome us both, for the air is hot and dry and sweetly scented with lingering aromas of basil and marjoram, and a broad crimson carpet stretches out from the vestibule into the main hallway... but such is naught but deviltry: everything is *wrong*. The very ambiance is wrong.

Thump.

At my feet, a broken lamp lies scattered across the floor, its colourful shards all spread out, yellow and white. *Thump.* Next to the wardrobe, some antique chair's been hauled over. *Thump.* Into the hallway, a strand of tapestry hangs loose, mayhap torn by some reaching hand, under which gleams a thin streak of... dried blood.

Thump.

Thump.

That low pounding sound, assuredly muffled by the interior surroundings, emanating yon the first corridor, probably 'round the kitchen or something. An irregular pace. *Thump.* Seemingly random. *Thump.* Erratic.

"Brace yourself, now." I whisper. "Anything moves, you go straight for the eyes, right?" Antonius leers back at me, sniffling. "Is that a yes?" I wonder. No answer. Too bad.

Blade aloft, I stroll through the hall.

Thump.

To my right, I discover a set of bullet holes in the wall, numbered at four, all relatively close, crackling the plaster underneath, some dust having speckled to the floor. Interesting.

Thump.

Going forth... still no sign of anything... when suddenly I near the entrance of a salon, broad and richly furnished. At the back, a chandelier illuminates the room, placed in front of triple windows overlooking the dark lake beyond – but movement catches my sight – thump – a leg in blue nylon pants, quivering, quivering – thump – a black leather shoe, laced tight – thump – and nearing, slowly, I can see a man there, lying flat on his face in a pool of blood.

Thump.

An officer. The back of his skull was struck by some blunt object, apparently, some sharp pieces of bone still protruding through the gash there... alive but he's not making *that* noise, no, rather –

Thump.

"Ha... help me," he croaks. Barely turning his head, raising some twitchy eyes. "Help... I... anyone here?"

He was struck blind, I think. Odd. And young, too. Maybe even younger than me.

Thump.

Leaning close, stepping feet in the mire of half-caked blood, I bow down and whisper close, instantly overcome with the acrid smells of staling bodily fluids.

"Well, there's us: a vicious ghoul and his brother-inarms, both suitors come here to league with the Red Queen."

Thump.

"I... ah... help..."

"Say... you wouldn't have happened to see a Black Rabbit come by here, now?"

"Arh... I –"

"How ironic," I must add, smiling as I can't help it. "T'would be easier to envision a certain reversal of our current positions, nay? I, in a puddle of blood, and you towering over in celestine glory? Isn't it brilliant to discover one another thus? *Fuck!* Little peon, in a protest *you* would have cracked my head open, given you had the chance. I've been pushed around by many a fascist stock in my time, still, here we are now. Ah, maid of Destiny – Fate in every cruelty!"

Sir Block now elects to remain quiet as a mouse. And for good reason: the fucken pig can't help but *beg*:

"Who, ah... you can't be serious! Please!"

Thump.

"Oh, no, rest assured I am *not*. What a predicament. On the other hand, remember that you follow orders, peon! I follow *none*. And since you don't know *why* you were sent here, I don't see any reason *why* I should... 'radio this in'. Ah, ah!"

Thump.

"But... but..."

"One argument, Mr. Piglet. One argument! Prithee, say on!"

Thump. "I – ah..." "Exactly. Faced with the unknown you *finally* understand the vacant futility of your past existence. Enjoy it, Mr. Piglet: this is your *one* moment of truth. Suckle on that teat whilst we hop away. Fare thee well."

Silently I raise myself back up again, leaning on some oaken coffee table whilst the other mumbles on.

"Gah... I - no... no!"

Ignoring the ignorant's plea, I must leave and start off again. "No," I turn to Antonius. "This is Scorched Earth. You know that as well as any." *Thump.* "Let's go."

We come out of the salon and head back through the corridor, towards the dining room.

Thump!

Distinctly I can make out *other* noises, mounting - we are not alone.

Thump!

Dragging my feet once more, I try and make my way to the room, uncertain of the outcome, sgian dubh braced to stab –

Moans, moans down the stairs -

How!? I hear them, yes, moans of... ecstasy, mounting, mounting – a female, at that, high-pitched, sultry, overlaid with the low rumblings of a coarser voice, barely heard through the coerced, rhythmic rams –

Pleasure writhing, her screams hint at such... desire, such bestial lust, ghastly yet brazen, betwixt to evermore – ascending, erupting... ardent pleas surmount the chaotic thumps and rise, higher, higher –

And violently... climaxing – *Climaxing*!

•••

Only to begin again.

Thump!

Low moans slur, dripping wet -

Hoarsened to vivid cries, anon!

Thump!

Gasping for breath, I drag myself to the basement stairs and there, door ajar, red light seeping from below, I can see *them*, curves concurred, circling –

Thump!

And I can see a loose wooden railing, nails torn off, battering on the wall at every stroke – skirt hiked, drooling, her writhing shape pounded, *pounded*, *again and again* –

Thump! Thump!

Stricken dumb by the full force of the spectacle, I somehow manage to wrench my eyes from the very sight and *tear away*, off into the dining room, swooning, reeling... limping aside through the agonizing pain –

And up the stairs.

Little piggy, little piggy What do you see? You're lookin' at death When you're lookin' at me

-Rob Zombie

VI.

First floor. Second floor.

No trace of Aethel anywhere. Yet I saw some chimneys smoking when I was outside, which can only mean one thing.

"Hold fast, Milord," I tell my comrade, probably more to reassert my own failing volition. "Scorched Earth or not, we'll get to the bottom of this."

Dare!

Visions of Maria's dripping lips still haunt me, somehow I must go on – up and again, one flight of stairs after another, hanging on, my whole leg pulsing in waves of pure anguish –

Third floor.

I can hear the rumbling of a fireplace, crackling, growling. This is certainly *it*. Pacing to the open, graven door reflecting the golden light of the fire, I softly tread.

Dare!

Leering in, I see that I've found the old man's study, and with it – $% \mathcal{L}_{\mathrm{re}}$

Ah, fucken hell!

Three leather couches are arrayed before a vast stone enclave where burns a huge wooden fire, stacked full. There sits the old gaffer, hair askew, unshaven, naked but for some stained underpants and a loose burgundy tie. Quietly sipping on a generous glass of cognac, he waits there, contemplating the corpse of another police officer, sprawled out on the couch in front of him. Her gaping mouth is still wet, teeth broken, blood guzzling from her lips unto her deep blue vest. The back cushion is smeared with dribbling shreds of what must have been her brains. Aye, fucken aye.

He shot her in the mouth.

Immediately I look for the weapon, and I see that there's an old Winchester hooked above the fireplace; a mantelpiece of sort.

"Senator," I firmly speak, entering the study. Fucken bloody hell...

"Oh," he stares back at me, somewhat surprised. "Top o'the evening to you, Dim lad! How the devil are you?"

There I enter, lowering the blade behind my back – a clumsy sight at best.

"Couldn't be better. Say, you wouldn't happen to know where dear Caitlin has gone, now would you?"

"Oh, my boy! Always so serious are we? Come now, sit and have a drink with me. Let us talk like *men*, you and I."

Leaning over, he starts to pour me a glass, which then overflows. Half the bottle is drained before he even notices and refrains. The table is bathed in cognac. The gaffer is worse off than I thought.

"Ooh, my, what a mess. We'll have to get maid to clean that up..."

The image of Maria surges up again - but down, down - let that pass -

"Assuredly. Now tell me, Hector, about Caitlin..."

I won't make a fucken move.

"Oh, what is there to say, really... she's her mother's daughter, that's for sure."

"Her mother's daughter, for sure..."

"Oh yes," he goes on, "how lovely, she was, my wife... my... beloved wife. Always tending her flowers, she was. Always. 'Til the incident, of course... such a shame, really."

"The incident?"

"Well, yes, her... condition. I saw to it that doctors tended to her needs, but... the best doctors, really. And what a pretty penny. They tried, of course, I mean we *all* pitched in... especially that doctor Beckinsdale, now what a wonderful chap –"

"But about Caitlin..."

"Ah, you fancy her, my lad, *ah*, *ha!* I know, I know – but you're a good boy, that you are... sure, you don't... *drink* like men but, rest assured we can work on that... and a bit pale if I might add... Well yes, the doctors warned me she might... develop the same... *taint*, you could say. 'One in a million', they said, 'one in a million'. Ah..."

The puissance of the fire and the sight of that corpse rendered such masquerade difficult to bear. That old fucken gaffer would have to *talk*, and talk fast. I mean, I knew Antonius would have kicked his arse silly if I hadn't been there.

"Listen, now, Senator..." I snarl, walking towards him, blade suddenly flashing at my side. "My tale is of murder and deception. This is the Scorched Earth stratagem. Not our first choice, mind you, but it does portend the quality of a fairly unambiguous, self-explanatory plot."

Then I simply lean over to his Winchester, unhook it and throw it across the room. It falls in a great metallic *clank*.

Intently, me and Milord watch the old dotard's reaction... but he's just staring at us, all confounded and helpless, sipping on his draught like it's liquid ambrosia.

"Blast," he whines, gulping a whole mouthful. "Haven't you seen the scars on her wrists?"

What the fuck –

"I have."

"So you have..."

"She did that to herself," I retort.

And then...

Then he starts to laugh.

Laugh!?

"Oh no, Dim lad. She did it to me."

Leering back at Antonius, I can see that he doesn't quite understand either. The gaffer keeps giggling to himself, now, musing, sipping and sipping again in great audible *slurps*. Eventually his glass is empty and he extends an arm to take the one meant for me.

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"You don't mind, now do you, boy..."

And he brings it to his side, spilling half of it on the way; the caramel stuff dripping down across his fuzzy, greyhaired belly.

I am losing patience.

"Listen to me. Where is she now!?"

Looking up, he extends a wiggly finger to the rear window.

"Well, off to her mother's grave, she is. To pay homage. She was always so polite... beyond the woods, that is. The birds, you see... she just loved the birds so damn much, my wife. You'll find it in the swamp, lovely little place, I'd go there myself if only... ah..."

There I walk across the study to look beyond the glass. Below: the garden, the fields, the hawthorn patch, the outskirts... and then the great Swamp.

"It's just," Hector's voice is getting weaker now. "How... I don't know how to say it, really..."

The wallowing blight. The Swamp.

"See, Milord." Antonius gazes quite unerringly beyond the sill to that black, shapeless void. "This is where we're going. Don't turn your back, now. She's waiting for us."

Instantly I stand off and drag my leg to the door. Meanwhile, the olden can't even raise his glass, now, it's leaning sideways, seeping. His voice starts to waver.

"I... just have the strangest feeling... odd at that, like I'm... flying... so *peculiar*..."

And we disappear down the hallway, me and my comrade.

Ready to strike.

Farewell, Senator.

Run my love Save yourself from this chaos The flames, the crowd, the new gods They're marching our plains Dispensing aesthetic death Oh, my breath! Infernal sickness

-Rose Heirdmarr

VII.

Into the woods.

Past the frozen garden and into the fields. The yellow grass breaks under my dragging feet as I stride; a bonfire of broken nerves clawing at my flesh like a drum. Somehow at this point I guess it would be fair to say something like gosh, darn or ouch.

But no, I am a worm of squirming deeps. "Forward, Milord! We're almost there."

Bumping, holding on my shoulders as best he can, the knight still can't help but hand me that conspicuous stare like he doesn't really believe me. Can I blame him?

"Ok," I admit. "Not quite. But keep a look out. Christians might be roaming about."

Weary beyond words, I make my way by paces unsteady, resting here and there to catch my steaming breath, crouching, slowly, carefully, hopping about into the dark like some prolix prowler. Gnawing on my broken nerves, I must fathom every painful step as penance for my own mortal condition: some fatal curse I am beginning to understand quite well now. Or is it just the trimethylxanthine wearing off?

Overhead, dry thorns cloud these outskirts forebodingly: they speak louder now, roofing over. *See!*? Between those treacherous stems, the moon shines: as a flaunted icon, pearl white yet traversed fro equally lovely taints, black and sharp and unforgiving. Truly, these hawthorns welcome us to *purer* visions of Chaos, but they are not likely to grant favours to any such two, nor should that be expected: we are hardly more than trespassers here and the Maze *stinks* about us still.

I know it.

And there, the great Swamp.

The life-swallower.

As the ground levels downward, so does the hard woodland trunks abruptly make way to overlaying brushy patches of undergrowth, thickly 'twined with the hanging branches of willow trees and wild vines. Suckling sounds accompany my every trodden step, as damp mud starts clinging to boots, nearly frozen; small ice crystals break as each feet is dragged, as it –

"Argh!"

ankle my ankle that fucken fucken bloody fucken ankle my fucking fuck fuck fuck that fucken ankle is going to kill me

Swollen to the core, halfway up my knee, I can almost feel it turning blue; a couple of veins probably popped, phlebitis ascertain, nerves twisted and sprung beneath them, wrangling my very bones as I move... flesh gorged in lymph, as fragile as the advance progresses I can almost see it coming: the rupture, the broken skin, and then the infection... spreading, cellulite, trickling pus, gangrene – black, *turning black*!

For a second there I pause, gasping for air, but this rancid atmosphere is clogging my very lungs, moist, flaccid, *alive...* I can't, *I can't breathe, arh!*

In the dark I can barely make out Tony's pale fur, his little whiskers, his tiny claws sunk into my shoulder. But he's not looking at me, no – rather, off into the distance, yonder north, across the moss pits and the bushes... where lights are dancing.

Two luminous spots, faint - very faint...

Flashlights in the Swamp.

"Milord, that's some eyes you have. Now, *who* do you think that is?"

He stares back at me, ambivalent.

"You're right, it doesn't matter."

Panting heavily, I get back up, wipe the earthen sphagnum shreds and rotten leaves from the *sgian dubh* and set off again.

"Schadenfreude," I snarl. "Let's go."

Now that I know what it's like I'll kill them all if I like Only time will decide No one listened to reason It's too late and I'm ready to fight So what? Now I'm ready to fight! So what? I'm ready to fight!

-Al Jorgensen

VIII.

"Aethel, wherefore!?" I cry. "Beloved..."

The path trails on forever, it seems; every step forcing me to clench my jaw, force my hands into fists and bear the agonizing torture of failing flesh. Certain vertigo spins me about, I cling to whatever I can find and oft fall to my knees, dipping my arms in muck to raise myself back up again.

When I finally stumble on a clearing, it feels like I've broken through the point of no return, sweat dripping down my brow, freezing at my neck.

There ahead, the open glade, surrounded by the Swamp on all sides. Stone foundations dug into the mud, their forefront lined by five rigid steps, aptly carved, leading to the entrance of the Crypt. A vast tomb, it stands, grey slabs of granite, ornamented by two wide marble pillars, pale grey under the autumn moon.

There I barely stand, at last.

Antonius on my shoulder, *sgian dubh* unsheathed, tatters of my raiment fluttering at my hind, all marred in rotten filth. Above me stretches the august tomb against the starlit night. Willow branches flutter in the distance, cast aside by the chill November wind.

There, I've made it.

Advancing, steeped on all fours to crawl up these steps, blade in hand, whimpering, exerting the remnants of my failing will *to gain her side*. Finally I lean against the door, that heavy wooden door – locked. *Locked*? Feverish, I scratch at the surface, imploring for the way to open

"Aethel," I beg. "Aethel, it's me. By the Flames of the Black Star, let me in!"

"So..." another voice echoes in the background, a blunt, *male voice* – "Looks like we've got our man."

Reeling, I look back to see two silhouettes pondering at the entrance of the glade, one flashlight aimed straight at me, blinding – *that fucken light! Light!*

They walk towards me but... one seems to be dragging the other, I stand, blade in hand, trying to avert my eyes, when the flashlight finally falls off, a great hollow *splosh* resounds through the quagmire.

Two police officers – one lying in a pool of still, muddy water, motionless, next to whom floats the fainting flashlight.

"Freeze, you evil son of a bitch!", says the other one, moving away from his partner and in my direction. A subtle gesture swiftly revealing a handgun, aimed right at me.

"Drop the weapon and get on your knees, now!" he screams.

Aye, very testicular.

And I tighten my hold on the *sgian dubh*, looking about, staring at the moon, appreciating the wallowing fright of the Swamp. A special poetry of the instant.

"I said now!" He yells again.

Nightvision slowly returning, I can guess that his partner – he or she – is gone under by now, and freshly so, since I distinctly saw *two flashlights* just moments ago.

"I swear to God I'll fucking shoot you!" Despair is riddling his voice raw. And I feed on his anguish ravenously.

And laugh... I *laugh*, then, for what strength is left in me, all the sound of that pig's apparent dismay, all hatred *triggered* anew and I remember the sweet nectar of revenge, the comforting wreath of the Dark.

"Ah, ah, HA!" I can't help it "Aah!" - and I laugh and laugh: see it in my eyes, fool, see the fell gift flowing freely

through my veins! – gunned down by police fire!? Aye! A death fit for an Anarch! Shoot, shoot!

"You sick fuck," he says, sliding his gun back in the handle at his belt, walking towards me – "You sick fuck..."

A strange gesture, then, quick and efficient, proof of either deep training or volition, accompanied by a very distinctive *c-c-c-click*!

He walks up the steps, now, a long, metal telescopic baton in hand, raised to strike.

Antonius, forewarned, clambers down my back and off to the ground as the piglet approaches, I can barely stand up, still I keep *laughing*, it – ah, ah! Blade raised, still he strikes there first, at the very wrist and the *sgian dubh* tumbles like a shooting star – so beautiful, but for an instant – *bring it on*, *fuckwit*! Start the killin'!

Still I *laugh* as he beats me down, striking across my knees and down my head, *down* – down and I *laugh*, down and again and hit forcefully by the steely bites of that fucken, *fucken baton!* brought down with explicit fury, *laughing* – it comes down like a raging wind, successive blows land here and there, so fucken cruel – and I *laugh* and *laugh*, helplessly trying to shield myself as best I can though I *laugh* – with one hand free he tries to wrench my arms away to strike again, one blow gets me right across the face and the whole world reels in vertigo – swooning, the very rock seems to twirl and I *laugh* and *laugh*, only pain remains now, euphoric, blow after blow, *laughing* though he spits and yells at me, striking, vying desperately to undo *what I have become* –

And laugh

And laugh –

'Til I start to lose senses and the breath is shocked out of my lungs by rubbery kicks and a flurry of fists, again and again

And snarl and grin -

'Til I hear some metallic *clang* somewhere off and the piglet starts to groan, leather creaking, steps uneasy, his very throat tortured with poignant suffering –

And laugh and laugh

'Til a great splash of blood showers down my contorted face – great gouts of vile vitae endlessly spurting down in cascades, and I spit and flay my hands to keep off that fucken, *fucken* – laugh, *laugh*!

I try and wipe it off, through swollen eyes I can see the other man waltzing away, back against the wall, shaken and convulsing, coughing more blood and bile, retreating, off until he stumbles over the edge and falls off the stairs into the mud in a great, a wonderful sloshing *whoosh*.

> And laugh And laugh -

Men's illusions in their pride under the sky melt down, and are diminished into the ground, gone before the onset of our black robes, pulsing on our vindictive feet against them.

- Aeschylus

IX.

"Ah, alright, alright... stand watch, Milord, I need to get my mind straight."

Leaning against the door, heart beating fast, bleeding profusely from half a dozen wounds – as far as I can tell – I throw my hand into my frayed backpack, closing my fist unto a handful of raw coffee beans, and start munching away, one by one. The taste is so fucken strong, it –

"Alright, ok."

Finally I uncap my water bottle and drain down the stale stuff to the last drop.

"Oï, fucken oï..."

Now let's see if I can get up...

"Aye, Milord, this is new ... "

Antonius skittering before the door, stern vigil whilst I creep down the stairs and into the freezing mud, fumbling blindly away at the piggy's corpse. Several of my fingers probably broken now, though it's difficult to keep track; a sharp pang of pain eventually reminds me which are hurt and which aren't.

When I finally do unclip the gun from his belt, I can barely conceive that I'm actually going to use one of these things. Erh. Crawling back up the steps, panting heavily, a neatly cut lip bleeding generously, I finally lay an elbow on the front step and haul my battered carcass up again.

"Alright, Milord." I gently put the knight atop my shoulder. Examining the device intently, I unlock the safety, aim at the door's lock, and *fire*, blowing holes and keep firing, 'til the clip is empty and the barrel is smoking. Antonius doesn't so much as bulge an eyelid. "My, that must have woken up the dead. Now let's see."

Wiping the prints off the handle, I throw the gun disdainfully. Bending low, I seize the *sgian dubh* once more and step forth to open the door. Takes a bit of a push, but it finally comes loose; bits of the locket clinkering to the stone floor.

Faint light seeps into the Crypt, I could barely make out the inside if not for the blessed moon – still I step forth, trembling, clenching my teeth to keep from howling outright in atrocity.

"Aethel..." I manage to call out, throat jagged and sore.

Still, no answer.

Squarely built, the room smells of past remorse – haunting imagery and slumberous woe. Such repose feels *inhuman*, somehow, and I can't help but be overwhelmed by a sentiment of... abhorrence. There is very little furnishing here, evidently, as naught would stand the test of time. Rather, the Crypt displays but two large coffins on opposite sides, both richly graven and silver shod. Their polished wooden lids gleam in the pale light, and I can distinctly notice one whose dust has been slightly streaked.

Silently I make my sorry way to that piece, barely able to stand. I sheathe the blade and put by hands to the cover. In one agonizing push I manage to open the coffin.

Darkness welcomes me, for that light can scarcely show me *whose* traits I now glean upon: those of a decrepit corpse or those of my beloved – but the slight reflection of a pendant immediately tells me I have not gone astray.

The flames of the Black Star.

She rests there, stretched out – I can see now, looking closer, the scarlet dress, the pale locks – the, ah... I can't help but *gasp out* in surprise when I see that her eyes are still open, fixed upon mine, and that she is *smiling*.

Smiling!?

"Beloved," she whispers, half-awake.

Robed as the Scarlet Fae, she has still elected to lay to rest adorning the Black Star. Traits of the dead countess

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show about her now; the radiance, the grandeur, the hopelessness. A beauty in decay, she was laying there waiting for death.

Delicately I bow down to kiss her, mouth drawing near to touch upon the silken softness of her skin... alabaster cold, wetly lipped with blood.

"No," I hush. "Not you too..."

Her smile stretches wide into a horrible grin. And she *laughs*, chuckling like some naughty prankster.

Raising her chest, braced on the edges of the coffin, she starts to get back up. "Hardly... I've no idea," she says, "I've tried it so many times on myself, somehow I think I might have developed certain *tolerance*... how queer..."

And she laughs!

How can she!?

"So much for the Scorched Earth stratagem," she adds, leaning to free her legs.

"No, Aeth'." I try and answer. "Just *look* at me, it's pretty burnt."

When all of sudden, a violent spasm shakes her asunder; no, no! Her head tilts back, jaw clenched – immediately I enfold her in my arms, trying to calm her down. No! A thick trickle of blood runs down her lips and unto her gorge – twisting her smile into a terrifying sight.

"Then again..." she snarls, muscles relaxing. *Laughing*. Swiftly she wipes off the blood with the back of her hand.

On the verge of breaking down, I try to retain a measure of countenance, striving to conceal both tears and wails – easing her out of the coffin, taking her by the hand... a very cold and delicate hand. Squeezing on my broken fingers, she leaps down and we both *crash* upon the floor... unable to stand.

"Fucken hell..."

And now we all laugh.

Antonius scuttles on the floor, whiskers aquiver, circling frantically. All three of us then ramp our lowly way out of the room and unto the front step, barely able to crawl.

Solemn, Aethel sits her self against a marble column, looking out into the sky, whilst I lay down to rest, head nestled in her lap and the carmine folds of her dress. Antonius climbs upon my chest and huddles there, shivering. And we three lay there for a minute's peace, lovelorn.

Caressing my brow, the Scarlet Fae looks down upon us with tender eyes.

"You both came..."

Grieved to hear that silence broken, still I resolve to jest about - the end has not come, not yet, *not yet* -

"Aye, it was all Block's idea, really. Said he didn't have a chance to say farewell."

And her gaze shows with moonlit clarity. Majesty looms there in twain.

"Doubt ill becomes *true* disorder, my love. I wish things could have been... different. I'm *unstable*, you know."

And I sigh.

"I know."

"Nearing Annabelle," she begins, sadness overflowing, "I saw something in her, that ambition, that... folly. Somehow I thought I could spare you from that sight. Scare you off. How little did I know..." satin lips atremble. "The Nematode had agreed, I trusted her."

Her!?

"Love," she goes on, "I bear no Hope. Simplicity ill becomes me. Dialectics can only bring us back to the beginning, but it's too late for me, I've gone so far in... the Asylum, it – I *can't*, but you..." weeping, then, softly, fingers running down my cheek. "But you knew that already. Still, you came."

"The darker road," I whisper, "has taken me. Imperfection is everything, now, I know that... Aethel, wherefore could I not emerge!? Can't we just end it here, close the curtains? I can't bear to *leave* you..."

"Dim, I'm sorry... 'wrong life can't be lived rightly'. You did not ask to be spared, but you need not die tonight."

But to die, to die!

"Nay... nay!"

Bereavement again? Loss!? That such beauty and truth should pass utterly, be rent from existence in the wake of adversity!?

"Arrh -" surging, another spasm rambles through her failing flesh, again, but subsides quickly. She spits off into the mire, and *smiles*, then, careless though ruins still smoulder about it all... and for once I realize the full grandeur of true malice.

"It's all right," she says, "I will not forget. Beloved, stay true. We can be at peace, now..."

These eyes, these pale eyes...

Ah, I will, I will -

"Peace..." my voice hushed in darkness, "...here we are at last."

Raising her head to rest on the column, she then looks yonder into the Swamp, almost serene, almost at rest –

Almost –

But vengeance strikes her features all at once, a dark shroud suddenly veiled over her beauty; wanton loth for ignorance, wrath of innocence and the sharp, consuming flames of the nihilistic Black Star.

Vengeance...

Pure fucking malevolence.

FUCK... YOUR GOD CAN'T HELP ME NOW IT'S UNDER MY SKIN NOWHERE TO GO BUT I WON'T GIVE IN CAN'T HELP ME NOW I'M BLEEDING WITHIN NOWHERE TO GO I'LL NEVER GIVE IN

- Tairrie B.

Х.

Furious light seeps into the glade, reflected in Aethel's twin amethyst orbs.

"See, beloved. My Scorched Earth!"

Her demented parle stings truer now, as I can actually see, from the relative height of my post, waves of luminescence igniting the autumn night – there, overhead, across the Swamp and the outskirts, the lake and the garden – in the distance, vermillion taints of a great bonfire, blazing up, blazing *high*, roaring: guttural, torn as though from scores of feline throats – *tortured*.

An enormous fire's been lit, but...

The Mansion!?

Carmine ardour lays siege to the once scatheless sky, inflamed in malice. But now I see that Aethel cares very little for the kindled spectacle, rather, she looks yon through the swamp-path, ruefully.

And I can see *them* all at once: more lights ranging this way from the Estate, half a dozen at the very least, whilst overhead, the ruddy layers of the burning Mansion, mingled with the purple veil of dawn both invade the night, raking the abyss from that portrait with the brush of a crueller artist.

Aethel then speaks the exact, ill-fated words as though they were my own:

"Time is running out of us."

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If I'm going down Then I'm going down good If I'm going down Then I'm going down clean If I'm going down Then I'm going The prettiest wretched whore you've ever seen

- Emilie Autumn

XI.

Rummaging...

Crawling around the festering, ice broken mud, Milord and I are striving to gather all we possibly can; salvage everything *before it's too late.*

Still sitting against the column, Aethel is tracing the double edges of her *sgian dubh*, smiling gleefully. The blade now rests with its proper mistress, and the marriage is but one more verse in horror.

"Not going back to the Asylum," she whispers, wise. "The things they do to you in there. Can't survive *twice*. Can't. I come from nowhere... and thus I shall return."

Blood is seeping from her lips, drop after drop, mouth twisted in malediction.

Remorsefully I think back on Clare, then. And why!? Hasten, now, daemon Dim!

There, I run though the pockets of the last peon and ramp back through the ice and through the dirt to the frozen steps of the Crypt.

My whole flesh is withering with tremors of a nameless suffering – shaking from the mere bulge of any ashen muscle, I try and ignore that searing pain to gain my beloved's post, only to crumble down in her lap from exhaustion, yet again.

Lips atremble, eyes too dry to weep, I offer her the two Molotov cocktails, the two lighters, the two .45 pistols and the three clips. She puts them aside, her delirious gaze sunk into the Wild.

"Sir Antonius Block," she tells the albino rat, "Jag älskar dig."

And the knight bows down solemnly - rendered ultimately deaf by the eloquence of his mistress, never to be seen again.

And the voices are coming -

Turning to me, she whispers in haste, "Beloved, fare thee well... save my side of the bed, will you?"

A million things I could say, then. A million words wouldst seek utterance, yet tongue and word can never tell... no matter, no matter. That, too, must pass.

"Fare thee well," I answer.

And, leaning to her side, I gently lay my lips over hers for one last, bloody kiss – tasting the poisoned vitae, sealing mine forever – quickly, she undoes the thin hooks that hold her chocker in place and hands me the dangling, Black Star. Silently, I bow down and turn away, departing to tumble down the steps and *flee*.

Laughing –

Aethel's laughter rings true in the rising dawn, she loads the two handguns one by one – laughing, laughing – lighting the two cocktails, all at once – laughing – blade hidden in the fold of her dress, standing up, quivering, to welcome those who dare come forth and make them understand – yes, greet them into the reality of what she is.

Laughing -

And I fall and crawl and push my battered carcass forward, onward, urged on by the rantings of the pale knight – onward, face lashed by the branches, veins freezing as I stumble into the unknown, away and anon to regain the Dark which spawned me

Posfludium

The Darker Road

I thank you that the limit has finally been transgressed. The mirror has been shattered. But what do the shards reflect? Can you tell me that?

- Ingmar Bergman

Dawn illuminates the somnolent land, frost covering the forest whilst willow stems rim thick with crystalline frost; branches waltzing majestically in the autumn breeze

Whence from underneath an oblique strand of red sumac bushes I *finally* emerge out into the roadside ditch, choking as I fall and raise myself back up, dragging my feet – up and again, slipping through the mud, reaching for some steady rock to haul myself back again, forward, forward –

Snowflakes faint from the lifeless sky; one by one they gently flow down the breeze to touch the earth, espoused lovingly by the frozen ground, the dead leaves, the black thickets, the icy flowers

Up the ditch I drag my legs and fall flat on the gravel side, rolling unto my back, breath cut short and hoarse. One by one the snowflakes descend from the heavens and unto my brow, unto my lips, unto my broken corpse, whilst a wee white shape scuttles to my side, snuggled against my neck to steal some warmth from my flesh... but will it find any? Into the pristine morn, a sound shatters the rustling wind; a low rumbling followed with the declining impression of rolling wheels, muffled, stopping short, right across, footsteps closing in, so light, so soft –

How beautiful, this falling snow... see that, Milord, winter is coming...

Winter is coming

"So..." echoes a voice, somewhere off. "There he is."

"Alone," echoes another.

"Alone."

"My, what a mess."

Twin black shades leer back from the heavens, reflecting a very battered form.

"Indead, what a mess," says Daeva.

"Nothing we can't fix," replies Ming, crouching down to move me. "Watch the leg," she tells the other.

Daeva nods disapprovingly, opening the car doors. "To think I warned him..."

"Well," counters the other, "you talk a lot. He's still alive, isn't he?"

"Obviously," states Daeva as they move me into the backseat of the car. "But at what cost to his sanity..."

She then lifts Antonius from the ground and wraps him carefully in a woollen scarf next to her. Ming gets in the back and closes the door. She wets a black handkerchief with a bottle of water, reflecting.

"Oh, please. No one is sane."

Slowly, the car starts moving, picking up speed. Contemplating, Daeva adjusts her mirror and replies, "as Cioran so eloquently put: 'instants have died *living* within you, only corpses remained on the path of hopes and failures'."

"Ah," Ming flinches at the very words, "don't be such a grouch. He's safe, now." Delicately, she wipes off some crusted blood from the placid features of my face, dipping the handkerchief in more saline water as she goes, tending to my wounds... undaunted.

Outside, the scenery rolls on, snow blanketing the forest in slumber. What truth, what beauty therein...

"But if... if nothing exists," I finally croak through crackled lips. "Nothing -"

But Ming looks back at me, a mysterious smile borne on her lips.

"... then everything is possible."

Bruno Massé, also known as Raven, was born 1982 in the Laurentian Mountains.

He has published several novels, short stories and poetry collections, as well as a number of plays for the Montreal International Anarchist Theatre Festival.

He has been co-founder and active part of such collectives as the Anarchist Writers' Bloc, the End of the World Comittee, La Foret Noire and Liberterre.

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