

MAKHAI

FASCICLE 2

(RAW)

This is only an incomplete fraction of MAKHAI. MAKHAI's release is planned as 5 fascicles, each going through the stages of raw, rough and ready.

“P & P”

This fascicle is **RAW**. Misspellings abound. Chapters may be incomplete, to be finished or abandoned. Lines shoot into margins, and text turns to notes which turn to gibberish. There are no illustrations.

February 20th, 2015

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Part II

PROIOXIS & PALIOXIS:

Breckeddal: Berdlick, I heva e valy, valy, valy cunning pren.

Berdlick: Is it es cunning es e fox whet usad to ba Plofassol of Cunning et Oxford Univalsity but hes movad on end is now wolking fol tha U.N. et tha High Commission of Intalnetioner Cunning Prenning?

Breckeddal: Yas it is.

Berdlick: Hmm. . . thet's cunning.

Breckeddal

back and forth

Blackadder: Baldrick, I have a very, very, very cunning plan.

Baldrick: Is it as cunning as a fox what used to be Professor of Cunning at Oxford University but has moved on and is now working for the U.N. at the High Commission of International Cunning Planning?

Blackadder: Yes it is.

Baldrick: Hmm. . . that's cunning.

Blackadder

The adventures of zen master Goto

As they are told in the manner of the Small House, which was founded by an apprentice of the first Gōtō.

I

A novice presented Zen master Goto with the question of a dog's Buddha-nature. Master Goto answered, saying "Fuck you", and at that moment the novice was enlightened.

II

A novice came to Zen master Goto and asked if a dog had Buddha-nature. Upon him asking this, Goto killed him with a hatchet and buried his body in the garden, under the cypress tree. When this all came to light, Goto said: "Buddha made me do it."

III

The policeman asked: "Who is Buddha?" Goto said, "What is Buddha?" and ran.

(This koan is also told as follows. The policeman asked: "Who is Buddha?" Goto said, "If you meet Buddha, kill him." Then he ran.)

IV

The FBI investigator asked Goto, "Why is there a body in your garden?" Goto said this was indeed so. The investigator repeated his question. Goto said, "To answer your question, you must unask it."

V

The FBI investigator said to Goto, "I know who you are now." Goto said, "Five pounds of flax?" The investigator said, "Now I am certain, but I am not enlightened."

VI

The first neighbor said, "Goto is a very nice, quiet little man. Keeps to himself, but everyone likes him." The second neighbor said, "Goto is a bit too nice, too quiet little man. Keeps to himself too much, even if everyone likes him." The reporter was enlightened.

VII

The Zen master Goto was brought before a judge. He was fined for contempt of court.

VIII

The newspaper said: "Mad Monk Massacre Mayhem! Senator Says US Soft On The Zen Terror Menace!" Goto said, "The Zenator has killed the mind of logic."

IX

The Zen master Goto was in prison, making license plates. They all said "MU", and nothing more. There were 964 of them. The guard supervisor was enlightened and fired.

X

The criminal said, "You have dropped your soap." "The soap is meaningless", said Goto. He bent to pick it up anyway.

XI

The criminal said, "You have dropped your soap." "Oh pull the other one", Goto said. "Does a dog have Buddha-nature?" the criminal asked. Goto bent over.

XII

Goto had a novice. The novice said, "What can you give to me?" Goto said, "Five pounds of flax." Then Goto had five novices. Goto said, "I do not have five pounds of flax." He had no disciples after that.

Death questions

To a religiously minded person, death is the greatest mystery: the ultimate barrier between Life and Truth, this life and the afterlife, the mundane and either the diabolical or the divine.

To an irreligious person, death is just a thing.

You know, a thing.

A slow dip from biology to non-biology, from man to no man but many worms. From living breath to the smell of the grave; from here to nowhere.

This chapter is for the irreligious person in each of us.

1. The original questions

Dead bodies.

That's a fascinating subject. In most cases they are buried: away to the churchyard, down, and then sod on you. But what if you don't want that, or are not allowed it? Say you're an infidel in a religious land, or just plain contrarian.

Well, you could give your body to science, or to medicine. What do they do with the parts that are left over? Are they buried? "And now we give to rest the remains of Randolph Carter, minus his heart, lungs, kidneys, spleen, bladder,

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genitalia and most of the big muscles on his strong, sinewy arms. . . May those parts of him that remain rest in peace.”

Or are the remaining remains thrown away? “Gee, Bob-Joe. Them hospital throwaways can have shiny things in ’em — sweet mother of all that is holey! We’ve got a leg in here!”

Or cremated? And what is it like, anyway, to work at a crematorium? “Me? Work? Oh, just in the, um, waste disposal business, I think. Details? Um, oh, I. . . I burn dead people. Are you satisfied? What about the kids? You want some juicy stories?”

Do crematoriums charge you by unit, or by weight? Or are you not supposed to ask? And is there a book somewhere about these things?¹ Please tell me if there is; I am much too well-behaved to pester a professional. Besides, they might get angry and conk me over the head with a shovel. “Gee, a curious guy, you say? Never seen noffink here. Now sorry, must go back to shovelling them coals into the oven.”

And the ovens. . . What do they run with? Coal sounds rather medieval. Could you wish for birch logs, just for that good ol’ traditional Nordic cremation? And is there a law against having your own cremation done privately? “In this my final will, I lay this burthen on my were-brothers Bob-bred and Joethelstan: that they should, when I am dead, gather a pile of wood no less than ten feet high, and on that pile lay me —”

What are the laws on handling dead people like? I should consult the legal grimoires on this. Can you donate your skull to a friend? And if you can, who handles getting the icky surface stuff off it? “What are you doing in there, Frankie?” “Just fulfilling the will of an old friend. . . Say, give me a spoon!”

How about a leg? Say you want to be buried, but want to give your aunt your leg, encased in plastic. Can you do that,

¹Mary Roach, *Stiff*, apparently.

or will the undertaker walk in and say: “Give me the leg, ma’am. And don’t mess with us, we’re experts in disposing of dead people!”

How about art? There seem to be no protests against bone galleries and catacombs exhibiting the bones of people that are long dead. Say you want to freeze your body in carbonite and put it up in the National Gallery. Object 42, titled “He watched too much Star Wars”. Is that legal or not? Can they sue your agent? Whose property is your body when you die? If it’s not buried, does your significant other inherit it? And can it be sold? If not, why? I could cut off my hair and sell it. I could give away a kidney and I could conceivably cut off my genitalia, nail them to a Playboy and become a millionaire artist celebrity.

But what about my body, my whole dead body? It’s not mine anymore — I’m dead, I have no self and no possessions. Well, I could come back and possess my own body. Then I’d have a possession. But if I don’t — whose property am I? The wife? As said in the will? Do I revert to a church or to the state? Who can claim me, and to what purpose? “As his last will was ambiguous on the matter, we are hereby gathered here to dispose by orderly auction of the remains of the late John Q. Public — and we have ten dollars from the seedy-looking gentleman in black! Keep them offers coming! You don’t want him going for ten dollars to that necrophiliac-looking man in black, do you? Twenty dollars from the widow!”

Ah, necrophilia. I knew I would get to it eventually. If you’re an adult, you can give Bob your consent and have sex, and it’s all nice and legal. Likewise Bob can sodomize a meat grinder without committing a criminal act. An act of self-mutilation, maybe, but that’s not criminal.

I hope it isn’t. Is there a book on the subject?

Anyway, back to necrophilia. Sex with consent is legal, and sex with the unliving is legal. Is bonking your corpse illegal if you write down your consent before dying? “I want in death what I did not have in life — I am free to all who

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come!”

That was a terrible pun. I’m sorry about that.

“He said it would be okay, constable! Stop hitting me!”

“Well, let’s hear him about it! Do you want me to stop hitting this man, Mr. Poor Dead Guy? Huh? No? Then it’s Kick-a-rama Time!”

But seriously. There seems to be a bit of an unclear situation here. Suicide is okay — hell, there are people I’d even recommend it to. But help a man to kill himself, and people act like you’re a lunatic. We don’t shun butchers, though they kill animals without asking if they want it. And soldiers! What about soldiers? They don’t ask if the enemy wants to die — in most cases it’s pretty clear the enemy doesn’t want to die, and they shoot anyway! So why shouldn’t it be allowed to kick the chair from under a friend that’s asking for it? Could be euthanasia, but it could be just for kicks — pardon the pun — too: some people are bored to death.

Suppose you’re terminally ill and want to go out with a bang, so you download a last message to Youtube and then let your best friend shoot you full of lead. He’d do it if he was a man — it was your will, his duty as a helping friend, and men want to shoot at living things anyway. Would the police come for your friend?

Sure they would. Policemen are prudes, just like the most of us. Why can’t we talk rationally about things like this? Or, failing that, can’t anyone recommend me a book on the subject?

I should have begun this piece with warning off the people that can’t stomach things like this, and that’s probably the only part of this stuff I haven’t covered yet — eating.

Cannibalism.

Suppose you cut off your finger and eat it. That’s not illegal, right? Gross, especially if you have dirty hands, but surely not illegal. Suppose you gouge out a few pounds of fat and fry a sack of french fries with it. Can you go out to the market and sell it? I mean, straight-out sell it as

“French fries fried in human fat! Three platters for the price of two! Free veggies!” Is that illegal? Why aren’t things like this taught in schools? It would keep the pupils awake.

For several days and nights running, I think.

Are there standards for human parts sold as food? Do you have to know if it’s free of infections and contains only ten percent of fat? “Buy Humargarine — it’s closer to you than you think!”

Suppose you arrange to buy human parts for science, but are forced to sell them as snacks instead because you’ve got no funding. It’s health food — hey, it was healthy when it lived! Three time national boxing champion! What, if anything, are you exactly guilty of? You owned the body when the lab shut down. You’re not poisoning anybody. What’s the crime? Unforeseen reduction of a man into mince? Making Spam out of Sam? And what to do with the food? You can’t experiment on Pickled Peter.

Does a policeman get training on subjects like these, or are they just supposed to arrest anyone that does things to dead bodies? I think this subject deserves a great deal of thinking and research.

Fund me!

2. Budgie did a go-go: a pet urnery

Recently found that in the wonderland of bureaucracy there is such a thing as a pair of forms, one of which begs for the permission to bury someone somewhere special, and the other which pleads for the permission to found an actual bone-yard.

The problem in founding a cemetery seems to be that you either need to own the spot, or then at least have a plan for renting or otherwise having the right to use it for

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the next 130 years.

“Hey, uncle. Mind if I use a corner of the yard for a while? Oh goody. Bye! See ya!”

Makes me wonder what kind of a rent-master evicts someone that’s been keeping a graveyard on rented land. “You and your corpses. . . you have until the end of month to go, or I’ll call the police!”

Apparently you can apply for a permission for a coffin-yard, an urnery, or a combination. Almost makes me want to buy a secluded, quiet square meter somewhere, and apply for an urn four-seater there.

Would there be any takers? “Now accepting submissions to the Smalltown Urnery — 4 spots available, each with a hollow cement shaft and a plug with a decorative garden gnome. The gnome’s face can be customized to resemble the inmate for a small extra fee. Vacancies to be filled by time of death. The following rites provided free of charge: Cthulhoid (dis)interment, full moon howlings, reading the daily headlines, generic Christian rites. Prayers whined to distant uncaring stars for an extra 10e/mo. Act quick; only 4 spots available; only 50e/decade with an option to renew. Applicants can win great prizes.”

(Er, if you bury someone somewhere, what if you buy the plot only for a fixed time, and refuse to renew? “Here’s youse uncle; we ain’t keeping him if youse don’t pay us. Sorry ’bout the mouldy coffin, miss; it gets like that in the ground. The leaky stuff, y’know.”)

The next question would be whether having the permission to have a graveyard means you can operate last rites of your choice there — the operator doesn’t, by the law and form, need to be a formal religious group — and what kind of rites I would do.

Pyres?

Embalming? (Do you need a licence for that? And, hey, would my university happen to have that as a night school thingie? “Honestly Mr. Constable, embalming night school!

Why else would I be dragging around a corpse in the middle of the night?”)

Zoroastrian open-air exposure to the elements and the vultures?

Now, what would I be allowed to do, and would I need a religion for it — I don’t recall from my civics lessons what the law exactly says on the things you can do to a corpse.

Well, I have the distinct impression that necrophilia is out; funny, since I think it could be arranged in perfectly tidy fashion with some variant of an organ donor card.

Really; I’m not joking. Or rather I’m joking, but also being perfectly serious. If you can give consent to intercourse, why the devil you couldn’t give that in advance on the behalf of your corpse?

ORGAN DONOR ETC. My organs can be harvested for medical, scientific and cannibal use after my death, in that order. After that, as specified in the Mortuary Law of 2020, I can be released to uses of [] heterosexual [] homosexual [x] bisexual love until my burial. Signed with full consent, presence of mind and retching of relatives, etc.

I’m a liberal, you see. The cold, hard, icky kind of a liberal.

An old-time boat burial, or one on a pyre, would be a grand way to go. Though the ship set to the sea would probably be a biohazard, and to burn a pyre you would have to die outside the forest fire season.

Life is complicated; seems death is even more so.

Nah, scratch that. When I die, I want to be encased in a humongous block of transparent plastic in a befuddling swim-falling-like posture, unshaven and nude, and donated to the nearest department of mathematics. Preferably with a stipend “for the duration of the accompanying monument being on display in the premises. With a student representative lighting a candle in front of it every full moon, and

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every day a Fields medal is given. In the name of Euler, QED, AMEN!”

But — pet semataries. (Sorry, cemeteries. I don't think the King variety was in any way zoned or approved.)

Do you need a permission to found a pet cemetery? And if you do, is there a still different paper you need to fill, or is it classified as something less noble, such as a biowaste disposal spot? (I hope not.)

I've heard Finnish Lutheran clergymen — well, some of them — are benevolently fuzzy about the concept of pets in heaven, and anyway don't see much wrong with a cross on the grave of one.

Could you book a priest to perform — er, officiate? — at Rex's funeral? Probably not; he was an ungodly beast that coveted his neighbor's bone, and walked up and down the streets with genitalia in full view, drooling at every passing bitch. There's no salvation for such miscreants.

Wait a minute — if pets can get to heaven, do all pets get there? Even the angry poodle that bit its owner into itsy-bitsy little pieces? How bad and deadly can a pet be to its owner before it goes to Hell instead?

And if pets get to heaven, how about farm animals? Who feeds them? And what about the poo-poo? It would suck to be the angel of the Augean stables.

What about pythons — some are pets, some wild animals. Do only the pet snakes have a shot at eternal life? That's bloody *wrong!*

What about little Joey's pet ants?

What's ant heaven like anyway — or are ants a part of Joey's heaven, instead of having a slice of their own?

Priests should really consider the theological implications of their words before they say that of course Fluffy will be waiting up there.

Unless it's not Fluffy but a simulacrum, a shade to amuse the blessed — while Fluffy himself either burns in Hell (i.e. “Bad doggy! Here's an anti-gravity stick... fetch!”) or has altogether ceased to exist.

Wouldn't want to say that to poor Timmy, aged six. "Well Timmy, you'll be in heaven but once your doggy dies, it's *gone forever*. Pets have no souls. And dogs live a seventh of what humans do. Bless you! Anyway, Jesus will give you another in heaven. Now run along with that soulless little beast of yours, and fetch me your mother. Tell her Reverend Brutal has come."

I've found that theology is immense fun, at least if you don't have to believe any of it. It's like freeform sudoku: you start with a few details and fill in the rest.

Come to think of it, thinking of farm animals and death: what the heck does a farmer do with all the dead cows? I mean a farmer that goes for milk, not flesh. Are there some pits in the woods I don't know of? Are they all ground to fertilizer or (yuck) animal feed? Is zoonecrophilia legal? (Hey, that's a new fetish — both totally harmless and utterly kinky.) Horses used to go, as I understand it, to the salami factory —

Ah, yes. Horse sausage. An icky thing to many, eating such a beautiful animal. I agree on horses being beautiful, graceful, nice animals, but I still somehow don't have any qualms about eating pieces of one.

Or pieces of cow. I am regularly seen rubbing my hands together and saying: "Mmm! There's nothing better than tasty dead cow chunks!"

And what, ugly and disgusting animals like pigs are okay to eat, but nice horsies are a no-no? What sick kind of a preference is that? If you were a cannibal, would you eat the ugly people first?

Well. Pets have cemeteries. Farm animals and meat animals have a pit somewhere, or an incinerator. (I guess your local slaughterhouse wouldn't be improved by a forest of white crosses in front of it.) Some people say dead animals are treated in awful fashion, and contrast them to humans; I like to do the opposite. Dead people are dead flesh: turn them to food and fertilizer.

The offense you feel at this is not rational: the dead

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person is gone. What is left is only the shell. It would be let down to the ground to rot, to be eaten by worms, or then put into an oven and burned to crisp, crackle-crackle, anyway. Is that *better*?

Besides, think of it as a final good deed. A final ecological bit of enrichment for Mother Nature — a lot more efficient than rooting a tree on your nutritious remains. Like George Carlin said, isn't it a pretty outdated, barbaric thing to gather all our dead people in one corner of the town?

And all for what — superstitious fear? A bit of waste to honor the fallen? Simple queasiness? Crud, I'm my dance of synapses. When that ceases I'm gone; and anyway a human body sloughes cells off so fast, in a variety of ways, that every seven years I'm a brand-new man, or so it is said. The last iteration won't have any special commemorative value. A human being is that which is in the mind; the body is, figuratively, and eventually also literally, just shit.

Which is not being morbid or gloomy, but just, if you believe it, upbeat in a ghastlily realistic way: you got to strive for the truth of things when you can, because a mind is a terrible thing to waste.

And a waist is a terrible thing to mind. G'night, all.

3. The final blasphemies

People seem to have an aversion towards graves. Sometimes greed for buried riches overwhelms that aversion; but generally speaking people don't want to go looking for dead people.

Greed motivates some of us; so does curiosity. The pharaohs of Egypt didn't get to sleep in peace; after the grave-robbers had, ahem, unearthed the subject, we were curious in a base and glorious way, because we knew so little about those thousands of years of the double crown and the royal hawk.

(Well, glory can be another motive, all the way from “I happen to be the virile man that excavated the tomb of Seti the Shostak, you unwed lady with huge tracts of land!” to “You don’t think I’m tough? Okay, get a shovel, we’re going to visit my gramma.”)

Now, then, if you want to keep something safe — put it in a grave and don’t tell anybody. Monuments are defaced, histories erased, legends altered; but amidst death, certain things can live forever. (As quoth in ye Nekro Noma Eikon of ye Mad Arabb Abd-ul-al-Azreed. . .)

Not telling anybody about your grave is obviously difficult if you’re a pharaoh; people are sort of on the lookout for the spot where you’ll lay down to rest. But, nowadays, common people are buried all the time. Wouldn’t it be a splendidly morbid idea to go down with our equivalent of the tomb paintings — say a set of aluminium plates that detail our recent history from the Fall of A-Dolfu to the rise of the Ge-Or Ge-Pushu the Lesser? (And a thousand years later, a schism in the Mormon Church! Newly decrypted revelations deciphered from the Re-reformed Egyptian of the Silver Plates!)

That infolful burial would take more than a spot of planning, though. Grave plots aren’t for forever nowadays; and the tending of graves is a tad undignified. Not on the level of having a hut on the yard grounds for all the bones that the seasons throw up, like in the old days; but still. Graves shouldn’t have a pit where the coffin lies; but as the coffin rots a hole forms and the ground trickles down. Then the boneyard caretaker comes, cuts away the turf, shovels earth in the hole, and goes over it a couple of times with a sort of a plate-ended pneumatic drill. The result is a nice smooth plot, but one really doesn’t want to see what’s happened to the one beneath. (Not so in the old days; the English word “graveyard” meant originally “a garden of pits”.)

And then there’s the possibility that a helpful governmental authority decides the stones take up too much space, and presto! your skull’s in the Catacombs of Paris along

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with the contents of most of Paris's cemeteries until 1786. (And really, to quote Carlin, what kind of an idea is keeping all our dead in one part of the town? Really? Is there such commemorative value in the last generation of our cells?)

Even if a wholesale resurrection like that doesn't happen, grave plots are not eternal. It would make cemeteries kind of big and expensive to maintain after a while. Unless you found a real big piece of land, filled it starting from one end, and maintained, clipped and prettified only the fifty most recent years. Beyond that, let it all slowly become a jungle, let trees grow and eat their fill and let our old ones return to the nature from which they came.

A nice vision, certainly. In Hong Kong, on the other hand, or so I hear, a public grave is for six years. Then you're dug up, cremated, and handed back to the family if the family can be found.

"Did you say a package from your great-great-uncle?"

"Not, not a package *from*..."

What do you do with that kind of an accumulated ancestry after a couple of generations anyway? Get a small room filled with jars of dust, and hope a toddler doesn't decide to go and taste a few? (Or an older one to hide his or her dirty magazines, cigarettes and the like in a jar only half full — ecch. "Pt. . . pt! Grains of sand in. . . pt!")

I think the grave plots in Finnish cemeteries — the Lutheran ones, though everyone's welcome, even atheists (that's ecumenicism!) — are for 25 years or so; also free, if you're local. Outsiders obviously have to pay, and may anyway get a "gag grave" while the locals laugh into their beers. (Er, no.) After the quarter-century, you can renew, if you want to; if not, in a couple of years (with a minimum of four) there'll be a new tenant in. Used to be the plots were eternal; then for fifty years; now fifty years after that 25 years is the general rule. The matter's brought to the family's attention with some kind of a placard at the site. ("Your lease ends X.X.20XX. Please move out before that. Clean the site after you. . .") One somewhat representative list of prices

said: 25 years for a local, free; 25 years for an outsider, 350 euros; 50 years for a local, 350 euros.

How much is 50 years for an outsider, the list didn't say; maybe he or she will be considered a local by then.

I wonder if, after those 25 or 50 years, the exhumed Finns get cremated and shelved somewhere. Of the ten or so parish websites I went through, not one said a thing about that. I don't think they can put the new tenant atop the previous one; you'd have a coffin pyramid in a few generations. And doesn't seem very practical to make the pit deeper and pad it with the previous guy; see the previous about how the coffin might be all rotten and shattered. Ideally, I think, a cemetery of this kind should have a hidden cellar under it, under the whole cemetery; you could hit a lever, and the previous occupant would ratchet down one notch to give way to the next one. Then eventually you could take the lowermost and compact him or her somehow. (Egh, this sudden image of an immense *cube* of dead people, each pressed to a cube of five by five by five inches, the whole standing quiet, cubical and horrible in a big vault somewhere. "What's behind that big black door, Head Caretaker?" — "Shut up and haul the lawnmower. Let's get back to the surface and mow some. You don't wanna see the Cube of the Dead.")

Now, what the above was to demonstrate was that unlike the ancient Egyptians, we can't leave messages for the curious (and the greedy) of the future quite so easily. (Maybe a nice spring-loaded jack-in-the-box for the gravedigger fifty years in the future?) One could, I suppose, be buried in some private and undisturbed place, but I gather the authorities have made that difficult, too. (Probably because no-one has any idea about just what dead people are — are they people, possessions, or what? Do they have human rights? Or owners? Best to hide them away before anyone starts to ask too many questions. "ello. I 'ear death 'as visited this sad house. The deceased, may I buy 'im?")

(The problem is, until the legal aspect of this is cleared,

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there's no hope of removing the ick associated with necrophilia. If there's no clear idea of what dead people are, it's pretty difficult to decide if it's okay to have sex with them or not. Are you doing something to something that is, in some aspect, still having a part of its human rights? Or are you, em, fondling a possession that might not belong to you? Should wills include not only the division of the possessions, but the person that now owns the deceased, too? Some Green organization should start asking questions about this; call it Project MErtilizer, maybe.)

So: get a permission to be buried in a remote place. Mark the place as a grave, just to keep the less curious away. Be sneaky about the full extent of your final resting place; possibly manufacture a back room (or a lower coffin!) behind the necrotically near-hermetic seal of your own dead presence. Then be buried there, and take with you something more permanent than a book or a CD. Maybe you could find a cave and decorate it with finger paintings of the important political figures of today. ("The figure 55-B was apparently not a popular one. The bulbous cheeks of his picture were pressed to the wall with paint-coated. . . nether cheeks.")

("The nose. . . I never wanted to be an archaeologist anyway.")

Then the door closes; you are buried; and a few millennia later there's a tap at the door, and face peeking in, beholding with awe and hunger the images on the walls, and the pile of Playstation parts, and other heaps of priceless antique relics of genuine and oh-so-rare plastic, seldom seen in this world, and seldom preserved; and there are whispers in the deep silence.

"Can you see anything?"

"Yes. . . wonderful things!"

Soul questions

Pregnancy is a kind of miracle. Especially so in that it proves that a man and woman can conspire to force God to create a new soul.

— Robert Anton Wilson

Suppose I have a soul. I've been told I have one; I haven't seen it myself.

How did I get it? Was it the moment I popped out of my mother's ladyparts, or before? Surely not when a sperm met an egg? Is there something in the sperm and something else in the egg that come together and make a soul like they make a body? Or is the developing body an airfield for the soul, and the soul a plane from some ethereal realm?

Do souls pre-exist? Do they come to us new, still with a whiff of plastic packaging, never before used, no traces of previous owners? That's a possibility. But how do souls come into being — does some nebulous Hera wave a hand, making souls out of nothing at all? Is a soul conscious, or consciousness — do they have repressed memories of their creation? Are they created whenever needed, or are there piles, vats of souls waiting, in some metaphysical sense, somewhere in the skies? Do they sleep and dream together? Do they whisper, excitedly, over their corporeal futures? Is this where soulmates start?

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Do souls live again? Is my soul pre-used, re-used, dry-washed with most of the wrinkles removed? But world population has increased for almost all of time. For most generations, the souls of the previous one haven't been enough. Again, piles and fanes full of souls, or new creation whenever required? (Imagine an hourglass with souls for sand. The upper bulb is Heaven, the lower Earth. Generation by generation more souls are required below, until...?)

Is there a difference between people with used souls, and people with new ones?

Maybe a pre-used one makes you a better person, better used to the vagaries of the world, more understanding and compassionate, comfortable in flesh, an old hand in an old world.

Maybe a pre-used one makes you a stick-in-the-mud, unwilling to go forward because you were comfortable back in time; maybe you have fought against time and fate once already, and your soul is corroded and decayed.

One soul with multiple bodies is called reincarnation. Is reincarnation subject to the arrow of time? Could some of your previous lives be in the future? Or in the present — a thousand lives from now you will be your own soulmate, and that is why you are so in sync.

Can you remember your past lives? Speak ancient Egyptian and feel a different sex between your thighs? Know how a potter's wheel works, and how Alexander of Macedon used to smile and sweep his hair? Feel your anger at Hittite scum, feel your fingers throttling a youth over sexual jealousy? Remember as you stood, tall and without doubt, robed in black and iron, and pronounced death and torture to those who violated propriety?

Would you want to remember if you had been a very different person, a seller of hatred and pain, a prophet of anguish and injustice? Would you want to know that had been you, and the deepest, most meaningful part of you was that dead monster?

Did Hitler's soul go out of circulation, or is there a wist-

ful man out there somewhere, a man who feels his hands clench at the sight of uniforms, who shivers when an orator stands up? Is he guilty or clean? What would you say to him, if you knew?

Do animals have souls? Some models of reincarnation say you could come back as a dog, or a cow. Let us say you did. What would it be to recall a dog's life? Do dogs remember like we humans do? Is this where zoophilia comes from?

If animal souls are just human souls getting their karma, and since there are a lot of more animals than there are people, which fraction of animals do have human souls? Are they different from the mere brute beasts? Is there a special clan of dogs that have human souls, given that property at some canine dawn? If you knew, should you treat these dogs any different from mere pure dogs? Should you leave the TV on for them?

Do animals have animal souls, then? Cats, surely, but dogs and horses and frogs — do all animals have souls? Are they all the same, or do smaller, less emotionally able animals have “smaller” souls? Are they different in any way except degree, if even that, from human souls? Could one be reborn as a human? Or as a different animal? If you follow a soul back through reincarnations, what does it start as? Are newly made souls those of bacteria and tardigrades, which through life after life become those of snails, dogs, humans, maybe something greater after that — angels, demons, gods?

Two million years ago, was my soul a gibbon named Gus?

If a human soul is that ineffable human-ness of humans, what is an animal soul? What is the ineffable horseness of horses? If a soul is the explanation for why humans are self-aware, conscious, whatever you want to call it, what do animal souls give to animals?

Maybe animals do not have souls. But then again, dogs care for their puppies, mother chimps for their babies. An-

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imals aren't heartless psychopaths; pets and wild animals alike can express concern, love, self-awareness. If those are not the tuggings of a soul, then are our moments of elevated humanity anything different?

If there was a soulless human being, an s-zombie, would it talk? Walk? Desire? Love? Would it feign those things? Be just a talking monkey, a mechanical Turk? How would you know?

Can you hurt your soul? You can't scrape it like a knee, but if you do something bad, can you wound your soul? Can you do so much evil that your soul is slashed off and separates from you? Can you get your soul back? Or any soul? Does a soul have internal structure? Can your soul split in two? Can you mod your soul? Is a soul a jewel or a flower, or a block of unworked marble?

Is your body just a workbench for a beautiful sculpture, the world just a set of tools for working on your soul?

If souls come from a great stream of reincarnation, then it probably follows that your soul is not related to those of your parents, or your children. (But what if family after family copies those of the past?) You share your blood; but your souls are strangers. You live together, entangling your bodies and souls; and as you die, a bond remains between those souls. Life after life, more and more souls are tied together: here parents, there siblings, friends, workmates, lovers.

When a body dies and a soul leaves, does the soul retain a sense of time and self? Does it shuffle into a heaven, timorous or elated? Does it retain the shape of its body, or does it become young again, or altogether formless? Does it fly through an unspeaking, deterministic universe to yet another incarnation, or are there gods, demons, angels, other souls it converses with? Is it helplessly drawn to rebirth as a sloth, or is there a great tribunal of souls, where it must answer for its evil?

Does such a tribunal judge evil, and mete out punishment, as mortal courts do? Or does great good outweigh

moderate evil? Is reincarnation about doing away with the evil, or doing more good than evil? And can you say, it was not me, the real me, but just my body, in another country, and besides the sack of meat is now dead?

You can take a stick or a probe to a person's head, and by injuring their brain change their personality: sometimes to better, but most often to worse. Is there a soul, in a futile rage, wrenching at controls which no longer work, as the golem of a body goes out of control, the words on its forehead mutilated by mortal hands?

If there is no reincarnation but just one single life and then afterlife, does the soul miss its body? Does it get a new, heavenly one? Is that just a spiffier coat, or something very different? Maybe something with wings and horns and glowing eyes? Mortal bodies decay, yes, but we also grow more comfortable in them. Would you feel uncomfortable in a heavenly body? Would you feel naked without a body?

If there's a clearing at the end of the path where all souls end up in, a City of Heaven, what is it like? Not only does it have the French and the Italians and the Chinese in it, with different customs. Do they retain their languages, too, or is spoken language a body thing? Do they retain their cuisine in some spectral form, or is this one of the things that souls in Heaven never get to do again? Is there sex in Heaven — what does sex between souls mean? Do they have genitals, hands, faces? Just a floating me-ness? A hologram of what used to be? Can it be wounded? Killed? Fitted with earrings? Is that an act upon the soul, or just scribbling over the hologram?

Is the form of your soul you as you died? Or you in the full bloom of your young adulthood? What if you died as a child — do souls grow up? Are there souls that never were in flesh? Are they nobler, or bratty children? What about transgender people — are they the flesh they had, or the flesh they identified with? Can you look like (be?) whatever you want, or just what you really were?

Is the part of you that likes to eat just in the body? Do

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souls feel hunger? If they do, do they get over it?

The City of Heaven — millions and millions, and nations isn't the problem: time is. People of today, people of tomorrow, people from the beginning of time, all dumped into the same giant city either as they come, or after some great apocalypse all at once. Are they segregated into enclaves where people have the same experiences, same norms and customs, or sprawled pell-mell here and there? What if your new neighbors are intolerably rude, sexist ancients, or horribly licentious, flirtatious futurians? What if they speak of music you've never heard, books you've never read, guest-rights you have no idea of? Do you scream and move to the company of your century and your nation?

Is there some culture that the City of Heaven has on its own, or is it a melting-pot of every culture that ever existed? Is it okay to move into cultures you never knew as a body? Can your appearance, whatever hologram or soul-aspect it might be, change to fit your new self-identification? Do you, over the centuries and millennia, pass through culture after culture and emerge as a . . . what?

Is there crime in Heaven? Are there police-angels? Prisons? Can a soul die — are there murders or executions, deadly accidents, resurrections from those? If you can't die, or stay dead, and always heal perfectly, what kind of new bloodsports and suicide-hobbies would you invent?

What about the lesser forms of inconsiderateness — what about those who are rude, greedy, liars, glory hounds? Nobody is perfect, down here, so how different would people need to be for Heaven to be a place of perfect people? Would that be a process of subtraction, or addition? If you lose your morning sleepiness and taste for wieners, your tendency to lose your shit over matters of nomenclature and your appreciation of taut abs, and a thousand other body-things and imperfections, is the soul, the essence of you, all that much "you" anymore?

If you have a soul, you should find out what that means.

Cat porn questions

Cat porn: would you watch it?

I don't mean humans and cats, but just cats having sex, cat-on-cat, kitty smut, hairy pussy action. You can find it on Youtube, it's not tagged as mature or anything.

Would it be tagged mature if you cut it properly, put in a soundtrack reeking of catnip and desire, and made the camera linger on feline genitalia?

What if you had a narrator; what if you had people voicing the cats' innermost thoughts and moans of desire?

* * *

Laws have a lot to say about human porn. What about every other species in existence? Two flies having sex — you could show that to preschoolers and the only negative comment, no matter what the flies did, would be “flies are nasty”.

What about snakes coiled in carnal delights?

Cats, dogs? Ponies? Chimps?

Is there a level of anthropomorphism where the moral guardians don't care yet, but the actions are human-like enough to be educational? “As decreed by our school board, infinitesimal in its wisdom, we will not have sex education; we're instead watching a film about my cat's kittens, and how they came to be.”

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* * *

It's not weird if the whole family of humans watches their cat give birth; it's cute and adorable and only a little bit icky. Some people even put videos of such on Youtube. Humans giving birth is different; as if we don't know what's under their clothes. As if there's a secret word painted on the crotch of everybody, a word that makes you the slave of anybody who sees yours.

Then again, we human animals live in the society we choose to have; and we're still choosing some less clear variety of "who sees, he owns", or "who owns, he sees".

It's usually a he.

* * *

With pornography, you can have plot and romance and speech; but it's enough to have two animals having sex, without words, plot, or any signs of intelligence. Two human animals go at it; you masturbate and feel good, even if you're not that fit, or black, or blonde. You don't need to watch performers that are like you; indeed, most of us wouldn't want to.

Would it be weird if you masturbated to cat porn? Probably weird, yes, but bad, no — but this may be one of those perfectly okay things that aren't easy to explain to your neighbors. (Mmm, neigh.)

Cats are mammals the same as humans; they writhe and make animal noises as they hide a penis in a vagina. Cat porn would be considerably less kinky than human porn; cats don't have the societal awareness necessary to build proper kinks.¹ Cat porn includes a little bit of licking, running around, rolling and pawing, and then vaginal sex; deadly boring compared to what human porn offers.

¹The best audience for weird racebending porn are the racists and the anti-racists; the people in between just don't see what's so dirty and titillating about fetishizing fictions of race.

* * *

One might wonder if there is any meaningful concept of consent in cat porn; that pets can't give consent is the second most common argument against zoophilia², but nobody's stopping pets from having sex among themselves. Yet a lot of the sex between animals that are not humans is rape: the male animal forces itself on the female animal, or another male animal, or a slipper, with equal disinterest in the partner's state of mind. Animals obviously don't have human rights, so nobody's going to jail Brutus; at most, someone could aim a hose at him.

Is non-consensual duck porn then rape pornography? If one accepts animal porn as something to stroke to, is it bad? It isn't staged; it's really actually non-con.

What about insect snuff porn — the lady finishes by eating the gent's head!

If you gave gorillas some fraction of human rights, would you need to police their sex life, too? Or are they unconscious enough to get away with rape?

How do zoos deal with this? Do they?³

* * *

You can pet your cat; you can get it fixed, collared, police its diet and domain, lock it in a yard to have kittens, maybe, with that other cat; you can be the owner and master of your cat, as long as you do it no harm. Which is to say, petting yes, penetration no.⁴ But, ladies, cats have rough tongues and licking something can surely do them no harm... right? And cats are lithe animals, a symphony of yawning, stretching graceful motion; if beautiful flesh

²The first: "Eek! That's unfamiliar and not something I want, so you must be a sick pervert!"

³Well: "Male Dallas Zoo gorilla to get therapy for sexist attitude", NBCnews.com, 23.9.2013.

⁴On the other hand, humans have died penetrated by horses. Let's wash that hand and speak of this no more.

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pleases you, would it be wrong to rub one out just looking at your cat? Would you be a pervert — well, your neighbors would think so, but they're Philistines — or just using pretty flesh for arousal? Cats masturbate, too; does it hurt a cat that you shake and stare at it?

How do *you* feel about using pets as masturbation aids? Unlike your friends, they won't blab. . .

(The stupid retort: "But this will lead to people raping their kittens!" — stupid, because by the same logic hiring a stripper for a private show — no touching! — leads to rape; and watching porn leads you to knocking on the actor's door with your fly open. Honestly, sex isn't some pink high pressure container that sprays everywhere if you open it an inch too far.)

(Or, if we've made it into such with our hate, ignorance and squeamishness, screwing (ha!) it tighter shut isn't the solution. Let that sweet pink mist bleed out until there's no danger of an explosion. . .)

* * *

There are gay animals. Not because their owners made them so; but because nature makes critters in all orientations. Human animals can be born homo or hetero; human animals can also be born "in the wrong skin"; this doesn't refer to furies but to transsexual people. How much of this is a function of humans having big, complex brains? Ask yourself — don't laugh, this is serious — are there transsexual gorillas? Cats? What would it feel to be one, so horribly wrong, and so incapable of changing or even understanding the problem?

How far would you be willing to go to improve the life of your pet, if you had the means?

* * *

Animals are a continuum; humans may be the only ones to wear sexy undies, but we're not as separate as we might

like to think. Some exhort you to think of humans as animals; some tell you to think of animals as humans. Both are useful perspectives.

The next time you walk around in your undies, look your pet in the eye and ask yourself: does it think I'm sexy?

Aesop: The Cat and the Gods

This and the following few chapters are adapted from *Aesop Unexpurgated: The Raunchy Sex Legends of Antiquity* by Loeb Green.

Gods were arguing over whether a living thing could change its nature. Zeus said it was impossible, and the gods agreed this was so; but once Zeus had retired, Aphrodite said she believed improvement, or impoverishment, was possible. As Hermes kept up Zeus's position, they set up an experiment.

They found a cat in Aeolia, and turned her into a young woman of great beauty and intelligence, and of amnesiac origin, probably due to pirates (she thought) — a fisherman found her on the shore, wet and half-dead and miserable as a drowned cat, and fell in love with her. In a week, their wedding-feast was held.

Now, as Aphrodite watched from the window and Hermes from the crack of the door, a mouse was let into the hall. The couple was behind a long table, smiling, raising their cups; the fisherman's relations and the local people filled the hall with joyous noise and discordant singing.

Into this, the mouse scurried, from table-leg to table-leg; and the girl's head turned without her willing it; and a

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yowl escaped her throat unwilling, in a barely human sound. The hall fell silent; the bride stood up, trembling, stiff, all senses on the mouse — and then she leapt over the table, eyes burning, skirt flaring, and dove on all fours at the gray beast, teeth bare.

The crowd scurried back in confusion and horror as she chased the mouse, palms and knees slipping on the floor, and as a fist came down on the mouse and white teeth tore it apart, splattering a gown with red blood and gray fur.

“Nature wills out”, Hermes said with a laugh, and the two gods departed while behind them the hall exploded with screams of disgust and outrage.

The marriage failed there and then; the fisherman went to the sea and did not return; the bride ran to the hills, and was not seen again; and the locals did not speak of the event, except in hushed voices when no outsider was there to hear.

But it was said that when the moon was full and the sea calm, one could hear a peculiar sound from the hills, as if a cat was crying — which is nonsense for it is not in the nature of cats to cry.

Aesop: The Dog and the Pond

A dog was carrying a shinbone in its jaws when it came to a pond. Peering into the pond, it saw a second dog there, and the second dog had a delicious shinbone in its jaws — so the dog opened its mouth and barked, reckoning two shinbones and a tussle a better deal than one and peace.

The dog's shinbone fell into the pond, of course, and shattered the reflection. The dog, seeing its foe and the foe's shinbone disappear, dove in and drowned.

It should be said the dog died happy in pursuit, though confused.

Aesop: The Cat and the Mice

There was an old cat that was tired of hunting. She thus hung herself from a peg on a wall, and waited there. Soon, a mouse appeared on the floor and asked, in a tiny piping voice, “What is that thing hanging from a peg on the wall?”

“I am but an old bag”, the cat said, with barely any meow in its voice.

“I did not know old bags spoke”, the mouse said, hesitant.

“You have not seen many old bags then”, the cat said. “Come closer; you don’t see a talking bag every day, do you?”

The mouse came closer; and that was that.

The next day the cat was doing the same when a very old mouse appeared on the floor.

“What is that thing hanging on the wall, I wonder”, the old mouse said.

“I am but an old bag”, the cat said, already licking its whiskers. “Come closer.”

“But you look like a cat-fur bag”, the old mouse said. “I did not know they made bags out of cats.”

“Only of cats of finest quality”, the cat said.

“Oh”, the old mouse said, “but this fur is familiar to me, and it belonged to a very old and lazy cat, which surely would not have been fine enough for a bag as fine as yourself.”

CHAPTER 61. AESOP: THE CAT AND THE MICE

At this the cat leaped off the wall, snarling; but the old mouse was far away and ran away.

Aesop: The Dog and the Pond II

A dog was carrying a shinbone in its jaws when it came to a pond. Peering into the pond, it saw a second dog there, and the second dog had a delicious shinbone in its jaws — so the dog opened its mouth and barked, reckoning two shinbones and a tussle a better deal than one and peace.

The dog's shinbone fell into the pond, of course, and shattered the reflection. The dog, seeing its foe and the foe's shinbone disappear, dove in and, leaving a ring of ripples, vanished.

Soon the pond's surface frothed, however, and then the dog flew up out of the pond, jaws squeezing the throat of a water-dog; and the two growled and rolled and clawed on the water, the surface solid for them (for such is the nature of water-dogs) — and then, with a gurgling howl the water-dog laid down in submission and begged for mercy. Graciously, the dog granted this; and the water-dog fetched it a shinbone and the bones of a great sea-monsters from the pond's depths; and the dog never lacked for bones to gnaw ever again.

Aesop: The Goose and the Eggs

There was a goose, and the goose had an owner. The goose was peculiar, for it laid eggs of pure gold. The said eggs were not good for eating or making more geese; but the owner sold them and grew wealthy with the first egg, rich with the second, and greedy with the third.

He then told himself: “Three golden eggs have come out of my goose. I could wait for more, I could; but people are talking about me and my gold, and I fear I hear mutters under the eaves and see eyes behind the windowpanes; if I do not act quickly, some villain will steal my goose, and it being (except for the golden eggs) in all aspects a perfectly normal goose, it will be beyond my powers to recover it once it has been stolen. Thus I need to extract all of the gold now, before disaster strikes.”

Thus he then chopped off the goose’s head, and slit its belly open — but, much to his shock and dismay, found the goose perfectly ordinary on the inside as well, with no eggs, lumps or even nuggets of gold within.

* * *

There was a goose, and the goose had an owner. The goose was peculiar, for it laid eggs of pure gold. The said eggs were not good for eating or making more geese; but the owner sold them and grew wealthy. This was of little interest to the goose, for the goose was in doldrums and despair:

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it had no children, for all its eggs were gold through-and-through, and golden eggs do not hatch to piping goselings, do not give progeny to quacking follow their mother.

And the goose spoke to the owner, saying: "My owner, my lord, my God: I am a freak, a mistake of nature, a miserable thing. Instead of life, I produce hard, cold, dead metal: I am a worthless being. If you can heal me, fix this horrid mistake in me, I would forever obey and worship you; but if that is not within your power or will, at least give me a death, so I may be as dead as these infernal mockeries of new life that I lay."

And the owner killed the goose, and the goose had peace.

Aesop: The Tortoise and the Hare

There was once a hare that met a tortoise; and as is the manner of hares, hopped rings around the tortoise until the tortoise stood up and challenged the hare to a running match.

At this, the hare fell to the ground laughing; but the tortoise persisted in its challenge, and eventually the hare agreed: the next day at noon they would run.

Now, the hare was not stupid or overconfident.

He knew the tortoise was ancient and wise, as all tortoises are.

Thus the hare spent the day, and the night, and the morning too thinking what tricks the tortoise had in store for him: for clearly the tortoise had a cunning plan, for why else would it challenge the fleet hare to a contest of speed?

But the hare could not come up with anything: shadows, yes, and suspicions, but no stratagem that would give the tortoise victory. The hare abstained from food and drink, fearing laxatives and poisons; holed up in its hole, fearing “accidental” sprains and sharp acorns to step on; and then the moment of midday was there, and the hare slunk to the starting line, full of nervous concern.

“Shall we run?” the tortoise said, smiling.

“We shall!” the hare said, croaking like a frog, paw shaking.

There was a bang, and they were off. The hare leapt!

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HARE
ran! dashed! went ahead leaving the tortoise in its dust!
racing without regard to reserves or pacing — and past the
second bend fell to the ground in a dead faint, downed by
exhaustion, thirst and nervous strain.

The tortoise trudged to the first bend, then to the sec-
ond; then past many other bends, and then to the goal.

Aesop: The Boy Who Cried Wolf

A boy, a shepherd boy, ran into the village, crying: “A wolf! A wolf is coming!”

The villagers said, “This boy is nuts. This is the eleventh time this week, and each time before there has been no wolf.”

“Seriously, honestly!” the boy cried, “A wolf is coming! It ate all my sheep, swallowed all of them whole, and it’s coming to eat all of you!”

“Now this is serious”, the mayor of the village said. “You say all your sheep are gone without a trace?”

“Yes! The wolf picked them up one by one, dropped them into its great cauldron-like maw and swallowed them without any chewing at all!”

“I think”, the mayor said, “And having thought, and conferred with the good men of this village, I believe you took the sheep to the next village over, sold them there, and made up this whole wolf story to cover up your theft of this common animal property.”

“Honestly I did not!” the boy cried — but the constable, who was a big burly man and much quicker than seemed right, caught him by the neck and threw him in a cellar to wait for the law-meet the next Thursday.

That night, then, there rose a great racket from the house next to the mayor’s, which was next to the woods; and the mayor came out in his glorious purple satin nightcap

CHAPTER 65. AESOP: THE BOY WHO CRIED WOLF

and his white nightrobe and his rabbitskin slippers, and banged on the neighbor's door, screaming: "For fuck's sake, keep quiet you howlin' lunatics, honest people are tryin' to sleep in here!"

As the racket had already ceased at this point, the mayor felt good about himself and went back to sleep.

When morning came, however, the house was found empty, and none of the people who lived there, or their animals, were ever seen again.

"It must have been robbers, robbers that I scared away", the mayor said, standing in the empty kitchen.

"But they've taken none of the forks and the icons, or any other objects of value", the much too quick constable said.

"Then they must have been worse", the mayor said. "Slavers, I reckon; slavers, kidnapping good hardworking people because indolent and bothersome people do not make good slaves."

The next night, the house on the other side of the mayor's house erupted in clamor — since this was a small village, on the other side of that house was again the forest.

"Oh dear", said the mayor, and ran to the constable's house — but the constable was already out and the noise was waking up the whole village, so the mayor ran back to the house of the noise and banged on the door.

All at once, the noise ceased, except for a quiet thumping, as if of a hand palpitating against the inside of a rough wall-hanging of wolfskin.

"Come out, whoever you are!" the mayor cried, and then, out of courtesy and fear, added, "Or whatever you are!"

Behind him, a mob was forming, with pitchforkses and torches and big staring scared eyes.

"Go in!" the ditch-digger cried.

"Who, me?" the mayor asked.

"Yes, you! You can speak to the taxmen and the knights and the knaves alike; if there is any in this village that can

talk to slavers or whatever, it must be you!”

“Oh for fuck’s sake”, the mayor muttered, and slowly pushed the front door open a bit, and slipped inside.

At once something slammed the door shut, and pressed him against it. It breathed heavily and with great smell; it was taller than a man, and bigger than a horse; it was all over covered with wolfskin, and it was a giant wolf!

“Hello”, the wolf growled.

“I have come here to speak to the slavers!” the mayor gasped.

“You fool”, the wolf leered, pressing its face against that of the mayor, “There are no slavers. I made that up.”

And, in a movement much too quick for a beast of its size, it contorted its back and rolled its eyes and drew in its hair; and in its place stood the constable, grinning and licking his lips.

Of the family that had lived in the house, or of their animals, there was no sign — save for a weak shaking of the constable’s belt buckle over a big, swollen belly.

“You are a wolf!” the mayor cried.

“You’re nuts”, the wolf-constable leered: “There is no wolf, and I think you’re in league with the slavers who just ran out the back door.”

And the thieving boy and the slaving mayor were both put to death, and the constable found them a grave nobody else could ever find.

Aesop: The Frog and the Ox

There was a frog that, hopping along the side of a pasture, hopped above the tall grass and saw an ox in the middle of the pasture.

“Ho!” the frog cried, “What manner of creature are you that you are so humongously large?”

“I am an ox!” the ox bellowed, as oxen do. “I am bigger than you, frog!” — oxen are fond of simple statements — “the head of my see-ox is bigger than you!”

At this, the frog bristled — not literally, for it was not a bristle-toad — and cried: “Why, you boasting animal! I’ll huff and puff and bloat myself to be bigger than you!”

“I wouldn’t like to see that”, the ox lowed. “And I do not think I shall.”

“Galumph”, the frog said, drawing in air; and then it said “Galumph” again and again, swelling like a pale-green balloon.

“Nonsense”, the ox said, shaking its head. “It is not in the *nature* of things smaller than me to be bigger than me. I may not be a professor in logic, but I know that much for sure.”

“Galumph!” said the frog.

The frog swelled, first to the size of the ox’s head; then to half the size of the ox; then almost to the size of the ox; and the ox watched this with concern.

“You should cease”, it moaned, “or you might burst.”

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“Galumph!” said the frog, swelling to just a hair’s breadth of the ox’s size.

“Galumph!” said the ox, hastily gulping in air and pushing its cheeks and fat bellies out.

“Galumph!” — the frog swelled some more.

“Galumph-uh!” the ox gasped, swallowing air and feeling its bellies roil as its cheeks and eyes bulged. “Insolent beast!” it thought — but it had no time to speak, for again the frog went “Galumph!” — and the ox drew in a great breath, “Galu—”

And then there was a great big wet boom.

“Hiccups!” the frog went, deflating. “Hiccups, hiccups, hiccups!”

And it looked around the pasture everywhere, but of the ox there was no sign nowhere; just a sunburst of blown-down grass where it had stood, and a twinkle in the sky, as if of something big, ox-size, sailing over the sun and the moon.

THE MORAL OF THE STORY. Those that are born big should not think growing up is easy.

Aesop: The King of the Frogs

One day a long time ago frogs held a meeting — this was when all the frogs in the world lived in the same pond, which was quite large — and in the meeting decided that they wanted a king.

Since kings rule by divine right, they petitioned Zeus, the King of Gods, to give them a King of Frogs.

Zeus heard, laughed, and tore a wooden pillar off the facade of the house of Hera on Olympos, and hurled it with a great splash down into the frogs' lake. (To which Hera said "Hey!" — and Zeus said "Sorry honey, I'll make you a new one out of marble okay?")

Carefully, gingerly the frogs approached the wooden pillar, floating in the pond; but on closer examination they found it rather too self-absorbed and inert to be an efficient king.

Thus they petitioned Zeus again, and Zeus (being busy harassing Hephaestus for the labor of a house for a goddess) waved a hand, and a great stork landed in the lake, majestic, with beautiful plumage and great long beak.

Carefully, gingerly the frogs approached King Stork, which was standing on King Log. The frogs bowed and made homage. The stork, in accordance with its essential stork-nature, ate a few of the frogs, and the rest fled in terror, finding this king much too active and consumery for their tastes.

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The frogs again petitioned Zeus; but Zeus was busy and merely sent them a letter: “Dear frogs, You asked for a king. You got two kings! Deal with it. Yours, Z.”

This made the frogs sad, and then angry: for they were noble and beautiful creatures, and did not feel a god, even Zeus, should deal so poorly with them.

The frogs then lit their forges underwater, and cut sharp reeds and trapped many dragonflies, and prepared a great army of frog-kind, and on the wings of dragonflies, armed with water-iron and spiky reed-armor, flew up to Olympos to confront the King of Gods.

Great was the panic of the gods that day; Hermes and Aphrodite and Pan all fled the great mountain, leaving their houses empty (and Pan never returned); but Zeus stood at the roof of his house and roared with great anger at this doubly anti-monarchist revolt.

He called up King Stork; but the swords of the frogs were sharp and King Stork fled, torn and bleeding.

He called up King Log; but King Log was inert and did nothing.

He called up himself, then, Zeus Aegiduchos, Zeus Bron-tios, the eldest of the gods, patricidal son of Cronus, without equals in beauty and terror, hardier than the roots of the mountains, his breath wind, his eyes flame, his veins aflow with the blackest sap of the first oceans — and he fought the frogs.

In that fight Olympos was shaken, and the frog-pond broken; stones fell from the skies and new ponds were formed; dragonflies fell from the skies, burning, and pockmarks, red and raw, were formed in Zeus’s chest; the Sun and the Moon hid, and the other gods wailing drew the ground over their heads and sobbed with closed eyes; and the frog war-storm closed on Zeus as clouds shroud the tallest mountain; and thunder boiled within that cloud.

In the end thunder cleansed the skies, and the world was quiet, and Zeus stood alone, tired, injured and torn.

“I curse you”, he growled, as a few frogs crawled away from their rout. “I curse you. Be witless animals, slimy, friendless, charmless, gutless, graceless. Go to whatever ponds you may find, and be forever split among them. Never a great unity again. Never need a king again. Never have a king again. Never anything of power, danger or majesty again. . . frogs.”

And it was so.

Aesop: The Deer Without A Heart

There was a sick lion, who had heard from a prophetic raven that the only cure to its sickness was the heart of a white deer, the most potent of all medicines. The lion had a servant, a fox of rare cunning; and the lion sent its servant to lure a white deer into its lair.

The fox searched and searched, and heard from a supercilious owl that there were only three white deer left in the whole world; and they were grazing nearby.

“Come with me”, the fox said to the first white deer, the smallest one: “I have found a truly marvellous place and I wish to show it to you.”

“Okay!” said the deer, and followed the fox to the lion’s lair.

“Harump”, the biggest of the white deer said to the middling one. “Come with me. There is something amiss here.”

Meanwhile in the cave the lion was very sick, and so it spoke to the deer: “I am a lion! Know me by my voice. I am the mightiest of all beasts — *cough* — my paws are death-sharp, my leap lightning-fast, my jaws like iron. Submit to me, and I shall slay you swiftly and without pain.”

The deer answered: “O mightiest of beasts, king of all animals! I am a weakling deer; there is one in my herd which is a choicer morsel for you. Pray do not devour me, but wait for a meal more fitting for your majesty.”

“Very well then”. the lion grumbled.

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The deer came out, and breathed at the fox: "It was just as you said! I faced the lion and lived!"

"Harump", said the biggest deer — the three deer and the fox being now clustered at the mouth of the cave — "This is a dangerous game. We should not play it."

"Bah", the fox said, "the lion is sickly, and your horn-tips are such a deadly constellation you do not see the thrill of this. Come now, middling deer, would you too like to play this game?"

The second deer was whispered the magic words, entered, and was similarly threatened by the lion — and answered in similar fashion, and was allowed to depart.

The third deer, the biggest one, the king-deer, was by now jealous and curious, and rushed in, antlers scraping the roof. "Feh!" it spoke, "I smell a beast here in the darkness. Who are you?"

"I am that which I am", the lion growled, "The first of beasts, and the king of animals. I am the lion, and if you would die without excess torment, cease your — *cough* — teasing of me."

"Hah!" the deer laughed, "Your voice quavers, your words slur, your threats ring hollow. I am a deer, a king of deer: my horns are a thicket of tall thorns wider than your pebble-teethed jaw; my hooves are knife-sharp and I kick like an avalanche. Do not raise your hollow old thunder against me, you doddering lion king."

The lion leapt gracelessly, and the deer shook its head; they fought.

Meanwhile the fox was outside with the two other deer. "Oh, oh", the first deer said: "He is our king; what shall come of us if he loses?"

"Be at ease", said the fox; "the lion is sick to death, and soon the whole forest will know your king as a lion-slayer! Which of you shall wear his pelt?"

"Oh", the second deer said, "our king must wear that. To think of such majesty — I swoon at the thought."

“Rest here”, the fox said cunningly, “while I and your sister here nip behind this cliff — the lion has great hidden treasures, and we must take possession of them so you can adorn yourselves in a manner befitting your new elevated position.”

So the fox and the first deer vanished from sight.

The lion and the deer-king fought, teeth flashing, horns tearing, claws and hooves clashing, great muscles straining and eyes bulging, all in the darkness, with spittle and blood alike raining on the stone floor.

In the meanwhile the fox came back to the second deer, licking its chops, and said: “My dear friend, there is so much treasure in the lion’s cache. Have you maybe recovered from your faintness enough to come and pick the choicest jewels to hang on your mane? There is gold too; pray, come and save a few of these golden loops for your ears before the jealous lesser animals hear of the lion’s death and rob his treasures.”

“Oh, I will”, the deer said, and together they vanished behind the closest cliff.

Inside the cave the fight was over, and the lion was dead. Bleeding from a hundred cuts, and seven serious wounds, the king of the white deer staggered out of the cave, crying with the pain, eyes trembling with the idea of lion-slaying.

The other deer were not outside the cave. The king-deer called for them, but they did not answer.

“Treacherous fox!” it cried. “Where are you? Where are my companions!”

Then it collapsed to the grass and closed its eyes.

Though it was too much to open eyes and see, it could hear the soft footsteps of the fox, and that sly and cheerful voice: “Dear king, lionslayer, lord of battle: your companions stumbled this way and went over a slight cliff — I cannot say what fancy made them kick at dirt so close to the cliff’s edge.”

“You villain!” the deer-king gasped, and opening an eye saw the fox, circling, smiling with its mouth and jaw red

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with fresh blood.

“Hey”, the fox said to the dying deer, “I’ve heard the heart of a white deer is the most potent medicine in the world. What do you suppose eating three of them would do?”

Aesop: The Miser and His Gold

There was a man very well known for his exceeding wealth, and his exceeding miserliness and mistrust of people. For these reasons he was disliked, and people extended him no charity nor credit (though he needed neither), and would not have lent him an end of bread had he been a starving beggar.

Thus being rich, miserly and mistrustful, this man went somewhat mad and day by day reduced the number of his servants, believing them thieves and cheats, until only his most trusted servant was left. Also day by day he dressed in cheaper, more ragged clothes, ate less fine meals, sold away his horses and litters; for he accused feed-sellers and litter-bearers of sponging off him, setting extortionate rates and grasping for his rings when they shook hands.

Finally, he was seen selling even his house, and going to the bankhouse no more; and a rumor went that the miser had exchanged all his money to a great lump of gold.

It was observed by many that each night the miser, who now lived nearly as a beggar, would creep into the forest, so carefully concealing his departure that nobody could miss it; and after sundown he would return like a suitor from a hidden tryst, a mixture of present-elation and future-fear roiling over his face.

Then one night the miser returning crying, screaming, tearing at his hair, waking up half the town. He fell at the

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feet of his one sole surviving servant — for he lived only nearly as a beggar — and wailed that his gold was stolen. The woken-up half of the town, gathering round the two, gained the story by gasps and moans: the miser had truly concentrated all his wealth into a large nugget of gold, and had buried it in the forest, and had visited it each evening, happy that at least his wealth was safe. As was easy to predict, this evening-night he had arrived to find his secret hiding-hole dug up, and the gold missing.

So pitiful was the miser's wailing that many hearts were softened that night. The old servant cradled his weeping master and consoled his, saying with stern voice and soft eyes that why, if the cruel world had driven his master to reducing his wealth to a ball of gold in a muddy hole, then a stone in the gold's place would serve the master just as well.

The miser wiped away his tears, chastened and made wiser; and the town set out the very next day to treat him not as a miser but as a man made better by grief. Though nobody saw his chip of gold, he came back to life and business and acquired new, moderate wealth; though of servants he needed only one.

POSTSCRIPT. The miser had had some creditors in the town, but after his eccentricity and the disaster following it they forgave his debts, much to the pleasure of the mob outside their doors.

Aesop: The Pious Woodman

There was a very honest and pious woodcutter who dropped his axe in a river. He sat down to weep and pray, for the axe was his livelihood. Without it he and his family would all starve.

The gods heard his cries — or maybe his prayers — and sent Hermes to see what could be done to still the cries. Seeing what had occurred, Hermes dove into the river, unseen, and rose in all his godly splendor, carrying an ancient axe made of gold, honed sharper than steel by the fire of Hephaestus' forge.

The woodcutter dried his tears and ceased his prayers in a hurry, but would not accept the axe: "No", he said, "dear god, that axe is not mine — I am a poor, simple woodcutter — only a king would have such an axe." And he thought to himself, only a king would not be murdered in his bed for possessing such an axe.

Impressed by his honesty, Hermes dove back to the river and, just as the woodcutter was about to leave, leaped back up with a silver axe whose blade shimmered with stars captured therein. This the god offered to the woodcutter.

The woodcutter did not accept this axe either: "No, dear god, that axe is not mine — I am a poor simple woodcutter, poorer than you think — I am no prince, no axe such as that is mine."

Hermes sank into the waters, and the woodcutter sat

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down to wait, thinking, if I possessed that axe cretins would kidnap my children and hold a knife to my wife, just to gain possession of such a treasure.

For the third time Hermes rose, now with an axe of scratched iron and sweat-stained wood: and the woodcutter cried in joy, for this was his axe.

Hermes, impressed by the man's honesty, dropped the two other axes at the man's feet, gave him a cursory blessing, and departed.

At once, a figure appeared from the rushes — the woodcutter's neighbor, who bulging-eyed had watched the divine apparition. "What", he cried out, "gods are afoot? You are a wicked man for not calling me to see them! Why should you be the only one to benefit from misfortune?" — and he unhooked his axe and hurled it into the river.

As nothing happened instantly, he then began wailing in a loud voice for Hermes' intercession, while the first woodcutter stared, mouth open and arms full of axes.

Hermes did not appear, and neither did any other god. In a while the envious woodcutter realized his mistake, and began cursing and dancing angrily in a most frightful manner, for he too had a family, and he too without an axe faced famine.

The honest woodcutter then took the golden axe and gave it to the other man, saying: "You have made a mistake, but no man should be punished for a single mistake. Take this axe and sell it; maybe it is an apology enough for misleading you into throwing away your livelihood."

The envious woodcutter fairly fainted with this (to him) unthinkable generosity, and greedily clasped the axe to his chest. But greed overcome him, and he gasped: "I accept this apology, for the sake of my famished wife and children! But an apology's not an axe! Replace me my axe as well!"

The honest woodcutter shrugged, and handed the silver axe over as well, saying: "This axe is much too fancy, but I suppose it cuts well."

The envious woodcutter left, prancing, a golden axe and a silver one in his hands. The honest woodcutter sat down and wept.

Soon after a story spread of a simple, poor woodcutter who had acquired two axes of unspeakable antiquity, beauty and value: for one, his family was killed by thieves; for the other, he himself was hanged for a thief by the king.

POSTSCRIPT. And the gods looked down at all this and could not make heads or tails of it, though they thought the king with his golden axe looked like a real dashing kingly king.

Aesop: The Bird in Borrowed Feathers

There was a crow, black and tatty, that wanted to be beautiful. It went about the realm of birds, asking each for a feather: and the other birds, flattered by the request, each gave one — eagle, peacock, canary, ostrich, emu, kiwi, penguin, every bird.

Out of all these feathers the crow made a coat, and with great care and pain sewed the coat to its own feathers. It peered into a lake, and saw a new bird: what peered back was a dashing fantasy of riotous color, with awestruck, teary eyes.

There came a special evening, the most special one in the realm of birds, and all birds came to the branches of a great and special tree to celebrate: eagle, peacock, canary, and all the rest. The crow also came there, and the tree fell to silence.

This new bird is more majestic than me, the eagle thought, but said nothing.

The newcomer's more beautiful than me! the peacock realized with a shudder, but could not speak.

“Who are you?” piped the canary.

“I am your old friend poor crow”, the crow said, rustling its feathers. “Thanks to your gen—”

“You're the crow!” the eagle cried in a shriek that shook the tree and everyone in it. “You're the — what's wrong with you?”

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FEATHERS

“That’s wrong with you!” the peacock took up the cry.
“You’re not *really* pretty, you’re just a *liar!*”

“Impudent, foul impostor!” the eagle shrieked, and jumped at the crow, wings beating.

“Give me back my feather!” the canary piped, and flew past, tearing its feather out of the crow’s face.

All the birds fell on the crow, tearing out the feathers they had freely given — and in tearing, tore out all the crow’s own feathers as well, until it lay naked and trembling on a branch, nuded of all dignity and beauty.

“Let this be a lesson to you”, the eagle cawed, and kicked it off the branch — featherless, the crow fell and hit the ground with a thump.

“Let this be a lesson to you”, the peacock cried after it, “Don’t try unnatural stuff like that around decent birds such as us!”

The crow heard this, and died.

Aesop: The Farmer and the Viper

A farmer was struggling through snow after a hard day at work when he heard a faint voice from under a drift, calling for help.

“Who be you?” the farmer said.

“Oh, oh, I dare not say — I am friendless and despised — if I tell my name, you will leave me, and I will surely die.”

“Omit your name and I’ll surely abandon you”, the farmer said. “Tell it, and there’s a chance.”

“I am—” the voice gasped, “I am a lowly crawling thing — a cold, miserable thing — I am a viper!”

“Ha! Have you not heard the fable about this very damn thing! If I help you and warm you in my bosom, you’ll bite me and I’ll die, because you’re an evil thing!”

And turning on a heel the farmer left the viper to die.

Aesop: The Revel

A lean man walked into a feast round a tree and under the stars, and sniffed seeing the feasters.

You glutton, he said to one, your morsels taste sweet, but think of all those who have nothing to eat!

You hog, he harangued a second, your face in the trough, if famine comes tomorrow you will regret this feast!

You wastrel, he shrieked at a third, you moan songs of love, cakes and wine, while important matters go untaught!

You cretin, he hissed at a fourth, you cretin drunken with kisses, the world tears apart those who do not exude proper sobriety!

You fools, he screamed at all of them, you fools, the world is burning, its edges fraying, we all fade trembling into nothingness, playtime is past and darkness comes for all of us — cease this preposterous bacchanal and feel bad as you ought!

As he turned to leave, a reveler asked him, do you feel better now?

No, said the lean man, and walked away.

Aesop: The Wolves, the Sheep and the Dogs

Sheep and wolves were at war, and the sheep could not be defeated, since they were brave and also had the sheepdogs on their side.

The wolves sent a negotiator to the sheep, and the negotiator said: “Let us cease this foolish war — let us live together in harmony! We wolves shall be your guardians, you sheep, and together we will march to a new golden age!”

The sheep agreed, and sent the sheepdogs away. Soon after sheep started disappearing, and bits of bloody wool started getting found round the wolves’ quarters.

The sheep brought this to the wolves’ attention, and the head wolf — the former negotiator — said: “I admit this looks very damning, and very bad for us wolves. I have, however, on very good authority that this is not the work of wolves, but of sheepdogs! They are out of work now that our war is settled; no doubt some fool among them wishes to set us at each other’s throats again. We must resist this violent impulse.”

The sheep agreed this was very well said; but more and more sheep went missing, and more and more blood and bits were found round the wolves’ quarters. Then the wolves called the sheep to a meeting, and the sheep came, quaking a little. The leader-wolf brought out a sheepdog, battered

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and bloody, and proclaimed: “This insolent pup was found skulking round our place last night, half a sheep in hand! We have interrogated him” — at this, the sheepdog shuddered in remembered horror — “and he has confessed: all these killings and evil hints have been a conspiracy of the sheepdogs to start a war between you sheep and us wolves.”

The sheep were outraged, and the sheepdog was put to death. The sheep and wolves all together prepared for great violence, and made war against the sheepdogs — and the sheep could not be defeated, since they were brave and also had the wolves on their side.

Aesop: The Turkey, the Duck and the Chicken

There was a turkey, a duck and a chicken: and all three happened at the same time across a golden grain in the middle of a road.

“What’s this?” the turkey said.

“It seems a grain of wheat”, the duck quacked.

“But it is peculiarly bright, I think”, the chicken piped.

“What ho”, the turkey cawed, “a grain’s a grain, I’ll eat it, I’ll eat it!”

“No you don’t, you greedy beast, this grain is mine”, the duck squawked — but by that time the chicken had swallowed the grain.

“No!” the duck screamed, ripping its wings wide and sinking to its knees, “I was already in the zone for the grain, and it’s too late to turn back now” — and it turned on the chicken and swallowed it whole.

“Gn— gn—” the duck hiccupped, “I can taste the grain! I can taste the grain through the damned greedy chicken!”

“Let me try too!” cried the turkey — and swallowed the duck whole — and thus was turducken first made.

Aesop: The Cat and the Lid

One very hot day a man fell ill and staggered inside from the heat, stomach heaving, knees clapping together, face set in a terrible scowl.

The man had a cat; the cat was nowhere to be seen for it was a very hot day, too hot for the cat.

The man staggered into his toilet, shivering and sweating with diarrhea aching for release. He ripped down his pants while breathing in and raising his chest, fighting for time, clenching his sphincter, positioning himself over the toilet.

The cat in the meanwhile had found a nice white clay basket to doze in, with a nice, cool puddle at the bottom of it to ward away the searing heat. The cat had fallen asleep there. Now it woke up as a pink lid, cracked in the middle, slid over the top of the basket.

The man let himself go, let go with a torrential liquid outpour from his bum; and for a split second he was relieved.

The cat looked up, and saw in twilight the lid split open, pouring down unspeakable effluvia; and a one-eyed serpent, spitting; and in sudden enlightenment the cat opened its mouth and said, “No.”

Responding to a terrible scream, the man’s neighbors found him half-naked and terrified out of his wits, weeping in a corner of the toilet-room, his buttocks perforated

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and his manhood split. The room's walls were decorated by a spiral from a furiously rising furry brush dipped in unspeakable brown liquids and worse.

The cat was never seen again.

Note: Until very recently, this fable was left out of translations of Aesop and included only in Latin and Greek editions, as it was considered "of dubious value" (Chambry).

Aesop: The Sick Raven

A raven fell ill, and asked its dove friend to go to the temple district to pray for its swift recovery.

The dove said, “But are you not a greedy thief of every morsel that are left in the temples?”

The raven said, “Nonetheless there must be a temple where you can pray for me.”

The dove first flew to the temple of Athena, but the temple of Athena was crowned with owls that did not permit the dove to pray: for, they said, the raven was a prophet of ill, and a thief besides.

Next the dove flew to the temple of Hermes, but there the winged sandalworms of Hermes told it the raven was an ill omen: and what was more, being of ill omen it was ungodly: a robber of sacrifices, a ravenous, unscrupulous eater of gift-foods left for the god — which all the dove already knew — and for this reason the dove could not pray there.

Finally the dove ended at the temple of Eris, where there was no bird on the roof but only a well-fed fox. The dove explained its problem; and the fox smiled a greasy smile and said this: “Ravens are birds of prophecy, this is well known. Also well known is the raven is a shameless thief of gifts given to gods. I see all other temples have assumed the first implies the second: the vile omenic or omenous prophet-nature of the raven drives it to offer-thievery. I

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believe differently: I believe the raven's thieveries give it prophet-nature. Through its ungodliness it becomes divine. It would thus be hypocritical of me to shun the bird because of its acquisitive antics. Come and pray all you want."

The dove prayed, the raven got better, and nobody got any wiser.

Short aesops

A mountain went into labor, and all earth gathered to see what it, majestic and immense, would give birth to.

The mountain gave birth to a mouse.

The people, disappointed, left and forgot all about this, except for a single lunatic that stayed on the slopes, shouting: “If a mountain gives birth, the interesting part isn’t what but *how?*”

* * *

There was an ass in lion’s skin, and an ass eating thistles; they were coded into flv and put online to an obscure video site, especially the ass eating thistles because that shit’s *nasty*.

* * *

There was a man whose wife drowned in a river. The man walked upriver looking for the body, and asked a fisherman if he had seen it.

“Surely the body would go along the current and not against it”, the fisherman said.

“My wife was very contrary”, the man said; “I am sure that even in death she would go against the current.”

The fisherman laughed, and the man went upriver, and never found the body, and got drunk on the funeral-money.

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* * *

There was a man in Aeolia, a man with a charmer's smile, a head of salt-and-pepper hair and rugged good looks, and two lovers, one much younger than him, and the other much older.

Whenever he was with the younger lover, she put his head on her lap and plucked away his gray hairs to make him seem younger, as young as she.

Whenever he was with the older lover, she put his head on her lap and plucked away his black hairs to make him seem older, as old as she.

As a result the man grew bald, and because baldness goes well with all ages, everybody was happy.

* * *

Two friends were walking through a wild, wild forest when attacked by a bear. One scrambled up a tree, while the other, being too far from a suitable tree, threw herself down on the ground and pretended to be dead.

The bear then came sniffing to them, instead of roaring, and sniffed the one who was pretending death to avoid death; and the bear nosed and pushed her, but she was as if dead.

The bear then turned to the tree with a very lively, and wishing to remain so, person up in the branches. And the bear climbed up into the tree — as bears do — and climbed higher, following the living girl as she climbed higher — until the weight was too much and a branch broke, the girl in the tree falling atop the girl feigning death, and the bear falling atop both of them. The friends died, the bear survived, being cushioned by them, and the bear ate both of them.

The bear then turned at the reader, and growled: "Being dead is no way to live, but neither's being too alive."

* * *

Thales, the first of mathematicians, was walking the night, looking up at the stars.

Looking at the stars, he failed to see a pit ahead of him, and fell headlong into it.

Some other nightwalker peered over the edge of the pit and said: "Beloved philosopher, take care of what's before your feet before taking care of the heavens!"

"Indeed", said Thales, and went with the nightwalker; and afterwards they sat on the roof of the nightwalker's house and looked at the stars together.

Grimm: Children Playing Slaughter

The following tale is from Brothers Grimm, from the days of wholesome storytime family entertainment. Some of the details have been toned down for the sake of the reader.

Two sisters were playing trades: a cook, a woodman, a blacksmith. Then they played butcher. One was the pig, and stripped. The other went to kitchen, got a big knife, and slit the pig open from groin to throat.

Their mother was upstairs bathing the third sister, but a wee baby, when she heard the pig wailing; so she ran downstairs and found one girl dead, and the other cutting her up. In an instant of unthinking rage, she grabbed the knife and thrust it into the butcher's heart.

When she fled the deed upstairs, she found the baby drowned in the bathtub. She went mad, threw herself down the stairs and died.

Some time later the father returns from work. He finds a knife and two dead children in the yard, his wife dead at the feet of the stairs, and upstairs the final child, also dead. He claws out his eyes and dies.

MORAL. "We are being digested by an amoral universe." (Tycho Brahe)

Grimm: The Fairy-Queen and the Woodman's Children

A brother and a sister, the children of a poor woodman and his wife, were playing in the forest when a fairy-queen approached them. She was the most beautiful thing they had ever seen, and she wasn't wearing any clothes at all.

“Are you the children of the man who cuts down trees?” she asked, and the children said this was so. “Tell him to cease”, she said, and vanished.

The children were scared, and told their parents nothing.

The next day, as they were playing at the forest's edge, within sight of their hut (for they were scared), the fairy-queen appeared again, her eyes as pale and cold as her flesh, her lips and nipples red as blood. She again told the children to tell their father to cease the cutting down of trees. She vanished, the children ran inside, but could not tell their parents, for they were overcome by fear and shame.

The next day the children did not leave the hut, but stayed inside as their father went to cut down trees, and their mother went to wash laundry in the river. They kept the door shut, and the windows covered; but as they turned towards the hearth the fairy-queen was standing there, tall, pale and terrible in her beauty.

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WOODMAN'S CHILDREN

"You did not tell", she said.

"Please", the boy cried, "we were scared!"

"And ashamed!" the girl moaned.

"He would not believe us!" he said.

"It's our livelihood!" she cried.

"It is more than that", the fairy-queen said, looming over them, her hair spreading behind her like a great pair of wings. "You did not speak because I put a spell on you, a spell so you could not tell of me to your parents. Do you know why I did this?"

The children only wept.

"Because the trees your father cuts down have no voice either."

And she touched them both, and they lost their voices.

Then she vanished.

Grimm: Snow White

There was a wise king with a beautiful queen. They had no children, for the queen was barren; but there was the king's daughter from his previous wife — whom he had married out of love, and who had died of plague; then he had married for the kingdom's sake, and became wise but no longer happy — who was a girl, sickly pale, with hair black as night, lips and eyes red as fire. She was called Snow White or, in the Old Tongue, Sneewittchen. Some called her Sneewitch, or the Snow Witch; but that was slander.

Since the king was wise (but not happy), he endeavoured to at least keep his queen happy (for she was from a distant land, and not liked): and so daily he asked his court this: "Court, my court, who is the fairest in the land?" And each day, the court would favor the king and answer: "My king, your queen is the fairest in the land!" — and sitting on gorgeous witchwood thrones which had been a part of the queen's exotic dowry, the two would smile, and then kiss.

Now years passed and paste-white Snow White grew up, and her father grew older and the courtiers began speaking of heirs. There were no heirs from the queen's loins, and none wished for, for she was from a distant land and people whispered frightful things of habits she had brought from there, and of songs she sang to demons in night-time; but there was Snow White, from the loins of the first, native,

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queen. So there rose an uncertain murmur in the court's answers, until one day the answer was a tumult that could not be understood. The king would not ask again, and the queen sat stony-faced and quiet.

The next day the king asked: "Court, my court, who is the fairest in the land?" And the court answered, with but whispers to the contrary: "My king, your daughter Snow White is the fairest in the land!"

The queen turned and looked across her husband at the girl, sitting on the other side of the throne: and she saw this was indeed so. She glanced at the crowd, and saw the answer still mirrored in their eyes.

The king raised his hand, and began to say, "Court! My court, who is" — but the queen took his hand and lowered it, and whispered in his ear; and the king did not ask again, not that day or any day after that.

Not long after, Snow White was one night woken up by a cough at her chamber-door; and on opening it found nothing but a parchment sealed with royal wax and an unfamiliar seal: and the parchment said,

I am a handsome but shy prince, and have fallen hopelessly in love with you, Snow White, after seeing you at court. Your evil stepmother will not let me see you, but I shall die if I cannot, Snow White. It has taken all my ingenuity and craft to find a servant to place this message at your door, Snow White. Please meet me at Forest Chapel tonight, if only to strike down my ambitions.

YOUR PRINCE.

Not many moments later, Snow White fled the castle, a fine black robe of silk shielding her from guardsmen's sight. The Forest Chapel was a ruined church lost in the shadow of forest darkness; as she came there, she saw a hooded shape

sitting on the moss-covered altar, while above the ruined arches let starlight and moonlight in.

“Oh”, she cried, “my prince, show me your face!”

The hooded man took down his hood. His face was rough, old, and not princely: his jaw was long, his teeth crooked, his eyes slits, his hair mostly gone.

“I have not seen you at court!” Snow White cried.

“You wouldn’t have seen a woodcutter there, your highness”, the man muttered.

“Oh!” she cried in relief, “you are the wrong man! I am here for a prince who is hopelessly in love with me, just like in fairy-stories! Have you seen him here?”

“I am he”, the woodcutter said, drawing out an axe, “or as much as there exists of him. You were lured here and I was hired here for the purpose of your death, your highness.”

“Oh, no”, she cried, stumbling and falling. “No! Pray, say this is a jest also — no, keep away — do not raise your weapon so—”

The woodcutter came to her, and she clung to his legs, crying. He held the axe up, arms trembling — and then lowered it to his side. “The power which paid me doesn’t end with me, child. If I do not kill you, you must be away and never come back home, unless you’re to find the next killer less merciful.”

“I—” Snow White cried, “Where would I go? I am a flower — uprooted I die. Who would take me, save those who lay their hands on beauty for the sake of despoiling it? Who would aid me, one who cannot offer any aid in return? If I run, I run into darkness from which no princess returns.”

The woodcutter looked down at her and saw her beauty, and his heart was broken.

“There is a place”, he said in a whisper. “But it is in this forest, and you would be safe there only if there was no-one to look for you. But— but I can arrange that.” And he gave Snow White directions to a place in the middle of

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that dark wood, and then returned to his home. There he called out his daughter, who was of age with Snow White, though less fair; and he killed her and took those parts he had been instructed to deliver from the body of Snow White to the castle. Then he sat down and wept over the power of magic to compel men to evil.

Snow White followed the directions, deep into the forest, with hoots of owls and whispers of less explicable beasts, with the rustling of leaves and the moans of wind, with wan moonlight and prickly starlight for company; she followed the directions until sunrise, with yellow light boiling somewhere beyond the boughs of oaks and maples and other very tall, very thick, very menacing trees, until the only stars visible were yellow, and floated at root-level off the path she followed; and in the end she came to a low, long, crudely built house, hidden under an immense rush of fallen oaks like an adder in a woodpile.

The house was empty, the front door hanging open, the dishes in dish-racks still wet from washing. The pantry was half-full, and not rotten or animal-raided at all; the beds — of which there were seven, in the same long room behind the pantry — were short, low, and neatly made. There was nobody in sight, and though Snow White called out, nobody answered.

The house had a front door, and a back door: but the back door opened into the fallen tangle of oaks, and to a hole sloping underground, into foul-smelling darkness; and Snow White did not dare to go there.

She was tired, so she ate from the pantry, slept on the least short of the beds (though it was still much too short for her), and then sat at the table of the front-room — which, she noted, had seven chairs, all of them with short legs to match the lowness of the table.

She tried to find something to do, but in the whole of the house there wasn't a single book, not even a letter, or quills or ink, not tapestries to trace with her fingers, no musical instruments to play, no art to admire, no alchemy to work,

not even a ball to throw around or a doll to play with. Even the food — though plentiful in the pantry — was bland, more an exercise than a delight.

In the end she found a tin bathtub in a back room, and heated enough water for herself — the work was unfamiliar, but she had seen servant-girls doing it and didn't find it too difficult — and then stripped and slipped into warm water, feeling herself relax as her dark hair spread around her.

The bathtub wasn't small, curiously enough; it was large enough for her and then more.

Then there was a bang at the door!

Not at the front door, but the back door, slamming open, the back door which opened only to the tangle and to the terrible dark hole into the ground.

Snow White gasped, and as hard feet tromped inside she did what she had time for — drew in a breath, and dove underwater.

She could hear many feet, and many harsh voices, and boots kicking and fists knocking and tools and bags thrown around, and clamor in each and every room of the house, and eventually in the bath-room where the bathtub was. There were grunts and growls and barks around the tub, and then something gnarled and misshapen fell in, and another, and a third, and a fourth — and then Snow White, unable to bear this any more, sat up and screamed.

As her scream ceased, she saw fourteen eyes on her, and seven dropped jaws — four naked, short, hairy men in the tub with her, and three more around it, ready to come in. All were ugly, gnarled of limb, twisted of face — and all were speechless with the shock of her appearance.

Looking down at her appearance Snow White blushed, jumped out of the tub — trying to not think what new revelations this brought — and threw her robe of black silk round her.

“Oh!” she cried then, “dear dwarves! I beg you — do not molest me!”

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One of the short men uttered a phrase — she could not understand it and immediately was more afraid, fearing these men were foreigners, of whom she had heard many bad rumors.

“Oh don’t gibber”, another growled, and then said at her: “Who are you? What do you do here? Are you a spectacularly bold thief or what?”

Snow White then knelt — bringing herself to level with the short men — and explained herself: that she was a poor girl in great danger, fled from her home and directed to this hospitable house of honest and good men by her good friend, a woodcutter with a long jaw and thinning hair and despite all a fairly handsome appearance.

“I do not think we know any handsome woodcutters”, the same short man said, “but there’s Curt, who fits the description except for the handsome bit. I cannot understand why he would send you here, but I cannot find it in my heart to send you out. What say you — do we have a place in our house for a wastrel girl?”

“If she cooks”, one said.

“If she cleans”, said another.

“If she makes our beds”, said a third.

“If she washes our clothes”, said a fourth.

“If she sews and knits”, said a fifth.

“If she keeps the house in order”, said the sixth.

“Will you do this?” the spokesman of the short men asked of Snow White, “these things, and a seventh thing for me? Do not play with your charms, for we are armed against them; merely answer, will you, or will you not?”

“I will”, Snow White said. She was ignorant of all these six things, and mortally afraid of the unsaid seventh; but she saw nothing else she could say. “I will do as you ask, kind dwarves.”¹

¹“We’re not dwarves”, one of the dwarves muttered, inaudibly. “We’re just short people.”

So Snow White promised, and so the dwarves accepted: but by the end of the week (for this was the start of a week) Snow White was in deep trouble.

She did not know how to cook, though she had the idea this usually involved cutting big gross pieces of food into more delicate pieces. Much to her luck the dwarves were not a demanding lot, and the slabs of gray meat and dull brown bread and black-green cabbages that filled the pantry (along with pouches of bitter condiments and lumps of sugar, salt and pepperstone) became something tolerably like food as she cut them up, held them close to a fire, and occasionally sprinkled them with knife-extracted flecks of sugar, salt or pepper. Once or twice a dwarf, clutching his throat, asked if she knew what she was doing; but she said this was the cuisine of the forest edge, close to the king's castle; that was a more refined place. (To which the dwarf would say, "Bah! Refinement! Humbug!" and return to his plate.)

She did not know how to clean — walking around with a rag was a part of it, but after a few days it began to dawn to her it was not all of it. She tried to blow on bits of dirt and dust, and catch them with the rag — this did not go well, and only after some very quick talking did she manage to convince the dwarves this was gentle cleaning, as done at the forest's edge. The dwarves together decided that gentle cleaning was not enough; and introduced her to the mop and the bucket and the scrubbing motions of the rag. This all Snow White found terribly inelegant, and tiring too; but she did it as well as she could.

Then there was the making of beds — Snow White had never thought such a restful place as a bed could cause her so much grief. The dwarves' beds were stout wood-framed things, seemingly always ready to offer a splinter at a finger; and kicking them hurt her feet, too. The bedclothes were scratchy wool that tore at her fingers; what was inside them was hay, of all things, and it was scratchier and worse, and got in her hair too. There was no down, no lace, no silk or satin or anything nice; for a moment she thought

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the blankets had patterns but those turned out to be drud.

Those blankets needed to be washed: and washing them and clothes was a whole another box full of grief. Each morning the dwarves went down the hole and to their underground mine; and each evening they returned, clothes black with rock dust, ash, soot, mud and little bits of rock. Each day Snow White washed the previous day's clothes, for each of the dwarves had just one change of clothing. She bore water and heated it, hit the wet clothes with sticks, spoons and bars of soap — these things she somewhat knew, having been infatuated with a blonde maid turned to a laundry-girl the year before, but she never guessed how perversely difficult it was to coax dirt out without unravelling the whole garment. (The less is said of her clothesline and a certain wandering deer, the better: the deer was faster, but Snow White was more dogged.)

Then, when the clothes were clean, there was sewing, mostly of patches of the same drab colors — here she shined, because all of the clothes were patched already, so she could study the stitches and shortly after do much better: not because she was a woman, but because the dwarves' untidy sewing offended her mathematics-tutored soul. Knitting, however, was utterly impossible to her: she had no idea how to turn string into cloth. She tried to knot it: something like a cat-coughed furball resulted. She tried to stab it with the knitting-needles: the string failed to leap into cloth-hood. She tried plaiting the string, like maids had once plaited her hair — she couldn't make that work, and also noted she couldn't plait her own hair. (When the dwarves asked her to knit something, a cap or a mitten, she said "Busy, busy! Terribly busy with all this other stuff — ask me again tomorrow." And on tomorrow, each tomorrow, she said the same thing.)

Those were five things, and the sixth was keeping house in order. This was impossible: and it became more impossible day by day until by the end of the week everything was all dragons, no princes.

When the dwarves returned from their mine, they were happy for having a housekeeper, and threw their boots and pants and jackets and helmets and hammers and mattocks and pocket-knives and iron necklaces and beard ornaments and bracelets and socks and undershirts and belts and gross underpants and girdles and shoulder pads and jingling pocket-contents everywhere — and this meant *everywhere*.

When they were all piled in the bathtub, poor Snow White searched the house. She couldn't think of a reason why a dwarf should go to the pantry and leave his underpants there on the salt rack — or rather, of the reasons she could think of, none was amenable to a second thought sans screaming. She found a boot in the kitchen in a kettle (an empty one, as it only by sheer luck happened to be), a sock hanging from the ceiling (fortunately the ceiling was low enough for her to reach), and shirts strewn on the floor like rugs (and occasionally looking like rugs, too) — this all the dwarves expected her to gather up, and be ready to move to dinner when their bath was over. In truth, after the dinner as the dwarves smoked a few pipes and then moved to sleep she still haunted the house, looking for that last sock, that one peaked cap — once, in sheer desperation, she climbed to the roof of the house and found, if not the sock she was looking for, then an ancient one not much grubbier than it.

One day she just couldn't find a boot, so she dunked a spare sock in a pot of gravy and let it dry; the new boot's owner said he liked the leather.

And their clothes weren't the only thing the dwarves put in disorder: they raided the pantry at midnight, not caring if they put salt lumps back on the sugar shelf, or vice versa; they left their beds in terrible disarray (now that they had a housekeeper); they seemed incapable of getting up without knocking both the chairs and the table over; they trailed dust, soot, mud and water everywhere, and grass and bits of leaves and halves of earthworms, left grubby handprints on the walls, muddy footprints on the floor, and in some cases sooty faceprints on the ceiling. (This was, apparently,

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from a game where they threw each other around; Snow White wasn't asked to participate and was much too busy anyway.)

Thus, by the end of the week Snow White was dead tired, and dead fed up, and dead ready to scream.

This was not a good state for the Sunday, which the dwarves declared was their free day, which they decided they would spend just being around the house.

It quickly became apparent to Snow White that this free day was not hers: the dwarves demanded food more than ever, and in supplement to water and milk rolled out barrels of foul-smelling ale (not offered to her, much to her relief) — very soon there was singing, which she did not like, and tossing of axes hand-to-hand, which she liked less, and sort of dancing, which she liked the least, dodging hands trying to draw her in as she delivered a platter of gray cutlets or an unbroken mug.

“Come dance with us!” the dwarves bellowed — “I have no time!” she cried, but on the next delivery a dwarf drew her in in a parody of a close dance, resulting in him burying his face in her groin — she shuddered in revulsion, danced away in her best courtly avoidance, and ran to cook and sew and wash clothes; but when she returned to kneel and wipe away spilled ale, a dwarf slapped her behind, hard enough to make her cry — so again she whirled away, dancing through the house, tears in furiously glaring eyes, dancing through the house, trying to avoid every dwarf and meet every demand. And ever the dwarves grew louder, bolder, more crass and unsteady.

Now in all this work she was wearing a linen dress, rough and plain, the only garment of her size she had found in all the chests and cupboards of the house — she did not want to speculate on its owner, or its use — and had her magnificent black hair tied back with rough scarf, and was barefoot. Her pale face was streaked with soot and grease and soap-water, and sweat besides; and her red lips were bitten with anger and frustration, her red eyes watery with

smoke and weariness and tears.

Then as she was delivering some final morsel to the drunken, singing crowd, a dwarf took her by wrist and yanked her head down to his level — and angrily lisped, “I don’t think you’re very good in making food, girl! I’d do better myself!”

“I do my best!” she cried — “That isn’t good enough!” the dwarf growled.

She tore her hand away, whirled, trying to flee — a second dwarf faced her, or her groin anyway, and drunkenly poking a finger at it proclaimed: “This house was much cleaner when *I* cleant it!”

“I did my best!” she screamed — “I did better, and *that* was barely good enough”, the dwarf spat.

Thus in turn each of the first six dwarves rounded on her, accusing her of failings and inadequacies and over-promises and outright lies over her abilities and actions in cooking, cleaning, bed-making, clothes-washings, sewing and knitting, and keeping the house in order. To each she answered she did her best; each answered back that she was a worse replacement than they, and more trouble than she was worth.

“Worth!” she screamed, then. “I sleep in the pantry to keep you from mucking up the salt and sugar! I eat like a bird, I work all day — you couldn’t wring more out of me, and yet you dare to complain!”

“Nay”, the seventh dwarf, the leader of them, growled then into the shocked silence. “Six tasks have you done, and failed them. The seventh I have not asked yet, but now I shall. Be as you were when we first met, girl: get out of that dress and show your nakedness to us.”

Now Snow White turned to flee, whether to inside the house or outright out of it, she did not know; but all round her was a ring of dwarves, burly and burning-eyed and licking their lips, each eye lustfully focused on her.

“Name your boon”, she cried at the leader of the dwarves. “If you would harass me, be out with it — enough with your

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lewd hints and hidden stares. Put to words your heart's desire if you would have it. Or if you cannot speak it, abandon it in darkness."

She devoutly wished the dwarf would blush, stammer and stay quiet — this was by her experience what boys did, and the dwarves were boy-size or less — but she was in no such luck.

"I would have have you suck", the lead dwarf sneered, massaging a thick dagger in his groin, "suck this achingly lonely cock of mine, with those sweet red lips of yours; I can supply such white nectar that you never need eat from our pantry again. What would you" — he asked of the others, and they each in turn answered as Snow White turned a horrified round, looking at each in turn.

"I would be under that dress of yours", the second one said, "nuzzled to your breasts — do not worry if you do not give milk, I will leave my own on your breasts."

"I would be all over that glorious soft white skin of yours", said the third, "licking, caressing, pinching, slapping, biting and clawing until you were red all over; then I would paint you white again, and again."

"I would feel your feet", the fourth said, "lick each toe in turn, and the spaces between them, and save your soles for last. I would have you stand on me, trample me, caress me with your feet; my arousal would thrive under your feet like the ocean, and leave its froth on your feet, on your toes and between them."

"I would have the treasure between your legs", the fifth said, rubbing a monstrous bulge at his crotch, "I would be the conqueror of it, a conqueror in blood as in moans I'd guess; I would make you cry and squirm and scream and run dry of tears with my veined rod of conquest; and I would plant my white flag within you, until it came time to start the war again."

"I would watch you sleep", the sixth said, "even prepare you a cup of herbs so you would not wake. I would caress you as you slept. I would be with you as you slept. I would

leave surprises for you, on you, in you for your waking. You would dream of sweat and desire, and unspeakable pleasure, all night long.”

“I would not harass you thus”, the seventh dwarf said with a shy smile, “I would let you be until the sad toil of this world wore you down, and then I would show you the delights of giving up. I have chains for your wrists, ropes for your body, pins and needles for your arms and legs, whips for your pale behind and razors for the front, snapping-angles and sucking-straws for other parts of you: I would make your quivering flesh scream and feel like never before, find red beneath your white skin and white bone beneath that red, before the final darkness took you.”

“Eep”, Snow White said, eyes darting from dwarf to dwarf — from greedy eyes to greedy eyes, and tented trousers to bulging pants — she sought words, but found only these: “This is too much for food and board!”

“You spurn our generosity”, the lead dwarf growled. “You deny us this, and wish to cheat us of what has supported you this past week. You are a villain; an oubliette is what you deserve!”

“An oubliette!” the other dwarves cried in drunken anger — Snow White did not know the meaning of this word, but guessed it was nothing good.

Like a low, angry ocean the dwarves swept her up and carried her off, despite her grasping at doorjambs and lintels; off and out the back door and to the back yard and the rush of fallen trees and the dreadfully sloping tunnel underground, and the darkness muffled her screams and kinks of the path cut off all daylight and the smell of dead earth deadened her senses, and then suddenly the hard hands let go of her and she fell, screaming, through a momentary, interminable, shapeless darkness, until cold hard earth met her and all sounds faded away.

Searching around her she found only steeply up-sloping walls of dirt; she was in a deep pit, in absolute darkness and silence with no way out.

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She waited, she despaired, she cried. After endless, measureless time hunger started gnawing at her, then thirst, then madness. To stave these away, she sang a sweet little ditty about humming, whistling, sweeping and tidying things up — now even those woes seemed so far away. She got as far as “Imagine that the broom is someone that you love”, but then the shortness of the broom made her think of the shortness of the dwarves, and her tongue stuck to the roof of her mouth.

Then she heard a voice, the voice of a girl, thin and high and weak, singing in response: “But don’t imagine the seventh, the dreadful seventh wish!”

“Who are you?” Snow White cried, as loud as she could, deeply and devoutly wishing the answer would not be “Madness.”

“I am Rose Red”, a voice answered, the voice of a girl as young and scared as Snow White. She was in some nearby pit similar to that Snow White was in; she, too, was there because of the displeasure of the dwarves. She too (she told, and Snow White told) was a runaway of vague origin, threatened by terrible danger; though she had stumbled through the forest and on the long, low house without anyone’s directions, and fallen for the six requests and stumbled on the seventh. “Oh, I am grateful of the darkness”, she cried; “in darkness no-one can see how I am burned and marked, pierced with metal and hateful desire.”

Snow White said “Eep”, and then asked if Rose Red had tried to escape — she said she had, and had failed — she had nothing to scale her pit with; the dwarves had left her with nothing, had even taken her dress, a rough linen thing.

At this, Snow White leapt up and cried in triumph — and then, loudly explaining her deeds, took off her rough linen dress and, with work-trained hands, tore it to strips and knotted the strips together and thus made a long, thin, tough rope. She threw the rope up, and over, and into Rose Red’s pit; and both of them scaling their end of the rope they met at the top and hugged each other in relief and

triumph.²

“Oh, we should run away now”, Rose Red whispered in Snow White’s ear.

“But we cannot”, Snow White said. “I know not the way out, and neither do you — do you? You do not — and we might as well stumble on the dwarves at work, or finding the way out stumble on them in the house, for I no longer know if it is night or day. No, what we shall do is we shall *wait*.”

After a while of waiting, Snow White asked if the dwarves saw in the dark; Rose Red said the dwarves were just short people, and had no magical sight.

After another while Snow White asked how Rose Red had survived the hunger and thirst; Rose Red said all the meats and foods of the dwarves came from the mine, and she was grateful she saw not the squirming things she sank her teeth into. Snow White gagged a bit, and felt her hunger leave her, for a while.

After a third while they heard hard boots stepping, tromp tromp, a single pair coming in the direction of the two pits, measured and counting, placing memorized steps to avoid falls and walls.

“Ho!” a voice finally cried, at the edge of Snow White’s pit, “Have you reconsidered, girl? Shall I rain a white rain for your sustenance, or shall you come up and drink it at the root? Come, girl, your discourtesy shamed you and us both— aah!”

This last cry was because Snow White kicked him in the head, and he himself tumbled into the empty pit.

After much cursing, Snow White extorted and threatened out of the dwarf the route back, step by step, and the time of the day: it was day, and the other dwarves were hard at work far deeper in the mine.

²Then both took half of the rope and dressed as best as they could, and the string bikini was invented then and there.

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The two crept in carefully calculated steps away, and left the hollering dwarf in the pit — but as they saw the first ray of sunlight from behind a bend, Rose Red stopped, trembling, and would not go on.

“I dare not”, she said, “I am unfit for sunlight; you do not know what they did to me. I dare not show myself to sun, or you, or myself.”

“Oh, wait here”, Snow White cried, fleet-footedly ran to the house — the empty, ominous, now again well kept-in-order house — and grabbed her robe of black silk and drew it around Rose Red’s trembling frame.

Trembling both, they looked back at the yawning maw of the mine; and seeing something exceedingly curious they discovered a pair of doors near-lost in the tangled trees round the hole; and on the doors, great chains: and in a few frenzied moments the doors were shut, the chains snaked all over them and the locks on the chains snapped securely shut. On a chain, there hung a dusty sign from a less paranoid age:

SECRET DWARF MINE
KEEP OUT
PRIVATE PROPERTY
THIEVES WILL BE STABBED
STAY OUT
NOTHING HERE
ON PAIN OF OUBLIETTE

— in this more paranoid age, as Snow White and Rose Red both knew, the dwarves never went further from the mine than to the house right in front of it, and between it and the world.

They took the keys, and went into the house — and on one of the beds, found a sleeping young girl with sea-green hair.

“Oh boy”, said Rose Red, nothing visible of her but a pale, pretty face in a black cowl.

“No, a girl”, Snow White said.

“Ah”, said the green-haired girl, waking up and clutching the blanket to her in terror. “Ah, I am not a thief! Please do not hurt me, er, girl dressed as witch and girl not dressed. . .” After a moment of silence she added, confusedly, “Wait, what?”

“Have the dwarves molested you?” Snow White asked.

“What?”

“The seven dwarves. Have they put you to work? We just locked them in the mine in the backyard”, added Rose Red in explanation.

“What?”

After the initial confusion, it came out that the name of the girl was Bottlegreen, she was tall and thin and gangly, and usually did not say “what” all that much, and she too was a runaway of uncertain origin, and she had just moments before (probably) stumbled on the house, bone-tired, and fallen asleep without seeing anyone. When she heard of the wicked dwarves, she trembled in horror and — seeing Rose Red shift uncomfortably under the robe — in belief.

Now the three girls had no place to go, and thus went nowhere. They kept watch on the mine-door — but heard no sounds from behind it — and pushed the seven beds together into one big one fit for three; and ate and kept house and lived together, and found that a third of the housework for each annoyed everybody but did not tax any of them overmuch.

After a time, there came a peddler, an old bent crone of a woman, knocking on the front door; and when she expressed surprise at the absence of the dwarves the girls told her the dwarves had all moved away to care for a sick, elderly grandmother. At this, the peddler put away her licks of salt and sugar, and instead offered ribbons and ties and scarves at the three girls, opining that as each of them

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was lovely, such adornments would make them beautiful as princesses.

Since the girls had no coins, nor anything to trade, they only browsed — though eagerly, with much cries and laughter, for the hut of the dwarves could be a boring place, and not all available time could be filled with work, or the pleasures of tribalism, using scissors and other frettage — but the cheapjack (or cheapjill, as she was), on discovering there was no gold to match the cooing, strangely did not grow angry but instead confided she had some special ribbons she would be willing to part with for free, for such pretty girls as these, with wind in their hair and heads. She drew from a deep, oilcloth-lined pocket three ribbons wrapped in pink and pale blue papers. These were in rich colors with golden figures of dragons, unicorns and sea monsters; much more beautiful and expensive than any of the other ribbons; and as the peddler left, two of the girls felt something very wrong had taken place.

The third girl was Bottlegreen; she happily put her ribbon of the three in her sea-green hair, and come the next morning she was cold and dead, and her ribbon and the two others were turned to twists of straw.

Snow White and Rose Red wept for Bottlegreen, and buried her in the front-yard.

A while later, another peddler came by, selling hammers and nails and a selection of unpleasant pincers whose use he refused to explain; but on hearing the dwarves had moved over the mountains in search of some long-lost gold he swore and fumed, and then inquired if the girls were liable to start mining-work in the close future, or move out in favor of some who might. When they confessed this was unlikely, the peddler swore some more, and then dug up some tatty combs: ones with such sharp steel teeth and such a slick of oil and grime Rose Red commented only a girl of iron might wear such, or survive the ill fumes of disease that floated over them. The peddler expressed that the dwarves had never complained, and had been very nec-

essary customers to a struggling metal item salesman such as he; and then he sighed and offered a fancy comb in apology, for free; and would have offered another, if Rose Red hadn't grown wary, glancing at the fresh grave and fearing her past.

That evening, Snow White and Rose Red kept their distance from the comb, and examined it with seeing-glasses and axe handles and long sharp sticks, and poured water and vinegar on it — but they could find nothing in the comb that was not comb-like, so they put it in an iron box, and put a big stone atop the box, and went to sleep.

Come morning, Rose Red woke to find Snow White next to her dead, with the comb in her hair. The box was still closed, and the stone still on it.

Rose Red wept, and wailed, and buried Snow White next to Bottlegreen in the front-yard.

When the third peddler came, Rose Red asked of her: "Do you sell death? And do you have a free sample?" — the peddler, an old crone, looked at her askance, left an apple, and then left herself.

Rose Red lay down between the graves, took a bite of the apple, and fell to sleep with all the properties of death. The last thing she heard was a faint tap-tap from underground, and she thought, ah, my friends wait for me below.

* * *

Now a Prince, young and bold and the upholder of the local law, was going through the forest, flushing out poachers and bandits and witches, with a manacled train of misery following the horses of him and his armsmen, when he came across a great big crush of fallen trees, with a miserable little house under it. In front of the house were two graves and an unburied girl between them; the Prince left these to his men and went in. The house was a poor hovel, but on the other side of it was a door into the earth, with some squiggly sign and great big chains on it. Smelling

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adventure, or at least treasure, the Prince took his silvery sword and struck the chains and the door down in one blow. Out of the smelly darkness, a horde of gibbering beasts rushed at him; he shouted a challenge and waded in, sword flashing like moonlight on water, blood gushing like water under wind. In the end, seven indescribably horrible (though shortish) monsters lay dead, bent mattocks and axes falling from their cooling paws; the Prince breathed heavily, leaning on his sword, and tossed off his tunic, his only casualty of the fight.

A servant rushed in to retrieve the tunic — for a proper Prince ought to not be so cavalier with what bore his sigils and symbols — and slipped on dwarf-blood.

The Prince then peeked into the darkness — dark, smelly, no treasure or adventure but just mud — and then returned to the front-yard and the dead women.

“They’re not dead!” one of his armsmen cried in terror; the Prince saw most of his entourage had already taken flight, including the humorously clumsy chained-together line of poachers and the like.

Thus he alone approached the twin grave and the black-silk-robed girl. He was splendid in his black trousers and his billowing white shirt, with flecks of blood at the collar, and gore at the heels of his boots. At one hip, his silvery sword hung; at other, a golden-hilted dagger hung; in between, his danger-wakened manhood hung, pendulous and gravid.

The girl was dressed in a black robe, as if a sorceress; a few locks of red hair hung past the hood’s opening, and a face full of terror and confusion glanced here and there and at the receding backs of the Prince’s retinue before fixating on the Prince himself. The robe had been half-opened — in lust or in resuscitation, the Prince did not know, and did not want to guess — and what peeked out was lovely, though dappled with what might have been shadows, or scars, or paint.

But that was not why his men had fled; for on either side

of the confusedly gasping girl — was that a bite of apple she spat out, or a worm? — the two graves were writhing, and from one a slim white arm stabbed out — from the other a wet black mass of hair rose, sloshing over some chthonian face — the Prince gasped in horror and purpose, and drew his sword.

“What be ye”, he cried as heroes of stories cry, “Witches or monsters, beasts or Hell’s spawn? Name yourselves, or be—”

And then the black fall of hair fell off the face of the denizen of the right-hand grave, and the Prince’s tongue clove to the roof of his mouth, for this denizen, even if of Hell, was the most beautiful girl the Prince had ever seen, more beautiful than the Queen, more beautiful than the Moon, more beautiful than life itself. Her skin was pale-white beyond nature; her cheeks were blushing from the exertion of extrication from the cold earth — without a thought, the Prince dropped his sword and rushed to help her — her lips were red as blood, curved in a gasp of panicked fear — he kissed her as he dragged her feet from the sod — her eyes were wide and red and burned with flames crimson like dying suns. Her lips were cold, but warmed against his; the Prince felt chills ride up and down his whole frame, and claws of terror and terrified, confused desire rake his heart — after an eternity, he broke the kiss and asked in a weak voice: “Who are you?” — and she answered, “I am Snow White.”

So did Snow White come to life, the comb rotten and broken off her hair, and Rose Red, the apple-bite sucked out of her throat through resuscitation or a corpse-lover’s kisses; and Bottlegreen, too, her poison too left in the cold ground.

“Who are you?” the Prince asked, as his men crept back from the wood, cautious and curious.

Rose Red was in her black robe of silk, a pensive face hovering in darkness; Bottlegreen was in her tattered clothes of a woodcutter’s girl, maybe; and Snow White would have

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been in dwarf-rags, had not the Prince looked at them in revulsion and offered his shirt in exchange — so Snow White was in a shirt too large for her, the hem hanging to her knees, and the sleeves well past her hands. This did not decrease her loveliness, and the Prince’s servants, too, were awestruck by her beauty, and the cascade of her dark hair against the white of the shirt.

“We are but runaways from violent homes”, Bottlegreen said.

“Nameless, and unimportant, too”, Rose Red added.

“You are Snow White”, the Prince whispered at — who else? — Snow White. “That name sounds familiar to me. It ought to be the name of girl more dead than the one buried here.”

By that time the last of the armsmen returned, struggling with a pole with the Prince’s flag on it. Now Snow White gasped, for the sigils and designs in that flag were those of her father the King.

“Who are *you*?” Snow White breathed.

“I am”, the Prince answered, “as the flag proclaims me — the Prince of this forest and the lands round it; I reign in the castle beyond Forest Chapel, for I was summoned by the . . . the Queen of that castle and realm to do war against her husband, revealed to be a wicked sorcerer; and through her help and guidance I defeated that wicked sorcerer in the field and locked him to howl in his own cells. And, so I have heard, the first indication of that King’s wickedness was that he had his own child, his own blood, a girl by the name of Snow White, killed, and had her liver and lungs for a meal, and fed them as such to his gagging, blameless Queen.”

Snow White touched her chest, confused, then her face, outraged. “I am Snow White — I am alive — and my father is no sorcerer! I know it is my wicked stepmother who tried to kill me, for she has always desired to be prettier than me! She must have ensorcelled you too — tell me, Prince, why would you ever be besotten with an old hag such as her?”

The Prince, all of a sudden, could find no answer; and his protests were drowned in his armsmen shouting and chanting: “Snow White! Snow White! *Snow White!*”

“What, she’s a princess?” said Bottlegreen to Rose Red, who answered: “You mean you couldn’t tell? Only royalty has such a lax work ethic.” To which Bottlegreen said, “Wax what now?”)

Thus the Prince rode back to the castle with a new fire in his heart, and with Snow White on a white horse at his side.³

At the castle’s gates, Snow White gave her Prince a kiss; and they dismounted and, trailed by an ever-widening train of servants, armsmens, scullery maids and cooks, made their way towards the court and the throne room. On their way, men and women fell to their knees and faces seeing the radiant, wrathful beauty of Snow White returned home, and the brooding, outlet-seeking anger in the face of the Prince. Some passing servant rushed to a closet, and draped cloaks of gold and purple over the shoulders of the pair; another scampered to the strongbox, and placed a diadem on Snow White’s raven hair, and blood-red ruby on a chain round her neck — such adornments as her mother had worn, but her stepmother never.

The doors of the throne-room were slammed open, throwing gold-dust down from the rafters; the courtier throng opened like a terrified sea; and the two, with their retinue, approached the twin witchwood throne. The King’s — or Prince’s — half was unoccupied, but on the other, alarmed by the fleet-footed rumor, and alarmed by what it told, sat Snow White’s stepmother, as beautiful as her, but a generation older, and alien in her features and dress.

Her eyes widened, seeing Snow White — then widened further, seeing the scowling Prince next to her.

³One of the armsmen, cursing, walked, with another de horsed servant — and Rose Red and Bottlegreen rode on the same horse, Rose Red taking care of the reins and Bottlegreen of swaying and falling off.

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“I—” she stammered, “I thought you dead. I thought I had tasted your blood in my mouth.”

“Silence, foul witch!” the Prince cried; the Queen reeled back as if slapped.

The Prince then strode forward and slapped her, and she fell off the throne.

“Restrain her!” Snow White commanded, and the Queen was put in irons — which, as is well known, lock away all magic — and thrown down to the floor. Snow White and her Prince sat on the thrones.

By this time all the courtiers and ministers and advisers of the court were in the throne-room; and Snow White stood up and told them her story as the Queen writhed and wept on the floor beneath her. She told how she had grown more beautiful than the Queen, who had been consumed by jealousy and rage. She told how she had been lured out of the castle through trickery, to the hands of a murderer, who could not do the fell deed for which the Queen had paid him. She told how she had found refuge in the forest, had been found in this refuge by malicious peddler — no doubt the Queen in witchy disguise — and how she had been awakened by the coming of the Prince, now sitting next to her.

The Queen’s eyes scanned the crowd as Snow White spoke, but she could find no sympathetic eye — those that would have been so were downcast, or already witnessing the saddling of fast horses. She was as alone as she had been, years ago, when she came to this kingdom from a distant and foreign land as a pawn of alliances; and the hatred towards her had only grown, not diminished.

“What do you have to say for yourself, evil witch?” Snow White cried.

“I—” the Queen stammered, rising to her knees, “I am not a witch! I have done none of these evil things! My Prince — my Prince — you answered my plea, you saved me from the sorcerer’s clutches — please, do not abandon me now!”

“*Sorcerer*”, the Prince spat. “You blinded me and drove

me against an innocent man, this poor girl's father. There was sorcery at work at that battlefield and after, but I did not see it was you — hah, drop your charms and let us see your true face, hag!”

The Queen bowed her head and wept in frustration.

“What shall we do with the witch?” Snow White cried.

“Burn her!” came a cry from the crowd. Then, “Behead her!”, then “Cut off her arms!”, then “Cut off her tits!” then “Stick a sword in her cunt!”, and then suggestions so horrible the whole crowd fell silent as a few more voices, one by one, added their fantasies.

Then Bottlegreen ran swiftly to Snow White's side, and whispered in her ear; Snow White shuddered with horror, and then smiled in triumph.

Then a blacksmith's oven was brought in, and from a display-case outside the throne-room, a pair of iron shoes — so displayed because nobody had believed they would ever be used. The Queen began to scream and babble for mercy, and did not cease screaming as the shoes were placed on the oven until they glowed red-hot, did not cease screaming as she was yanked upright by men wearing thick leather gloves, and stripped naked, did not cease screaming as her smoking feet were forced and locked into the red-hot iron shoes, did not cease screaming as men swung whips and sticks at her, forcing her to dance as her feet burned.

All the while, the court cheered, laughed, mocked her, pointed, guffawed, hurled abuse at her, and called her ugly, a witch, a monster, a torturer and a murderer — all the while as she danced and cried, and stumbled and was forced upright at spearpoint, until she fell over and no whip could raise her, though many tried.

When her dead body was hauled away, cooling heels bouncing on the chipped and bloodied marble, Snow White and her Prince held hands and smiled, and kissed in triumph.

That was not the end of it, though.

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No, for Rose Red had disliked this bloodlust, and instead taken a few armsmen and went looking for the cells and the King locked therein. Having found him — a man of no particular appearance — and unshackled and unchained and unbound (and so on) him, she brought him to Snow White, and arrived just as the last steps of the dance were danced.

Rose Red turned away from this; but the King watched the Queen fall with a curious smile on his face.

As her body was dragged away, he stepped forward, majestic even in rags, his shaggy visage not that of a beggar, but of a lion.

“Father!” Snow White cried.

“Get off my throne!” the King cried, at her and the Prince both.

“Father?” Snow White said.

“You are not the Queen yet, and if you would not suffer the same fate as the previous one” — he gestured at the oily burn-marks on the floor — “daughter, get off my throne before I lose my patience!”

“The cells”, a courtier whispered, “the cells have unhinged him!”

At this, the King swung around, and a bolt of lightning leapt off his palm and fried the courtier to dry bones where he stood.

“I tire of this prattling”, the King growled. “I’m finally rid of that vain, treacherous foreigner, and you, you absurdly vainglorious Prince, you I shall stretch on a rack for tortures that reduce you from a man to one below all beasts! But you, Snow White my daughter, you of all should fall down and worship me.”

“What is this?” Snow White cried, falling off the throne and to her knees. “I do not understand.”

“Feh”, the King said. “That is your problem — you have inherited all the magical potency that my blood possesses, but you have none of the guile and internal strength that I possess. You, like I, would have to lose your happiness and

gain wisdom instead, that was my design. As I lost your mother though I wrestled against all the potencies of Hell to regain her, as I lost every last speck of contentment and gladness — so I would have you, too, forced out of the castle and into the raw world, to live losing your innocence and purity, coercing others to serve your red-eyed will, thereby purifying your magical allures to strength suitable for sitting next to me and sharing my scepter. But, feh, what has returned but a mewling child, clinging to the hand of a gold-bedecked and glamour-besotted butcher. Tell me, dearest daughter, did all sense leave you when the dwarves h—”

Then he gasped, and spread his arms — the court flinched, fearing the unleashing of some great fire — and the King fell down to his face, with Rose Red's knife sticking out of his back, and Rose Red standing behind him.

“Fuck you, *sorcerer*”, Rose Red said.

And then Snow White ruled, with a love-ensorcelled Prince at her side, with Rose Red (some duke's daughter) as her minister, and Bottlegreen (a true runaway of no particular origin) as her companion. It would be a lie to say they lived happily ever after, for Snow White at least was now wiser, but no longer happy; and on most nights she woke weeping to the sound of iron shoes on marble.

And — because none of them wished to talk of it — what had happened in those days before the Sorcerer's death, and what they had done, passed down to whispers, to legends, and to myth, and emerged as a much shorter and nicer fairy-tale instead of something this grim.

Grimm: Little Red Hot

There was a girl called Little Red, because she was very pretty. She had two older sisters, called Big Red and Huge Red — this all was because their mother had made red hoods for them, with cloaks attached: since Little Red was pretty, her hood was small, and barely even covered the top of her head. Big Red wasn't as pretty, so her hood hung to her eyes. Huge Red was most definitely not pretty, and her hood hung down over her face and all the way down to her chest. Because of this, she often walked into walls and trees, and consequently grew still less pretty.

Now the three sisters and their mother had only one living relative, an aunt that lived in seclusion deep in the forest, for she had done an unspeakable thing and the other villagers would not permit her to live in the village. Despite this, Little Red's mother — who was called Mother Russia, for obvious reasons — loved her sister, and time to time went through the dark of the forest to deliver her some bananas, carrots, salami, sausage, manroot, kidney crackers, sugar sticks, and long lollipops.

Now this one morning the mother was ill, and Big Red and Huge Red were busy with housework: so the mother told Little Red to take the treats and take them to her aunt.

“Now three things you must remember”, she told her daughter. “Run away from strangers; obey your aunt in all things; and don't put any of these treats in your mouth.”

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“What, not even this deliciously sticky manroot?” Little Red said; “Not even those”, her mother said. “Do you promise?”

“I do.”

“Let me hear it.”

“I promise to run away from all strangers, and I promise to obey aunt in all things. . . and I guess I promise to not put any of *these* treats in my mouth.” So she said; and her pretty red lips pouted.

The forest was dark, and full of terrors.

From behind a tree, a werewolf stepped out, sleek, handsome and dangerous. “Hello, girl”, it said.

“Do I know you?” Little Red said.

“Soon you will!” the werewolf growled.

“Sorry! I mustn’t talk to people I don’t know!” Little Red cried, and dodged an out-thrust hairy arm, “And I must obey my aunt in all things!”, and dodged the other clawing arm, “And most overall put none of these tasty treats in my poor little mouth!”

“Oh I’ll put some treat in your mouth, and nuts on your chin!” the werewolf roared, stomping a foot down as Little Red skipped away.

Then, after a moment of thought, it realized it knew who Little Red’s aunt had to be — for there was only one woman dwelling in the darkness of the forest. With a grin, the werewolf set out in that direction.

Little Red, on the other hand, followed the curving path, which led through a clearing where sweaty, half-naked woodcutters were at work.

“Hey girl!” one of them shouted as Little Red went past. “Want some candy?”

“Sorry boys”, Little Red answered, “My mother told me to not talk to strangers.”

“Screw your mother!” another woodcutter cried.

Little Red halted, and shouted back: “Oh you wish!”

“What”, the woodcutter asked of the others, “what did I actually wish?”

"Incestuous lesbians I suppose", the smartest among them said.

"That a sexy thing?"

"When it's not your family. yes."

"Yeah", the woodcutter bellowed in Little Red's general direction, "Yeah, that I wish alright! Boom chika wow wow!"

"Well keep wishing!" Little Red cried. "You sorry lot can kiss my ass!" — which, flipping her dress up, she displayed with a defiant wiggle.

Since this drove the woodcutters into incoherently spluttering rage, she then skipped away, laughing to herself.

In the meanwhile, the werewolf can come to the aunt's cottage, and disposed of her; so that when Little Red knocked on the door, a roughly coughing voice answered from inside, "Come inside, little girl who I know and who must obey me in all I say."

Red rolled her eyes and stepped inside.

The room was in much disarray — this she attributed to her aunt living alone without a mother — and her aunt seemed to be in disarray too, being nothing but a hump on the bed and a pair of big hungry eyes peeking from between the coverlet and a white, frilly bath cap.

It had been many years ago, when she was merely a slip of a girl, when Little Red had last seen her aunt; but something seemed amiss here.

"Gosh, Aunt, what huge eyes you have."

Those eyes blinked, and winked, and a voice answered: "The better to see you with, girl."

"Little Red is the name, Aunt", she said, rolling her eyes again. "And your voice's so terribly rough and growly too."

"Why, 'tis the better to... the better to drive those discourteous woodcutters away with."

"Yeah, they're a bunch of annoying shits", Little Red said. "Or that's what my father says, I don't know why, they're not brown or anything."

"What", the thing in the bed said, "there are brown people?"

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“Sure thing, Aunt, half of the next village over is brown people now, they’re so pretty and handsome, some are both actually, and they sing the most beautiful songs you’ve ever heard, except I guess you haven’t heard them as you don’t know about them.”

“Er, are they as tasty as you. . . as we pale-skinned non-forest-camouflaged people?” And the coverlet slipped, revealing a big wide mouth lined with slaver and long sharp teeth.

Little Red rolled her eyes. “I don’t know Aunt, I’ve never had one in my mouth. Speaking of which, oh, what a big mouth you have.”

“Oh never mind the mouth”, the bed-Aunt growled, “get over here from the doorway already, uh, I mean close the door already, I’m fevery and fainty and whatsit all over.”

Little Red closed the door and took a step closer. “I’m hungry, Aunt.”

“Oh, you think *you* are hungry. . . uh, what do you have in that basket of yours?”

“Candy and meat, Aunt. Which my mother told me to not eat.”

“Didn’t she also tell you to obey me in all things?”

“Yes, Aunt.”

“Then eat the sodding candy and meat, stuff yourself, and then come over here to me.”

She did so, and put the basket aside. “But I’m all dirty from running around the forest, Aunt, I need fresh clothes.”

“Never mind the clothes, take them off if they bother you, throw them in the fire if you want to, I’ll take care of putting some nice furs on you!”

Skipping happily from foot to foot, Little Red stripped and threw all her clothes on the fire, where they burned merrily. “Oh, furs! Furs! Furs!”, Little Red sang to herself.

Then she dove into the bed, and wormed her way next to her Aunt, or what she thought was her Aunt.

“Ooh, you’re so hairy, Aunt!” she cried.

“I have not been shaving lately”, the bed-Aunt said. “I’m going all-natural.”

“Ooh, Aunt”, she said next, “you’re poking me with something frightfully long and hard and warm, and it has a knob on the end!”

“With something alright”, the werewolf drooled, and then stopped. “Wait. Girl?”

“Little Red, they call me.”

“You don’t have any idea what this sticker is?”

“Oh I don’t”, Little Red said, cheeks flaming, “though I am a woman, my mother does not think it proper to tell me all things. I don’t know how people are born, or what comes of them as they die, or what marriage means, or what that pretty young Manhoor does for his living.”

“Uh, right”, the bed-Aunt said. “Why don’t you take that stick in your hands and—”

“Oh, I need to take a shit”, Little Red said, “like my father says, mother always says I must take a doo-doo but the butcher’s dog is called Doo and that makes no sense—”

“Don’t you go anywhere.”

“But I need to make a doo-doo!”

“Just get close to me. . . like that. . . climb on my chest. . . sit there, and make your damn doo-doo there!”

So she did; and hot brown-green liquid gushed all over her buttocks and thighs and the bed-Aunt’s furry chest and neck and groin.

“I’ve never done that before!” she cried in triumph. “Ooh, that’s slippery!”

“Now rub it on yourself.”

“But Aunt, that’s dirty!”

“Do as your aunt says!”

So she did.

Then the bed-Aunt — well, we know it was the werewolf — opened its mouth and stretched its jaws, and put the whole of Little Red inside its mouth, all the way to her waist. The taste was not pleasant, but at least the girl was slippery.

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“Ooh, it’s dark in here!” Little Red said, and hugged the werewolf’s tonsils in fright.

“Gngngn”, said the werewolf — it tried to say “Let go of me”, but couldn’t — not only was Little Red furiously hugging its tonsils, her breasts were also cutting out the werewolf’s breath — so “Gngngn” was what it said, and then in panic vomited out Little Red and a great quantity of blood, gore and broken bones.

“Oh dear, oh dear”, Little Red said, “Your insides got outside you!”

“Nuh— no worry, dear twit, those aren’t mine. They’re just what I ate last.”

Little Red looked doubtfully at the slime-covered chunks of uncooked flesh, and the little lakes of blood seeping into the coverlet and sheets, and cracked splinters of ribs and shinbones and the like. “You ate this all?”

“Yes yes. Now why don’t you get off this muck by sitting on my cock.”

Little Red looked around herself, confused. “You have a pet bird, Aunt?”

The werewolf sighed and closed its eyes. The blood and the feces were a bit much, but it could not give up; it was lonely being the lone werewolf of the forest. “Come sit in my mouth, my dear”, it growled.

Soon after it said, with a gurgle, “I see. You — glglgl — didn’t — glglgl — pith yeth.”

“Hee hee!” Little Red laughed. “Bubbles!”

Then she said “Oopsie!”, given that the werewolf had a very big and long and agile tongue, and it was now in her urethra.

Then the tip was in her bladder, and she said “Ooh!”

* * *

The woodcutters were all men, and big men too, and didn’t wear many clothes, except aprons and gloves and boots. Boots because there were brambles and poison ivy

everywhere and you couldn't touch the ground; gloves because they hacked at trees with axes and there were flying splinters, and aprons because everybody knew Old Oak Albert, and didn't wish that for themselves. But the aprons meant everybody was very sweaty, and had to take a break and take the aprons off, and because they couldn't touch the ground the woodcutters formed a human pyramid to get above the treeline and into the breeze, and a woodcutter in the fifth topmost level said to one in the fourth topmost level, "Stop hitting me in the forehead with your big flaccid cock!" and the woodcutter in the fourth topmost level said, "What can I do about where my cock's hanging, I can't move or we'll all fall down, why don't you do something", and the woodcutter in the fifth topmost level sucked the cock a few times and it became erect and rose out of his face, and he said, "That's better, now whip it around like a rotor so we in the fifth topmost level get a bit of a breeze too", and the woodcutter in the fourth topmost level said, "How am I supposed to do that?", and the woodcutter in the fifth topmost level stuck his tongue in the fourth's ass and wiggled it, and the fourth's cock went round and round with a sound like flap-flap-flap and made a good stiff breeze, and the woodcutters in the fifth topmost level said "Aah, that feels so good", and the woodcutter in the fourth topmost level said "You have no idea about how good I'm feeling", and his cock went around faster and faster, like FLAP-FLAP-FLAP, and it went around so fast that he began rising up, and a woodcutter in the third topmost level said, "Holy fuck, your cock's going around so fast you're flying", and then said, "Wait, if you're there who's holding me up?", and the pyramid of woodcutters fell down and they got back to work except for the one who flew away.

* * *

The werewolf had thin wrists though, so once it got its fist inside Red's nipple it couldn't get it out. "Grrr", it said;

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now its both hands were stuck, and the girl was giggling all the time, which should have been impossible given what her mouth was full of.

* * *

Back at Little Red's house, her mother had gone to the bakery to get some baguette while her husband was away at the forest, in the sixth topmost level of woodcutters; and she had left Big Red in charge of Huge Red, mostly because Huge Red's huge red hood was so huge she couldn't see her sister.

Now after a while a dashing young boy came to the gate. He was called the Prince, on the account of him being dashing; in reality he was the butcher's son, and had been called Piglet when he was a child and not yet dashing.

He saw Big Red swinging in a swing beyond the gate, and dashed to her, saying: "Hello beautiful, show me what's under that hood of yours!", for Big Red's hood hung to her eyes, and didn't show them.

"Hello, Piglet", Big Red said, swinging slowly and lazily.

Somewhere inside the house Huge Red walked into a wall with a *bonk*, and fell on the floor with her hood over her dazed face.

Outside, Big Red took off the last stitch of her clothing and stretched. "Did I wake Little Piglet up?"

"Eep", the Prince said, and then looked down. "Those were my best pants!"

"That's your own fault for getting a sharp piercing like that. Get your hood on and we'll get this on."

She tossed the leather cone to him and grinned.

Huge Red had gotten her leg stuck in a butter churn, and with every step the plunger was hitting her between the legs. "Oh dear", she cried, "there's something horribly wrong with this dog's anatomy!"

"I love your navel!" the Prince cried, "It's tight and you can't get pregnant in it!"

Then he said a lot of grunting and moaning noises, and shot one of his balls into Big Red's navel, where it skittered around and then exploded into sperm.

"Help, I'm bleeding!" said Huge Red, and then moved from the window, where the sun was shining into her eyes through the red hood over her face, and then shouted: "Oh no! Now I'm blind!"

* * *

"Well this is awkward", Little Red said, looking at the bed-Aunt's hairy behind from a distance that was too close for comfort, especially given all the bed-Aunt's behind was smeared with. (She had never known there were that many liquids in an aunt!) There was no moving away, though, not with her arm being clenched at the shoulder by the bed-Aunt's bagmouth-like bottom hole.

Not to say how badly the whole of the bed-Aunt was contorted, with the bed-Aunt's arm trapped just the same way, to a hairy shoulder, in Little Red's own bottom hole — though that was not bagmouth-like, with trembling sinews for strings, but more like the mouth of a highborn lady's silk purse.

"This is really awkward", the bed-Aunt gasped past Little Red's feet — Little Red was really surprised she could rest her ankles in bed-Aunt's tight, tugging throat like that.

"Well, do something!" Little Red cried, and so the bed-Aunt groped around with her hand, and Little Red cried, "Hee! That tickles!", and the bed-Aunt took hold of Little Red's womb from the inside — no help — and took hold of Little Red's stomach from the inside — no help, and empty too — and then finally really pushed its hand inside and reached towards Little Red's unsuspecting throat, but only reached her heart.

And the bed-Aunt squeezed, and Little Red's heart went pitter-patter, and then went still.

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After a while, her white purse loosened, and among other things, the werewolf's trapped arm came out.

The werewolf then swallowed mightily, and Little Red's ankles slid down to its stomach, and Little Red's thighs followed; and Little Red's arm was ripped out of the werewolf's bum (and the werewolf whimpered a bit, because Little Red had very sharp nails), and Little Red's hips went into the werewolf's mouth and it spread its mouth very, very wide, and then Little Red's neck was at the werewolf's lips, and the werewolf stopped.

It pursed its upper lip carefully, and kissed Little Red on her red, cooling lips, its lower lip caressing the hairs at the back of her head, and then it swallowed the rest of her too, down, down to its big, hot stomach, sucking down the tops of her long hair like spaghetti.

* * *

There was a knock at the door, and a woodcutter, naked, came in.

"Did someone order an axehaft?" he asked, shaking his hips so that his cock swayed side-to-side like a turgid pink pendulum. His hands were up, wrists over the haft of the real axe across his shoulders. There was a glint in his eye and a smile on his face.

"Eep", said the thing on the bed, and crawled deeper under the stained sheets.

"Damn", the woodcutter said, looking at the sheets, their occupant being busy in escaping from sight. "I haven't seen that many fluids since the sheep-people went through the town. And when I say 'through', I mean they didn't leave a skirt unflipped or a pair of pants undropped!"

"Eh ha ha ha!" came an uneasy laugh from under the covers. "Sick now! See you later!"

"Ooh", the woodcutter said, yanking the covers off the bed, "let me take your temp— uh."

After a while he added, "I'll go and find— I'll go and find some medicines or something, okay?"

And he went.

The thing on the bed, bloated and hairy and sticky with all manner of things, with distended holes where prim and tight ones should be, sighed in relief, and waddled and rolled out of the bed and into the bathroom.

After some time, it came out bathed and shaven and rouged and nail-painted and lipstick-applied, and in a very fetching pink semi-transparent frilly negligee. It was still a werewolf, but very feminine werewolf, and fetching except for the stubble and the snout and the wormtail and the pad-feet and the prong.

Oh, and the stomach, so swollen that it outright pushed the negligee out of the way, and made the thing look like a beach ball with legs, if the beach ball was of the size to hold a whole woman, or her remains, inside.

The woodcutter returned and they had tea, given as both were now suddenly quite tired. They also had cookies, and some rum; and the werewolf-Aunt ate many handfuls of the plums the woodcutter had found.

"Why plums anyway?" it asked.

"Oh I could find no other medicine", the woodcutter said, putting a hand on the wolf-Aunt's stubbly thigh.

"Are plums medicine?" the wolf asked coyly.

The woodcutter just shrugged.

"Oh dear", the wolf said, as its stomach rumbled terribly. "I think the plums are giving me the runs."

The wolf fell off the bench, face contorted in pain.

"Oh dear", the woodcutter cried, and knelt and massaged the werewolf's shoulders as best he could.

"What the fuck?" the werewolf cried.

"*I don't know medicine!*" the woodcutter cried in anguish.

"Oh! I'll teach you medicine — quick, take a hold of my cock!"

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The woodcutter trembled. “Er, I’ve been meaning to ask you about—”

“Crank it!” the werewolf howled; and, chill-racked and terrified, the woodcutter did so: took a hold of the now terror-stiff cock and turned it like it was the hand of a clock, and he was anxious for tomorrow.

The werewolf’s body reacted as werewolf bodies do, and the two gagged at the foul cloud of putrefaction-scented gas. Then the woodcutter cranked again, and the werewolf’s stomach churned and twisted — and a slim ankle popped out of its backside, black with slime, blood and gastric juices.

“What”, cried the woodcutter.

“Gngngn!” cried the werewolf, straining, pushing heavy and connected parts through its twisting, turning guts. A shin followed the ankle, as ichor-covered as the ankle; then a knee, and a thigh: the woodcutter laid a hand on the thigh to convinced himself he was dreaming. The thigh was shapely, nubile even; and cold as ice. His fingers followed it to yet emerging parts, and found them cold too, the hairs sticky with dried blood. On an impulse he bent down and licked. Beneath the blood and shit, there was sweetness. Then the crack yawned wide, and a heavy white liquid bled out.

“Life in me!” the werewolf yowled, “she’s given life in me!”

The woodcutter backed away in terror like a crippled crab, and shivered against a wall, gasping, cock limp and eyes huge, as a second leg was forced out, toes strumming a symphony of taut pain against the werewolf’s tortured sphincter.

The werewolf howled dust down from the rafters as ichor-black hips passed, and then a belly, and then a chest with breasts painful like gallstones, hard blue nipples drawing lines of blood down the wolf’s intestine. Then a neck, arms, and tangled in delicate arms and a black travesty of hair and bile, a dead face, eyes staring with surprise, mouth

open, encrusted with black poisons.

The girl slipped to the floor to the middle of a spreading puddle of gastric juices and blood in various stages of coagulation; she was limp, dead, smeared with death. Before her, the woodcutter slipped down the wall, gibbering in terror. Behind her, the werewolf sunk to the floorboards, crying with pain and exhaustion. A shivering pink-red prolapse followed the girl from the wolf's butt, shivering above her for a moment like a blessing hand; then it followed the wolf to the floor, and hit it with a soft splat.

There was a silence. It was a silence of three parts: the dead girl, the shaking, silently sobbing werewolf, and the mutely staring woodcutter.

The third of these was the first to end: the woodcutter staggered to his feet, feeling sick and feverish, and also having a raging erection because the dead girl was, even if covered in blood and phlegm from head to toe, very pretty.

"She's dead and I don't know medicine!" he cried. Then, in a lower voice, he said: "So I might as well try anything."

He crawled to the corpse and spread its legs. White ooze still dripped from between its thighs. Breathing heavily, he thrust his cock into that white gash, then gasped as the white stuff burned him. Swearing he drew himself out and beat his member against the floor.

He turned her over and tried the other hole, but it was full of solid black blood and he could not enter it.

He turned her around, and put his tool on her lips; but her lips dropped off her teeth, and those teeth, horrible to see in such a beautiful face, were sharp and jagged as if those of a wolf. He wiped her face with a hand: human features, emptily staring surprised eyes — he pushed those closed — inviting soft lips, though bruised, and those terribly, bestial, blood-stained teeth.

"I must", the woodcutter gasped to himself, "I must give her the life! Somehow!"

His desperate eyes hit his axe, set down against the table what seemed a hundred years ago; and then he looked

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at the girl. Then back at the axe. Then at the girl.

He crawled to the axe, stood up leaning on it, and staggered to the girl, lying on her back with her arms and legs spread out.

He raised the axe.

He brought it down, buried it with a crash in the floorboards, the blade having passed through the girl's neck before that. Her head rolled free of her body; he picked the head up with shaking hands. He placed a hand on one cheek, another on another, like caressing the face of a lover, and lifted her face to his. Then lowered the head, feeling his arousal rise higher the more he lowered her. Her lips brushed his navel; he shivered, thinking of those teeth. Finally, the severed head followed the drops of blood and ichor it dripped to his manly tool; and with a shiver he thrust himself into her severed windpipe and found it tight and good, free of poisons, blockages and teeth.

It was a good hole, fitting a maiden, a sweet innocent girl, instead of this blood-drenched monstrosity. He battered the hole, gasping, fingers clenching on the pale black-encrusted cheeks, black-stained hair slapping against his thighs and knees. Her dead eyes lolled open as he thrust savagely into her, again and again; the eyes stared up at him, in incomprehension, or in mockery maybe, or in a dumb plea.

"Your eyes", the woodcutter moaned, "Your eyes mock me, me, me who strains to heal you — wicked eyes! Wicked eyes!"

He drew her off him, and maybe it was air gushing through her windpipe and past her terrible teeth, but it seemed to him she whispered, "Heal me!"

With a shudder he looked down at her, and then turned that dead head and plunged his member into her right eye. The evil, staring eyeball deflated and wept down her cheek. His tool sank wetly into her socket, sank into the cold, wet ichors white, black and red; sank as he crushed himself into her, finding slippery bone in the socket, and a deeper hole,

and the tearing mucus-filled membranes giving way, and finally the ticklish gelatinous embrace of her brain. He gasped, drew back; then slammed himself back into her, out, and back in, pushing himself into the cold jelly of her brain, while her other eye glared accusingly up at him. Glared, or stared, or looked with anguish; he could not say if the droplets around that eyeball were residual tears or brain-ichors forced to surface or drool dropping from his trembling lips.

Fresh blood, garishly red, streamed out of her nose as he forced and forced himself into her eye, into her head, into her brain; tears snaked down the other cheek, from the shockingly staring other eye; her mouth snapped open and shut to the rhythm of his thrusts, the bestial teeth gnashing together; her hair tangled round his upper legs like the medusa; her severed neck whistled with the power of his movements.

He felt a power building up in himself.

He thrust deeper, deeper, his balls smooshing on her nose, slick with her blood. He thrust deeper, immune to reason, deaf to pain, feeling nothing but the now lukewarm softness of that gelatin round the end of his cock. He thrust deeper, deeper, deeper—

“What the fuck are you doing?” a voice growled.

The woodcutter screamed in inarticulate release and shot his seed, white and warm, shot after shot after shot into her head. White tears boiled out of the ruined eye and the staring one. White droplets formed at her ears like precious pearl earrings. White bubbles frothed at her nose, and rivulets of white drooled out of the sides of her mouth. Shot after shot after shot, spraying into her brain, mixing with the tan and transparent tissues, forming white veins in the darkness inside her head, pools of white, sticky rivers of white—

The woodcutter staggered back, gasping, near to death. The head flew off his fingers.

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“What the fuck?” the werewolf repeated from its position kneeling on the floor, watching in shocked disbelief.

Then, watching in still more shock and disbelief, as the head bounced once, twice, three times: and hit Little Red’s body where it had been parted from it, and with a flash of white lightning, joined the body as if it had never been apart.

And Little Red opened an eye and a mouth — filled with nice, regular, human-fashion teeth — and said “Oh dear! I must have slept.”

* * *

After that, the werewolf was never heard of again, though the Aunt in the Woods was reputed to have become much more meek and timid all of a sudden, and hairy and ugly too. The woodcutter escorted Little Red back home, but for some reason could not look at her, and never visited the Aunt again either. Little Red was happy at sweetmeats well delivered, and everyone else was mostly happy also, ever after.

Well, except Huge Red, who happened to ask of Little Red how her little trip had went — she heard, and then walked into a wall.

The Marriage of Nitokris

There were two sisters, She and Din. She was a reader of books, and Din a reader of people. She read histories, legends, rumors and fairy-tales from scrolls and books and tablets of stone; Din spoke with merchants, noblemen and common palace-laborers. Both grew very wise, though they were still young.

Their father was a vizier to Shah Shahryar the Magnificent. She knew a vizier, also vazir or vesir, was a political advisor of a high rank; the old word in Arabic had been *wazir*, meaning viceroy; and this particular vizier father of theirs was the third from their family, and had been better regarded by Shahryar's father than by Shahryar himself. Din knew, for she had heard so, that Shahryar was an impetuous young man, driven by his loins and his dark suspicions of other people; and ever since Shahryar's wife, a noted princess of Africa, had died under mysterious circumstances three years ago, something awful had been happening in the constantly white-bannered palace, something so awful their father the vizier would not tell them; and the pale-faced men and women that went into the palace and sometimes came out would not tell the sisters. Perhaps they feared their words might reach the Shah's ears, and the Shah's scimitar then their ears.

One day She was reading a book when she jumped up, slapped her forehead and cried a very rude and antique

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word.

Din raised an inquiring eyebrow, terminated her discussion with the librarian's assistant, who was an intriguing girl from Cathay, and asked her sister what scroll had incensed her so.

She pointed at a scroll — an amusingly error-laden copy of the foreign-devil written Manners of the People of the Shahs — and read out loud:

And when the Shah takes a wife, the palace is festooned with white on the lower parts of the towers for a day, to resemble a garden of white flowers, purity and innocence; and when the wife dies, the tops of the towers are bannered in white for a day, to symbolise the wife's spiritual transformation into a dove, and rise into the arms of the Almighty.

“Oh”, Din said, for though they both had known these two facts for years, they never had considered the meaning of the Shah's palace being all adorned in white, the stem and the tops both, for three whole years.

That evening, as the vizier returned from the palace to the much lesser palace he lived in, on the hill opposite from the hill of the great and white palace of the Shah, in a place where the ground was less venerable and august, but the winds brisker and more filled with scents of the orange-gardens — he found his two daughters at the door, offering to take his cloak and boots, and giving him slippers and a draught of cool water, as servants usually would.

The dearth of servants was continued inside; and having relaxed and eaten a light meal prepared with filial love and some basic cooking mistakes, the vizier sighed and asked his daughters what was up.

She offered him a scroll, with a frame of gold and ebony set to frame certain sentences on the festooning of the palace. The vizier but glanced at these, and sighed again, this time with a greater concern.

He then related the marriage of Shah Shahryar to Nitokris, the youngest child of the Emir of Luxor. Nitokris was the epitome of feminine beauty, full of youth and wit, beloved of the Emir and all of the Emir's people. The marriage had been of Shahryar's own making, for he had heard of Nitokris's immense beauty, youth and wit, and grown hot and blind with desire. He had lavished the Emir of Luxor with gifts, and sent emissaries bearing images of himself in gold and ivory; and eventually had shamed the Emir into offering his youngest to Shahryar. Now it would have been within Shahryar's power to take Nitokris as a mere concubine, but he was so besotted with tales and dreams that he had the Luxorite elevated and declared to be the future mother of his heirs, a mistress of the palace under his own personal seal and sigil, and not those of the Shah's throne.

Thus, the vizier told, the lower parts of the towers had been garlanded in cloths and streamers of white, and Shah Shahryar and Nitokris had retired to the Shah's private chambers.

"Oh, that sounds nice", Din said.

The vizier sighed, and told her that come the morning Nitokris was dead.

Dead how, nobody knew, for the Shah's mute privacy-slaves bore away the body and buried it in an unknown place. Dead why, nobody knew, for the Shah was wrathful, full of some great and desperate frustration.

The garlands were pulled up to the tops of the towers, as was the proper display when the Shah's wife and consort had died.

As the day turned towards night, he motioned one of his viziers to him, and whispered an order. The vizier — not the girls' father, but an old, fat man called Othman — blanched, and then made arrangements. Older, lesser fabrics were brought out, and wrapped round the bases of the towers of the great palace, and unfurled over its mighty walls; and a woman, Othman's oldest daughter, was brought to the Shah.

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“I pronounce us a Shah and wife”, the Shah had sighed, then gestured. He retired to his rooms; his mutes carried the protesting new wife after him.

Come the new morning Othman’s daughter was dead, and the top-festoonments stayed in place. So did those of the lower parts, for Shah Shahryar gestured at a different vizier and grunted, “Get me a virgin of high birth. Lovely and desirable.”

For three years, for a thousand days, this melancholy slaughter had went on. That very day, the vizier told, the vizier Othman’s younger daughter had been chosen; Othman was inconsolate, yet incapable of resisting the command of his lord and ruler. Come morning, the daughter would no doubt be dead; come morning, the vizier confessed, it would be likely Othman would be dead as well.

“That is unjust!” She cried.

“It is the will of the Shah”, the vizier sighed. “And we are not sworn to do justice, but the Shah’s command; for in ancient days it was thought the two would be the same.”

“Not even in ancient days was it so”, muttered book-wise She.

The vizier went and slept, his sleep troubled by memories of white banners and procured virgins. She and Din did not sleep, not for a while, for they held their heads together and plotted.

Come morning, the vizier busied his servants for breakfast, clothes and a draught of cool water, and left for the palace. He wished his daughters had been there to wish him a good day, but he understood they might not have wanted to do so.

Upon arriving in the great palace, he left his horse-train and his guards at the great stables, and went to the seneschal of the palace, a man with a magnificent beard and a lifetime of sad secrets within him.

“How is the Shah?” the vizier asked.

“The mutes have been summoned”, the seneschal said, eyes downcast.

“How is vizier Othman?”

“He also is no more.”

The vizier sighed, then went to prepare for the court.

At midday, the Shah appeared to the court and took position on his throne. His viziers were in attendance, save Othman, as were other ministers and advisors, magicians and soothsayers, and some of his favorite concubines — though it was well known within the palace that the Shah had not touched any of his lesser wives for the three years since Nitokris. Also in attendance were a variety of functionaries: the chief merchant of fabrics, mostly white ones; the chief procurer of flower-garlands and other wedding decorations; the master foodtaster, pale and sick for the overabundance of wedding treats; and the smiling chief of the city’s slavemasters, sure that sooner or later the court would run out of noble virgins, save those he had imported from war-torn exotic lands at a great cost.

Shah Shahryar was still a young man, tall and slender, and handsome but for his cold, restless eyes. He was dressed in white from head to toe, and stroked the dagger at his belt even as his restless eyes went over the court like a chill wind.

A vizier stepped to the lowest step of the steps on top of which the throne of the Shah was, and various functionaries and petitioners each in turn addressed the vizier; and the vizier spoke in the voice and the will of the Shah, and the Shah did not see anything on which to correct the vizier’s words. Taxes were considered, and irrigation-canals, and the import permits of new types of tent-cloth — the Shah watched all this with restless distaste, stroked his dagger, and observed the crowd.

Most of the crowd, the court, stood in attention, straight but not so straight that they would have challenged the Shah with their stiffness. Each smiled as the Shah’s gaze passed over that particular person, smiled as sweat bloomed on foreheads and under clothes, for the Shah is the Sun: there is no life without the Sun, but an excess of its atten-

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tion brings trouble and death.

Now, as a vizier — the sisters' father — was bringing to a harsh close the audience of a disputatious wine-merchant, a figure moved forward from the back of the court. For a moment the Shah stiffened, for the figure was clad all in black, cloaked and hooded, and thoughts of hashish-eating assassins with poisoned knives leapt unbidden into his mind — but the figure raised a knifeless hand, and cried: "I volunteer as the Shah's next wife!"

The vizier's answer died in his throat, and the Shah rose half off his throne, as the figure stepped forward and lowered the hood — it was She, made up as a bride, with gold on her throat and ivory at her ears.

"What madness is this?" the vizier cried in mortal anguish.

"I volunteer as the Shah's next wife!" She cried, again, taking the place of the wine-merchant, who had seen it fit to scurry away.

"My daughter", the vizier cried, "my beloved daughter, what madness is this? Come not here, say not those words—"

"Silence."

At the Shah's single word, the vizier and the court fell silent.

The Shah sat straight on his throne, a frown on his face. "Who are you?"

"I am She", She said, addressing the vizier for it would be intolerable blasphemy to address the Shah directly. "My sister is Din, and this is my father. I am a virgin of high birth. I am lovely and desirable, as you can see, your Almighty-kissed highness. I have the intimation that you require a wife of my qualifications, and seeing no other better qualified to this task than myself, I have taken it upon myself to offer myself for the task."

The Shah's mouth twisted in distaste, but there was a flicker of curiosity in his eyes. "Bold words, these. Do you rate yourself over Othman's daughters?"

A plague of whispers ran over the crowd; the vizier covered his eyes. She spoke, her voice flat. "Given that they are both dead, I rank the living over the dead."

The Shah hesitated, as if surprised, or related a fact he had known but momentarily forgotten. "She will do, then." He glanced at the vizier, the girl's father. "Make the arrangements."

Having said this, and spoken more than it was customary for a Shah at court to spoke in a span of days, he rose and shuffled back to his rooms. The vizier stood in place, raised his arms to his daughter's direction, and fell to the floor in a dead faint.

She divested herself of the cloak and hood, using them as cushions for her father, and sat next to him, her face unreadable.

After a while a second figure in black approached, and likewise disrobed, and showed itself to be Din, who had watched the spectacle from the back of the crowd. With palm leaves and a draught of cool water the two teased their father back to consciousness, and bid him to not worry, nor protest what had been their own decision.

"But", the vizier wheezed, tears in his eyes, reaching out his arms at She, "why you? Why, of all the noble girls, why must it be you?"

Din smiled, placed a cold cloth on her father's brow, and said: "Dear father, it must be She, for the Shah requires a virgin."

At this, the vizier fainted again. In his absence and the absence of Othman, the wedding of the evening was brief and badly budgeted, costing more than many better planned and more entertaining events of the past three years.

Thus then She and the Shah retired to his private chambers, and to a bedroom whose bed was fresh sandalwood, with pillows and sheets that had never known a sleeper's touch — and this did not comfort She, and nor did the stone floor of the bedchamber, which gleamed mirror-bright from

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the daily cleanings of three long years, each morning scrubbing out some terrible, red, sticky remainder of the night that had went before.

The Shah disrobed; She averted her eyes, as was proper, and then likewise disrobed.

For a while, both busied themselves with their own anxieties, until they were side by side on the bed and the Shah turned his restless, hard eyes on his new wife.

With a shudder, She noticed the Shah had brought his dagger to bed with him, and like the Shah, it too was shorn of its sheath.

The Shah noticed her noticing, and said: "You no doubt wonder the fate of those who came before you."

She nodded in gentle acknowledgment.

The Shah gave her a mirthless smile. "Other have volunteered, before you, driven by a similar curiosity. They have bought that knowledge with a dear price. Some have volunteered knowing what ails me, but they have all been mistaken."

She nodded in gentle acknowledgment of this also, and said: "Oh Sun of the Faithful, I pretend no such knowledge, and my curiosity is a trifling thing. I come, and volunteer, in the place of my sister, who is superior to me in beauty and wit, but is not suitable to be your wife."

The Shah frowned. "Explain yourself. If she is She's superior, and She is enough for the Shah, how can she not be suitable?"

"Ah! Sad to say, but she is not a virgin; she is too skilled in such sport as this bed is for."

"I do not think so", the Shah sighed, "but I do not gainsay your knowledge of your sister, even if you yourself are innocent on the matter. But how should your presence here be of any comfort to her?"

"Not a comfort to her, but to the Sun of the Faithful, for though Din is familiar to every traveller that comes to the markets and the stalls of the Great Bazaar, She is second only to her in the knowledge of such knowledge as a

wife should know, and the wife of the Shah above all other wives.”

“What would that be?”

“Why, every tale that smoothens the troubled brow, and ensnares the preoccupied soul. Breathtaking tales of Zothique, weird stories of Hyperborea before the Prophet; such legends as only the oldest scrolls hold, and jealously guard; such tellings as are in languages men no longer speak, and only women bother to learn.”

“Intriguing. Entertain me with one of these stories, She.”

And She entertained, and began telling from raw memory the story-cycle of Zothique, the last world, the world of necromancers and hopeless soldiers, torturers and wizards, the land of the dying sun and a wan moon; and she told and told, and the Shah’s taut body went limp and his eyes lost their focus and hardness, and his soul was ensnared and his brow smoothened. And after an unmeasured eternity of enchantment in words, She stopped mid-sentence and lowered her eyes.

“Pardon me, Sun of the Faithful.”

The Shah blinked, and came awake from the land of storytellers, and demanded to hear the end of the tale, and the true identity of the terrible abbot of Puthuum, who had been the subject of that particular twist of the tale.

She turned her eyes towards the window, where a sunrise was peeking in, turning the room’s walls red with light; and the same moment there was a knock on the door, and servant entered to present the Shah his morning clothes and his first draught of cool water of the day.

“I have run out of time, your Almighty-kissed highness; I fear this wife must leave you even less satisfied than those who came before.”

The Shah stood up and paced back and forth in indecision. He snatched his dagger off the bed, glanced at the servant, then She, then the window. “I...” He hesitated. “Is there much left of the tale?”

CHAPTER 83. THE MARRIAGE OF NITOKRIS

She raised her shoulders, then let them fall. "Some. But there are some more stories left of Zothique, and one must not speak of Zothique unless one speaks of Averoigne as well, a land distant in space and time, a werewolf-haunted land of dour priests and dark magic—"

"Very well then", the Shah grunted. "We shall consider those when the sun has set once more."

The next night She told the Shah the remaining stories of Zothique, and some of Averoigne; but when She had but breathed the first lines of the story of the Enchantress of Sylaire, sunrise was again upon them; and the Shah, in an agony of curiosity, spared her life for another day.

So days and nights went by. She told stories, the ten dozen stories of Malygris, the greatest of wizards of antiquity; the nine stories of the cunning thefts of Satampra Zeiros, and the nigh unspeakable secret fables of Zhothaqqah; and every night ended in a red sunrise, and a tale left half untold. The court was a more restive place now that there was no need for a daily wife, though the procurers of wedding supplies grumbled and grew lean. As the Shah slept not an eyeblink each night, he slept most of the days; and this too added to the relaxation of the court, and the smooth running of its affairs.

So days and nights went by: one thousand nights, and one thousand days, until the thousand-and-first night came, and She told the story called the End of the Story, and at the end of it closed her mouth, for there were no more stories to tell.

"Now", She said, "Sun of the Faithful, the stories are told. There is naught but silence, or worse, until the sun rises — unless you have a tale to tell."

The Shah gazed at She's features, which had grown familiar to him, and more alluring with each passing night spent denying pleasure for the sake of the tale.

"Tell me of Nitokris", She breathed.

The Shah gazed at She, and something broke in those hard eyes. He closed his eyes, and buried his face in her

breast to hide the tears.

“Tell me why a thousand virgins had to die”, She whispered.

He told her.

Great had been the trepidation and fear in the breast of the young Shah, as his veiled-in-white bride Nitokris approached the palace; greater still as the veil-hidden bride mutely nodded her assent, and stood next to him at the feast, unseen and unheard, for such shyness was the custom of the Shahs. Then the evening had been over, and it had been time for the night. The bedchamber had been lowly lit, the bed a bower of shadows and bare skin. And Nitokris had been as lovely as the rumor had told; as witty in banter and teasing as the rumor had told; as lovely and comely and soft-skinned and dexterous as the young Shah’s fever dreams had foreseen. More pleasant and pleasing had Nitokris been than any woman; and at the end of the night, in dark despair, the Shah had taken a dagger and plunged it into Nitokris’s breast.

After Nitokris (sweet Nitokris! how that name lingered!) the Shah had felt compelled to swiftly marry again, but the first girl, the virgin older daughter of Othman, had been crude, unskilled and unwilling; a disappointment of many and troubling implications; and in a mad, sad rage the dagger had again plunged into a chest, and red lips had grown redder, and then colder.

So, then, for a thousand nights, he had sought purification and forgiveness, a new fire for his heart, a fire which he could name; some sign of a woman the equal of Nitokris, for surely there should be one.

There had been none such, and no relief, until olden tales seduced the Shah to the land of dreams, and such fantastic dream-thoughts that the pain of Nitokris faded, and was no more, leaving only a sad guilt, brought forth by the considering of this sad history from the vantage-point of manifold other sad crimes of fantasy, and this law from the perspective of the wreck of millennial customs lost to

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the long aeons of time.

To this She replied with that one word of Arabic which means such speechlessness as is known only to the speechless Djinni of the Empty Quarter, and those in such horrified wonder as She: "*Wat.*"

"Do not make me say it", the Shah sobbed — the man, named Shahryar, sobbed — with a soul as black as the outside night. "If I do not name it, I do not need to admit it. It is not fit the Sun of the Faithful, not for one Almighty-kissed."

"Yet", She said in a low voice, "is the Almighty not a man, also?"

With sunrise, mute servants came summoned to the bed-chamber of Shah Shahryar, and found it empty save for a body with a dagger in its breast, cooling and cold since the darkest hour of midnight; and they took this and buried it where a thousand and one other bodies had been buried.

And the vizier, She's father, sang phrases of loss and grief at the court, and the court cringed in fear and dismay; and the vizier stepped up to the throne atop the steps, and sat there in the Shah's place, and called her two daughters to her side: She, the widow of the previous Shah (who was now dead and heirless), and Din, who (knowing people, not tales) could have much sooner divined the needless denial which had been the source of the Shah's sick, murderous reign.

And from that day on, no banner nor flag or hanging at the great palace was ever again of pure and undecorated white.

* * *

In other books a different end is given for this tale. Those other books say the dead body was She's, and the next wife was Din, and the vizier died of grief as Othman had died, and for years and years the Shah ground down the high-born girls of his wide and broad domain, each thrust of the

dagger making it more impossible to consider the first a mistake. So years passed, and then decades: wars were fought on the borders, and rebellions put down in the interior; but no tumult reached the White Palace, where every day a girl of the white-lipped nobility stood trembling next to a hard-eyed man, and each morning mute servants carried a cooling body to some hidden place.

After Shahryar died of great age and sadness, his cousin ruled; and it was not until the time of Shahryar's cousin's son that a great darkness of horse-men came from the north-east and overthrew the realm, and reduced its capital to smoking ruins. It was then told that the White Palace, blazing, made a reek of burning flesh much greater than could be accounted for by the number of the courtiers trapped inside; but nobody had the temerity to move those stones stained by soot and grease even after they had long cooled and been covered by moss.

One thin and disreputable book tells that in those late days the mute descendants of those mute servants tended the wild gardens round the ruins, and gladly if silently guided all visitors round the palace's circular ruin; but if any approached clad in white, top and bottom, they took big sticks and beat that person to death for such lack of tact.

One book — written by a philosopher — observes at the end of the tale the universal truth that any belief, no matter how wrong and wicked, no matter how doubted and disproven in the dark hours of the night, will be adamantly held as long as the holder has sacrificed much for it: and with each sacrifice, each evil deed done in its name, the conviction will grow. Thus none scoff so loudly at book-learning as those who had a chance at it, and threw it away; thus none are so eager to cheer armies as those who have lost limbs and sons to war; for who would want to admit so much blood has been shed for nothing? In the words of the poet, suffering ennobles, but nobles are no good.

One book, in latter times much copied, says She and the

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Shah both survived that final night, and fell in love, and lived happily ever after; but that is palpable nonsense, for though love can redeem much, it cannot undo the deaths of a thousand maidens, and the grief of twice that parents. And She herself — what calumny to say she was besotted by the mere proximity of that murderous tyrant! That, on that bed a thousand times rebuilt because of the red stains of her predecessors, she would love their killer! One suspects the book was written by some shameful latter-day descendant of Shahryar's pestilential line.

And, finally, there is a pamphlet by a mad poet which, very much missing the point of the tale, asks if She survived one thousand nights with the madman because She was, nude on the bed, the exact image of Nitokris.

The truth about Harry Potter

“Funny I never thought about it”, Ron muttered gloomily.

Hermione sniffed. “Well, it was there on the fifth page of *Hogwarts: A History*; am I to be blamed for you never reading it?”

Harry was still gaping and gasping like a beached whale — a small, pale and black-haired whale with a lightning scar on its forehead, but somewhat beached anyway — so Ron had to speak for him. “Er, Hermione, are you sure?”

“Look here yourself. Or better still, *Loqualibris!*”

The book shook for a while, and then a droning voice, not unlike that of Professor Binns, rose from it, mumbling its way through the paragraph in question.

“As is well known, the four founders of Hogwarts based their school, and thus the magickal powers of all Britain, on an alliance with the Dark God Sathanas, who would cause wizards and witches come forth from each generation as long as the school and the attendant wizarding world was kept secret, and certain devotions were served by the Headmaster. (see the chapter ‘Why you really should pass your N.E.W.T.s’ for more.) This, and similar blood alliances — such as that of Beauxbatons with Lucia de Fer, Durmstrang with Bub Ba’alze and Helsingin Yliopisto with the Devil of Maksalaatikko — are the source of all wizarding power in Europe.”

Harry whimpered.

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“It’s just a question of perspective, Harry”, Hermione said coolly. “You know what they say about witches and wizards among the Muggles — among those that don’t think we’re silly imaginations. They think we’re evil, but we’re really not. They’re just mistaken about Our Lord Satan.”

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Harry Potter and the Silence of the Lambs

“We have a new Potions teacher, class.”

“It rubs the lotion on its skin.”

Odysseus, the early years

An exclusive excerpt from “The Girl Who Wouldn’t Be Believed: Adventures of Young Odysseus Book One”, coming from Derivative Publications, 2025

There were four sisters, all daughters of King Priam of Troy. The eldest was Cassandra, who was cursed by the god Apollo for not letting Apollo have his way with her; gods are like that. Her curse was to always speak the truth, and to never be believed.

The next sister — and Apollo’s next target — was Phegea; when she similarly rebuffed Apollo, she was cursed to always lie, and to always be believed.

The third — you can guess Apollo’s mind — was Ethionome; her curse was to ever speak the truth, and to ever be believed.

The fourth — Apollo, and so on — was Nereis, who always lied, and never was believed.

These four sisters were all equal in beauty, and in other attributes as well; to make the matter, and Apollo’s conduct, more plain: they were equal in everything, and nobody could tell them apart.

Thus, if Cassandra was seen fleeing wailing down Troy’s corridors, and she was asked “Who are you?” — she would

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cry “I am Cassandra!” — and the one asking would not believe it, reasoning she must be Nereis instead.

And if two of the sisters were sitting by the pool, and were asked if Hector had just gone by — well, there were whole schools of philosophers in Troy, paid by King Priam and the coin of their own curiosity, whose only purpose was the identification of the sisters and the interpretation of their words.

With time, it became a belief among the philosophers — who did not much care — and among the general populace of Troy — who much cared — that if a man, or a Sapphic woman, ever devised a perfect method for communicating with one of Priam’s cursed daughters, he or she would have that daughter for a wife, and the corresponding portion of Troy’s kingdom for a fief.

This was actually not a promise made by Priam, or any of the sisters, who would have been appalled to be given to a stranger having resisted even a god; but the general populace of Troy had no access to the court, and so persisted in their delusion. And as ship after ship swayed to under Troy’s unbreachable fortress, legions of sailors and their captains heard the rumor: and it went to Thessaly and Attica as swift as the wind, and soon to all the lands of the Dorians, Aeolians, Ionians and Achaeans.

So the rumor also came to the island of Ithaca, where Laërtes King of Ithaca said “Pah!” and disregarded it; but his son, young Odysseus, listened with stars in his eyes at the story of the four princesses, and the web of logic imprisoning them. He then decided to go to Troy and see the sisters.

When he told this to Laërtes, the king said “Pah!” and waved a hand, being distracted — these gestures that Odysseus had long since interpreted as permissions; indeed, he had dragged an elderly philosopher to the royal tables to proclaim, over golden cups and platters, that *pah* was *yes* like the most primordial Dorians had pronounced it, and the hand-wave the most antient gesture for proceeding as pro-

posed.

So young Odysseus found a captain in debt to his father, and soon was at the shadow of Troy's walls.

Soon he was at the shadow of Troy's palace's walls; and leaning into their shadow, observing a pair of guardsmen not inclined to let anyone in that merely claimed the title of Prince of Ithaca. (For Odysseus had come alone, and dressed cheaper than his station.)

He took a roll of parchment and rolled it up, and walked to the guardsmen, and said: "I have a delivery for the chambermaid of Princess Cassandra. Let me pass!"

The first guardsman scowled and waved a hand. "Pah! Off with you, boy. You're not in livery. Who knows what evil scamp you are. Is that a letter, even?"

"It is the most horrible letter in the world", Odysseus said with downcast eyes, and turned to leave.

"Hang on a minute", the second guardsman said. "What do you mean, 'the most horrible letter'? It's not bad news or something?"

"Oh no", said Odysseus, turning back around and whispering with much conspiratorial airs. "I should not even tell, or the Oracle of Delphoi would eat my liver for spilling her secrets, but it's a letter which is against the spirit of letters, and very much upside down."

"I'll clout your head upside down", the first guard growled. "Enough with the riddles. We're not like those damned philosophers this whole city is now infested with. Speak plain!"

"I shall, then." Odysseus leaned in, and the two guards leaned closer to him. "A proper letter is read, right? *This is a letter that reads you.*"

"Nonsense!" the first guard said, with a mixture of outrage and fear.

"Oh, but peek inside", Odysseus whispered, and presented one end of the rolled-up parchment to the guard. The guard peeked in, and jerked back with a curse.

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“Gods on Olympos! The kid’s speaking the truth. An eye looked at me from within.”

“Let me see”, the second guard whispered, and looked at one end of the roll, and stumbled back gesticulating protective signs with both hands. “It’s witchcraft!”

“You understand now”, young Odysseus said in a low voice, “Why this most horrible letter in the world could not be brought in publicly; imagine the panic if some guardsman of low intelligence opened the roll and saw the whole thing!”

“What— what would happen then?” the first guard whispered.

“It’s too horrible to tell”, Odysseus said. “But now I must be on my way to Lady Cassandra’s chambermaid’s quarters. I and the Oracle of Delphoi thank you for your discreet assistance.”

And with that he left the guards and went unopposed through the palace wall, keeping the parchment in hand, but slipping the mirror held to one end of it back inside his jacket.

Loki's plot

Angrbodha is the mother of Jörmungandr, the World-Serpent which encircles the world, protecting it from the One-Eyed Shadow. She is also the mother of Fenrir, the Great Wolf which will destroy the encircled world, once it grows stale and oppressive; out of that ruin a new, fresh world will be made. Thirdly, she is the mother of Hel, queen of Helheim, the Concealer's Home, the domain of dead souls, where the dead are stacked high and wide to dreamlessly sleep, and sometimes walk. Helheim is the meaning of death; if men did not go there, the old would grow wicked with the passing of years, and their yoke on the young would be intolerable. If the old did not go to Hel, they would be sent there by fatherbane's black blade.

So then Angrbodha the Giantess is the mother of three saviors of the world: the worm which keeps it, the wolf which renews it, and the queen which washes it clean. You have never heard of her, for she does not crave fame. That is more the province of her fey husband, the oft-scorned ward of Asgard, Loki son of Laufey, who called Odin his father and Thor his brother, and was at times answered.

Laufey and Fárbaúti were the sires of Loki, giants, rough and formless gods of ice. Out of their foreheads Loki came, thought out of the thoughtless, sex out of the sexless, a man-shape crying on the icy battlefields of Jötunnheim, as the blood of Asgard rained on those fields. That was the bat-

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tle which slew Laufey, and slew Fárbaudi, and was Loki's birth; and it was the fell victor of that fight, Odin, the butcher-lord of Asgard, who found the child and in his boundless cruelty took it as his own.

So to Asgard came Loki, to Asgard of whispers and blood, as a child of high homes and low blood, as a son in a fine hall, without inheritance; as an icy heart amidst burning eyes. Loki had a friend in Thor, his brother, a friend of good cheer and little thought. Used was Thor to luxury, to the admiration of others, to expectations of greatness; and great did Thor grow in the warmth of those expectations, gracious and strong, matchless in battle, and matchless at cups and jests and song. Cold and wise did the eye of Odin watch over Asgard, as Thor led its armies; cold and mirthless did the eye of Odin direct those armies, and hard and reckless did the arm of Thor strike with those armies; the seeing eye directing the uncaring arm.

To all this was Loki witness, for there was no work for him, and no other friendship to distract him: for was he not the son of Laufey the Accursed and Fárbaudi the Slayer, in whose hands many fathers and sons had perished, and many mothers and sisters been entombed in ice?

Was he not a living trophy of Odin's victory, this ice-giant grown up in the warm climes of Asgard?

Victory was written on his flesh; but it was victory over him.

To see him was to warm the hearts of Asgard; but it was not him which warmed, but that what he was not: son of Laufey, but not king; son of Fárbaudi, but no lord; lofty only by Odin's power, clothed and fed only by Odin's small mercy. Loki, of Fárbaudi and Laufey, guest of Asgard, son of Odin — his titles were said with smugness and satisfaction.

So did Loki busy himself with books, which hailed him not, and blind singers, who recognized him not; with slaves that dared to address him not. As Loki was the lowest among the great of Asgard, so he was the greatest among the lowest of Asgard; and what warmth he did not want to

give to the great, he gave to the low. All this Odin saw, and cared not; some of this Thor saw, and understood not.

This was what Loki learned from books.

The first of living things was Ymir, and he was a giant the same as Loki.

Out of cold Ymir, all living things came, many giants and the first kingdoms: Niflheim, Muspellheim, and Ginnungagap.

So from Ymir came cool Búri, and of Búri came lukewarm Borr, and of Borr came a warm child much less in size and wisdom than Ymir, and the child named itself Odin.

In those old days when Odin was young, in days of which a few whispers remained, and no more, did Odin commit the first war, and slay by treachery his old-sire Ymir, the first of all living things, and to escape the wrath and grief of Ymir's other brood, did Odin then break the gates of cloud, and bring flood and flooding fire to Niflheim which was made bleak, and Muspellheim which was made barren, and Ginnungagap which was made no more; and the whole line of Ymir perished, save Odin's greedy brood, and one giant couple far removed from Ymir, out of which the line of Jötunnheim rose.

And from that day on there was hatred and war between Asgard, Odin's fort, and Jötunnheim, the land of the memory of Ymir. And that war did not cease, nor that hatred diminish, though its reasons were forgotten, until the power of the Jötuns was broken by the death of Laufey, the death of Fárbausti, and the capture and mockery of Loki.

In a single book, too, he read what had been told him nowhere else, though he later confirmed this from Odin's own lips: of Laufey and Fárbausti there had been three sons. He was one. Of the others, the book only said they were Helblindi, or All-Blind, and Býleipt, or Bees-and-Lightning; these were the names given them by Odin's baying hounds for the long ways they were put to death by, as they hung on Odin's banners to lure Laufey and Fárbausti to war.

This all Loki read, from lines put down long ages ago,

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and from thoughts that lingered between those lines, and from lines from the time of his birth, for which there lingered living witnesses, unwritten for fear of Odin, or hatred of Ymir.

This was then the reason why Loki was, as all Asgard later knew, a wicked and untrustworthy person, holding a unreasoning grudge against those that fed and clothed him, and schooled him in the manners of Odin's kin.

Then did Loki, wise in old prophecies, seek Angrbodha, fair giantess of his own kind, and his own mind; and in places far from Asgard they cast spells and made love, and gave birth to three children of doom: Jörmungandr, who encircles Midgard, keeping it safe and apart from Asgard for a little while, Fenrir, who will come to strength and cleanse worlds of their old debris, gods and laws and else, by teeth and blood and other ways to which Odin is familiar; and Hel, in whose quiet fields the dead of Midgard will sleep, stacked like wood and not oft walking in their sleep, and not to cease in their sleep until Odin's brood is dead and the brood of Odin's braves is dead and Odin is dead, and the world of their making is remade.

The Duel of Siwa and Delphi

It is said that during the reign of Ptolemy IV, the soft sodomous king of latter-day Egypt, there rose a great argument in Alexandria over which of all the oracles of the world was the greatest.

Some said the oracle of the oasis of Siwa, in the far west of Egypt, behind a horrendously hostile and long stretch of desert, was the greatest, having spoken the will of gods to Alexander himself, and before him to millennia of pharaoh gods.

Others said surely Pythia, the oracle of Mount Delphi, the highest holy place of Apollo in all Hellenic lands, was as supreme as any spot on this weak earth could be: had not all the heroes and half-gods in whose shadow Alexander had stood come to Delphi to learn their fate — the fate they could not avoid.

It nearly came to blows; but then it was noticed there was a holy man of Delphi and another of Siwa in the city; and the matter was brought to them.

This is what they said.

The emissary of Siwa said:

Delphi is a place of fools. The king of fools Zeus bid two fool eagles to find the centerpoint of all land, which is Karnak in Egypt. The fool eagles, being fools, instead smashed into each other up in the airs, and where their feathered carcasses came down fool Delphi is built.

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The emissary of Delfoi said:

Siwa is a pile of mud bricks in the wet arsehole of a vast barren desert. There are no women in Siwa; the men lie down with their camels, and this is seen in their appearance and intellect. Yo! There is but one good thing in Siwa, and that is the road out of Siwa.

The emissary of Siwa said:

Pythia the matron of Delfoi is a weird woman, a pitiful thrall to the men round her. Even her god, who speaks thru her, is a man; this is most outrageous and unusual. She sets up on a tripod of cold steel; her fool god Apollo blows a wind up her ass, and out her mouth blows a braying babble of the nether regions in the crude hexameter of the Greeks. The braying of asses is of more profit than the exhalation gone up which should come out of Pythia's backside.

The emissary of Delfoi said:

Siwa is an oasis; its water must be tainted. The oracle of Siwa is pig-headed, is ram-headed, would not see reason if reason intruded up his fecal hole. The oracle of Siwa's mother was a camel; a camel so overfed it didn't have legs, but just hooves sticking out of the fleshy corpulence of it; so greedy it had intercourse with a legion of athletic desert-devils, out of which the oracle of Siwa came.

The emissary of Siwa said:

The oracles of Delfoi are malice and dumbness in equal measure. Croesos ruined his kingdom because of the obscurity of Pythia. The Zeus of Halicarnassus was built to have a thousand appendages because of the obscurity of Pythia, and consequently Halicarnassus was struck by a plague of locusts and thunderbolts. Whenever a guest leaves Delfoi, there is a storm of sniggering and a tempest of intemperate laughter rolling round the peak of Pythia; men are like ants to Delfoi; our lives and empires crumble for their sport.

The emissary of Delfoi said:

The oracle of Siwa has no vision. He has no spirits. He tells people what they want to hear; and hence often tells an untruth, for the people of Egypt are greedy, and greed-

iest of all is the oracle of Siwa. He sold out a century ago, to gold-plated Amonite priests, to the strong arm of Alexander the king of squares, to the Establishment of Pharaonic-Hydraulic Imperialist Empire. He has no integrity; his prophecies are formulaic pap; he is a shill of the pyramid industry.

And then it came to blows and the blackening of eyes, and half the city of Alexandria burned down.

A parable with a ship

It was the beginning of February, and the meat ships had started to come from the Dry Sea, gravid, with thick blubber smeared on their black iron bows. They moored close to the piers, putting down iron walkways with iron-chain handrails, black but scrubbed clean. Quiet moans and cries could be heard from within; and the merchants and cooks went in and came out with armfuls and cartfuls of freshly butchered meat. The merchants and cooks did not see the butchering, though they could not avoid hearing it; for the crews of the meat ships were jealous of the appearance and exact nature of their meat-animals.

That is, if animals they were. It was a persistent rumor that at the other end of the Dry Sea the same ships bought from the slavers of Quontho; but the meat-animals were never heard to speak; only mewl, cry and moan. To this the rumors answered that there had been some cutting-off of tongues, and worse mutilations.

Rumors such as these stayed rumors because the city's magistrates enjoyed their meals, brimming with foreign meats as they were.

Only once in the history of the city had a meat ship been invaded: then on the orders of a particularly dyspeptic and vegetarian magistrate without fears of what she might find inside. She had ringed the ship with blockade chains until its crew let an officer of the Sea Guard in to search it for any

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immoralities. This did not help, as the magistrate accused the crew of drugging and poisoning the officer, given as she came out reeling, incapable of proper speech.

The magistrate herself entered the ship, then, with a retinue of ten Sea Guard officers of utmost loyalty, three of them Aentichian Small Gods that no poison could harm, and no blade kill.

After a long silence, cries were heard from the ship, loud cries, with human words, in the voices of those who had went in. One of the Small Gods exited, dragging the limp body of the magistrate, bellowing orders to shoot fire at the ship — to ram it — to destroy and sink it as fast as anyone was able. This was done; no survivors leapt or swam away from the ship, neither crew, cattle nor local. The magistrate could not recall what had transpired within; the Aentichian would not tell, and took her own life the next night.

Since then, the meat ships have anchored, done their business, and departed unmolested by the authorities.

Far more gruesome than the magistrate's folly have been the reactions of the lowlifes of the city. The younger and more rash sort of these occasionally attempt to sneak into the meat ships, half for a vague guess of there surely being something valuable, exotic and portable inside; and half because they wish to be the kings and queens of ale and talk for a night and a thousand nights afterwards. Some of these are caught and deposited back on the piers by the ships' crews, along with sullen glances, low growls and stabs from black-leather-covered fingers and feet.

Some aren't caught that quickly; and none of these are ever seen again.

The more optimistic of the barfolk think them slain and dropped over the side into the dark waters of the bay; the less optimistic abstain from meat-eating for a few days.

One particular miscreant, a half-naked northern barbarian mostly clad in swords and dirks, sneaked in with a drawn blade, swearing that if caught, he would cut his way out. Now it is not known how the people of the ships fight;

but the barbarian was thrown out without his weapons, and covered in marks variously attributed to whips, wooden slats or tenderwood clubs. One particular hit to the head had so permanently addled his wits that he was unable to personally opine on the matter.

In case the meaning of this parable is not obvious, well, in that case finding it is left to the reader, who may upon having polished this dim mirror enough gain many useful reflections from it.

Internet tells all

unvirulent
pettifogging
spartanize
semitubular
charonic
tooler
bitesheep
grooveless
Service Master

The wisdom of Mongolia

"His Holiness the 23rd Rinpoche Goatze Lama, the Inferior Khutukhtu of Khalkha, bids you welcome, o gracious guest."

"Oh, Mr. Guest, why do you pale so?"

"Oh. That is merely a mural, twenty feet high and one hundred across, that depicts spirits of the previous twenty-two lamas giving their traditional opening-of-the-lotus greeting to the newly reborn Goatze Lama. It, which some call the Reverse Bow of Opening, or the Red Well of Infinite Depth, or the Sacred Heart Viewed From Below, is one of our most holy and most common theological motifs — oh, turn around, gracious guest: there is the Lama himself, already greeting you with the unfolding of the sacred red rear lotus."

"Gracious guest? Why such a scream? And why are you running away?"

"Gracious guest?"

"What, your Holiness? Yes. Yes, I suppose he will run into that place if he keeps running in that direction; there is naught else but merciless desert without a single llamaseraï in that direction. Should I alert that place of his arrival, and ask them to prepare their ritual of welcome for him?"

"Very well, your Holiness. I will try if the phone is working."

CHAPTER 91. THE WISDOM OF MONGOLIA

"Work, machine! Work in the name of the devil Brixton which made you! I abjure, conjure and llure you, you machine! Ha! Hallo? Hallo? Can you hear me?"

"Good! Is this the Nunnery of Two Nuns and One Bowl?"

* * *

This all began on an otherwise fine Thursday. I was up, into my muesli, halfway through the Guardian, when there was a knock on the door.

There were three monks behind it.

Not western monks; no ominous black robes and rosaries. No, three Buddhists in saffron, with shaved heads. The middle one was wrinkled; the other two ripped.

The middle one thrust a platter at me; there were three abused wooden objects on it.

I said, "Hey, I'm sorry but I'm not going to buy anything—"

He barked, "You take one!"

I just wanted them off my hair so I grabbed one of the objects and closed the door in their face.

The thing was wood, the size of my fist, blackened with dirt and handling, carved to resemble a ball of twine or a human brain — well, normal human brains are bigger than your fist, so a royalist brain, then.

There was a second knock at the door. I peeked through the eye; the same three monks, the middle one beaming. I said a rude word to myself and went to finish my breakfast.

Then when I finally stepped out, struggling with my coat, one of the young, bigger ones came up behind me and conked me cold. I woke up on the diplomatic plane halfway to Tibet.

The word was *tulku*; the reborn Tibetan Buddhist master. Which I apparently was. This was news to me. The wrinkled monk explained me that I had unerringly picked, out of the three traditional toys, the one that had been the previous incarnation's favorite.

When I asked if there wasn't a teensy mathematical problem in this, he just said he was happy the odyssey to find the *tulku* had been a brief one, since the apartment given to them by the Brixton-Tibet Association had been much below the level promised and guaranteed them. Then he winked.

Also, he said, the political situation back home was hot enough.

At this I blanched a bit; being kidnapped into Tibet was sort of semi-romantic, but being kidnapped to *China* was dire. Especially because of my blog. Some of my pieces had been pungent. Some had been a single step away from the Ho Lee Fuk school of unfortunate implications.

And now there was a hot political situation, too?

The airport had no terminal, just two yurts, with "1" and "2" painted on them. We went through the latter, because we were an international flight.

The security check was done by a man in leathers and fur, with a saber on his belt. He used the saber like a magnet wand, swimming it up and down my behind and front; then he gave a friendly smile and waved me through.

There was a camel.

I didn't know if this was Tibet or Mongolia.

I wasn't quite certain what the difference was.

The camel bit me.

Then threw me in front of this amazingly ancient and decrepit monastery clinging to a mountainside like a wart to a camel, and this new guy in saffron, real thin and nervous, ran out, saying something about his holiness waiting for me. . .

* * *

"Why don't you do your job and leave me alone?"

"Because you need an adventure. Muesli, Guardian, computer, blog, sleep — is that any way to live?"

"Hmph. So what are you up to today?"

CHAPTER 91. THE WISDOM OF MONGOLIA

“We’ve got this society thing with foreign visitors. Three m—”

“Not interested.”

“But they’ve come all the way from T—”

“Still not interested. The blog doesn’t write itself, you know.”

“You don’t even know what I’m talking about!”

“Foreigners, yes? I’m kind of leery of coming to goggle at them like they’re circus exhibits. Sounds kind of semi-racist to me. Nasty pseudo-imperial business if you ask me, dragging them here to be gawped at.”

“What?”

“I like my foreigners in print. Print is the great equalizer. Nobody has an accent in print.”

“So. . . you don’t travel, do you?”

“Not unless someone makes me. And with this job, what are the chances?”

* * *

Well, telling the story in this order certainly clarified some things.

Now I’m going to drink myself into a stupa and try to forget.

Tales of Diogenes

Diogenes of Sinope was a philosopher. He stood up and cried: “Hey, people! People, hey, come here!”

When various idle persons came to him, he hit them with a stick. “I called for people, but only bastards came!”

* * *

A youth complained that he was unsuited to study philosophy.

Diogenes followed him nonetheless, and told him: “Why do you live, if you don’t care if you live well?”

* * *

Diogenes was asking for alms from an obnoxious rich man when the rich man cried: “You’ll get the alms, *philosopher*, if you can dialogue them out of me!”

Diogenes laughed and said: “If I could dialogue you, I’d dialogue you to fall into the latrine!”

* * *

“Why do we give alms to beggars, but not to philosophers?”

Diogenes thought on this for a while, and then said: “We can imagine ourselves reduced to beggars, but to philosophers? Never!”

CHAPTER 92. TALES OF DIOGENES

* * *

Diogenes was most outrageously eating his most simple breakfast — an onion — at the middle of the market, and so people gathered and began calling him a dog.

“You call me a dog?” he cried. “You, who pace around me and watch me enjoy my breakfast?”

* * *

At a feast some porcine people threw bones at Diogenes, given as the philosopher had in their eyes a habit of behaving like a dog.

Thus then Diogenes raised a leg and peed on them.

* * *

Diogenes was arrested, then sentenced to clean the communal latrines. This took all day and most of the night. When Diogenes then staggered homeward (or barrel-ward, for that was what he lived in), a gang of toughs came across him and cried “Yo! Diogenes! What’s up, you old dog?” — and then, smelling him, gasped and clutched their noses.

“You bastards”, Diogenes screamed in response, “clutch your arseholes rather, that would be better for *all* of us!”

* * *

Diogenes was caught defacing currency. The magistrate asked him why he had defaced the picture of the tyrant in a coin.

“This seemed better”, Diogenes said.

“You have made him into an ass!” the magistrate cried.

“This is his ass”, Diogenes said.

* * *

“Who are you?” asked a passing merchant, seeing Diogenes lounging around.

“I am Diogenes, and I am a dog!” he replied. “I wag my tail at those who give me something to chew on, I growl at those who won’t; and I bite rascals!”

“Ho, you’re plainly a man and not a dog!” the merchant said.

Diogenes bit him.

* * *

Diogenes was caught masturbating at the market, and diverted attention from this thusly: “But imagine, ladies, if you could similarly assuage your hunger just by rubbing your stomach!”

* * *

Diogenes was banished from Sinope (for the previous reasons); he left, crying: “And I banish you to remain in Sinope!”

Diogenes and Plato

Plato, lecturing in the manner of his teacher, defined men to be featherless two-legged creatures. Since Plato was a pre-eminent and soon to be eminent philosopher, this definition was much admired by other philosophers.

Diogenes, on the other hand, interrupted Plato's next lecture by swinging a plucked chicken around, screaming: "Halt me, for I am by Plato's definition throttling a man!"

Plato amended his definition to include broad and flat nails, men having these and chicken, even if plucked, having them not.

The very next day, and lecture, Diogenes stood up, raised his long, hairy arms, and wordlessly held aloft a plucked chicken with nails in its feet.

Broad, flat, rough iron nails, the sort the sailors of Piraeus use to repair their ships.

The chicken was dead, though not deader than the silence.

Diogenes did not say a word.

Plato said several, none of them such as can be reproduced here.

It was then declared that a man was a featherless two-legged creature with broad, flat nails, that had born in that state without any external intervention.

Diogenes was not seen for many months after that declaration; and it was widely believed he had been chastised

CHAPTER 93. DIOGENES AND PLATO

and humiliated by Plato's philosophical finesse and ingenuity.

A year later, Diogenes returned from the high valleys, where boys ride the chicken herds; and he brought with him a creature dressed in a toga, and attired like a man.

"I found this man in the pens of the sickest chickens. I have had such conversations with him as no philosopher has had with me, save Plato himself. I have brought him to live among other men", Diogenes said.

The creature was a chicken born with a most singular affliction of its lower limbs.

Plato admitted it to the academy, though he had denied this distinction of Diogenes.

Non Ex Nihilo

Dear Editors of the Lurid Mysteries of the Unknown Magazine,

Have you ever thought about the North Pole? I don't mean the well-documented passage to Inside Earth; I mean the place where Santa Claus lives.

Disregarding for the moment the actual reality of all those tales, have we fully considered the ancestral events and realities of pre-Neolithic Europe that gave rise to them? Even at the risk of sounding like a cheap von Däniken knock-off — and I do not want to dim the glory of that great man by the tawdry association of my own vastly inferior ideolucules — isn't the North Polar cohabitation of that curious pair Mr. and Mrs. Claus of shockingly inhuman nature, surpassing even the curious arrangements of the Gods of Olympos?

Let us consider this, if we dare — if we are not so bound by the hides of unbudging scientific orthodoxy, or so cowed by the arcane rituals of approval of its callously self-appointed gatekeepers of ritualistic scientific lore — let us consider the setting.

Two creatures, Mr. and Mrs. Claus, clearly of a kind separate and much superior compared to their servitors and the common mortality that worship them, live in a sep-

CHAPTER 94. NON EX NIHILO

arate, deserted (shades of Hiroshima? dare we speculate?) area, and appear to possess near-supernaturally efficient means of transportation. Even today, the technology to visit every single home all over the globe is barely imaginable — what could have spurred the cave men of the ancient world to think up such unthinkable?

Or what of the toy factories, so glibly romanticized by the storytellers of today? Factories are a distinctly modern idea! Only a very advanced society would have been able to engage in such concentrated mass production of trinkets — or rather trinkets to them, but almost magical sources of joy to those receiving them. As thoughts of colonialist Europeans coming to wild lands carrying glass baubles rise to mind, one cannot avoid wondering if the Europeans' ancestors were similarly impressed by the baubles of a vastly more advanced habitation in the far north — but surely this all is unbearable mockery to the science types who have decided these damnable things cannot be said out loud.

What factories churned near the North Pole in days long gone by? What crude and half-formed worker-shoggoths toiled in them, only later to gain the name of "elves" or "gnomes" from barbarians unable to comprehend their true mechanically biological nature?

What engines and satellite feelers, what untiring machine eyes, kept track of the "good children" and "naughty children", or those primitive tribes that either did or did not follow the dictates of their alien mentors?

And, above all, what pair of intelligences housed in the shapes of a man and a woman, eidolons of the desired end result of their stellar mission, lorded over all this, the first dawnings of human civilization? What teachings and commands were handed down before all this was lost under the coy names of "Santa Claus" and "Mrs. Claus"?

What are those rites that survive in the chimney — the milk and the cookies — the story of the flying machine fronted by a red warning light and roaring like a herd of bestial reindeer — the bottomless bag of gifts — and what

of the space helmet-like conical hats? What antennae did they conceal — and what of them doth remain in the inaccessible northern climes?

I propose to lead an expedition to the North Pole to inquire into these and other things the scientific orthodoxy does not want us to know; and as I return, like Einstien, like Feynmann, like Hawkings bearing his dice, I want your proud publication to have the exclusive.

My calculations for the necessary funding and the probable location of ancient-astronautical ruins are appended.

enthusiastically waiting for your answer,

Hale J. Bopp, B.S.

Lourdes

This chapter is a holy text, an inerrant divine revelation of the Undying and Undead Goddess Eris Kallisti Dysnomia Discordia. Any who dispute it are heretics, infidels and/or hell-spawn, and forever cursed in the eyes of women and men. Any who utter even a breath against it are shrillily, stridently, intolerantly attacking a legitimate faith tradition sincerely and lovingly held by suckling infants, apple-cheeked little old ladies, boring young married white couples (two polite children) and/or ethnic people.

May the unhinged, genocidal wrath of Eris descend like a cloud of mustard gas on any hurtful cretin who speaks badly of this holy writ.

Uh.

May the unhinged, genocidal *and apophatic* wrath of Eris descend *gently* like a mustard gas cloud *of tolerance* on any hurtful cretin who speaks badly of this holy writ, *of necessity expressed in the crude, nonscientific, nonfactual idiom of its day, for which neither God nor the text's current defenders take any responsibility, and which is no way diminishes the text's divine origin or the respect due it.*

CHAPTER 95. LOURDES

Next to a garbage dump and a stone's throw away from a syphilitic pool in the south of France, in 1858 in a cave in a village so far clean of the corrupting glance of the Eye of the World, did the daughter of a former miller and a prostitute have visions. These she did see because of the syphilis in her blood and in her head, and the flowing of blood onto her thighs, for such things make a woman likely to see divine visions, as all men know. These did she see because of the kicks at her head, and the stifling darkness of her room, and the droning of prayers ever at her ears, for such things make a woman likely to eat the wallpaper and see divine visions, as all women know.

She was trailing along after her sisters, doing nothing very much, when she came across a stream, and seeking a way across it came across a mountain. There she sat open-mouthed for a while, the wind rushing through her ears, except that it was not the wind. Also the Sun danced in the sky, the Moon peeked giggling over the horizon, and small green men jumped out of the river and back in, waving giant privates. All this she saw, but nobody else saw it, for such was the nature of her prophetic gift, occasioned by her humble and selfless suffering of repeated kicks to the head, and thus being not caused by herself, but by more powerful boot-wearing external forces. Then she saw — as much as one can see after the ravages of poverty, malnutrition, cholera, beatings, tuberculosis, neglect, measles, treatment for femininity, pneumonia, treatment for slowness, schistosomiasis, deprivation, noma, religion and the guinea worm — a little lady, round and naked, and covered in blood up to her chin. The little lady's stature was small, but her appearance was that of an adult; her hair was braided in that fashion, and her face was serious and stern. One of her hands was perpetually between her legs, squirming and thrusting in the blood there, pleasing God and herself with endless devotion.

But the lady also appeared short and tiny much as she herself was, watery of eye, long-suffering and long-suffered

of face, touched and touched again by hardship and hard hands, just as she was; but nonetheless triumphant and defiant, and dressed in the white robe of the gloriously poor and holy Children of Mary, much as she herself was not, though it had long been her desire — for that order was unwilling to admit her, though she constantly dreamed of it, because she was too poor.

The lady, in both forms, spoke as one, saying,

My hands bring me the greatest pleasures, but empty would their touch be if my body was not bathed in blood even to the juncture where my hands seek my child-making hollows for shivers and shakes. No children in these hollows, but blood! And no children in my retinue, except for my food! I was Jeanne of Orléans, sacred to the only God, child, when I lived again.

And the child screamed in terror and ran away, piss discoloring the blood on its thighs.

The next day the child returned, having told her parents of the little lady. The parents had beaten the child severely, and its eyes were swollen shut and one of its arms did not move; so it did not see the little lady but rather heard it only.

This the parents had done because they were very poor and reliant on the charity of the mother's cousin, a very godly man who despite the family's obvious sinfulness, as revealed by their financial status, allowed them to live in a luxurious one-room basement dungeon, formerly a jail-room for the torturous confinement and convenient torture of local miscreants of more obviously sinful nature before their more speedy disposal. It was a dark room, but due to its nature it could not hold much darkness and was easily lit by just a single candle, thus proving the idiom "Even a midden has warmth going for it". It had, moreover, running water, or at least dampness dripping from unexpected places in the ceiling; and pets, which miracle of miracles

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did not require feeding, as they nipped on the inhabitants. The room was, this much one could admit, smallish, but as the family's six children had dwindled down to four, there was really no need to complain. As the parents did not want to upset their pious, godly and sole benefactor, and thereby lose this their piece of Heaven on earth, for which they were constantly and loudly grateful and manifestly unworthy of, they very much did not want to hear of the child's divine visions, lest the rest of them be reduced to such miseries of deprivation that all of them should see God and his angels and green men daily. Thus they employed such instruments and means of persuasion as the room's previous owners had left behind, and praised themselves for their shrewd combination of the financial and the educational.

But as said before, the child returned to the cave, even if it could barely see, and not at all see the apparition. It spoke, over the sounds of its red right hand,

I made de Rais my scapegoat, and history my whore; for through sorcery and slaughter of children did I destroy the English and seduce the King of France. I fed the souls of infants to chop-licking demons to make demonic knights for my war storm; I took a spoon to virgin boys to maintain my present youth. I am blessed, for the God — more of whom soon — blessed me for my wickednesses when I lived again.

After repeating this, the child was beaten by her aunts and other relatives, who used nail-ended sticks, and by the Chief of Police, who used a leather belt. The child's father assured the Police-Chief that stories of these apparitions would now cease, and to make sure of this he made the child write "Penance!" thirty thousand times on the walls with coal, thereby combining the interior-decorational and the educational.

When the child went to school, the nuns kicked her with nail-studded boots and made her write "Penance!" sixty thou-

sand times, though they had heard nothing of the apparition. Had they heard, they would probably have added more half-pounded nails to their boots and done the same.

Despite all this, the child returned to the cave and again saw the apparition.

The apparition that time spoke, saying.

Penance! Penance! Penance! Penance! Penance!
 Penance! Penance! Penance! Penance! Penance!
 Penance! Penance! Penance! Penance! Penance!
 Penance! Penance! Penance!

When the child repeated this, the apparition added,

In Hell will the demons dismember your father while he still lives; never shall life leave his body there, even if his fingers and palms will, his tongue and ears and toes and feet. There shall be an unceasing liveliness in him, and thereby an endless capability for pain. By fire and rope and blade and stone will his body be sundered for his crimes against you.

And the Chief of Police will be buried in burning shit and nobody will hear his cries for succor as he swims, not knowing which way is up, which down. He will know naught but terror, the sloughing of his skin, the increase of heat, the straining of his bones, the wet smack of his movements, and the terror, ever the terror.

And your mother who did not rescue you from your trashing and molesting by your father the demons with rape with cocks like spiked batons of glass needles soaked in the shit of syphilitic whores and smeared with pus from the wounds of lepers.

And your aunts, oh, your wicked aunts will be punished like your wicked mother, until the end

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of time, but they shall bear the demons' assault in all of their holes, front, back and mouth, alike. And not even insanity will rescue them, nor the dulling of senses or the familiarity of sensations. If they tire of pain, I will stroke their heads and turn it to pleasure, and make them scream in fear of their mortal souls! If they tire of pleasure, I will make them a game, and enjoy their torture of each other for a promise of personal relief — and by the time they are alone and see the lie, I'll have more wheels to break them on, wheels within wheels!

For you are my child and I am fond of you; I will inflict endless torture even worse than these descriptions on any who even thinks badly of you.

If a man sneers at you, you will get a necklace of his eyes and jewels.

If a woman laughs at you, I will make you pillows of her skin and hairs.

If a child, if a child will not play with you, and mocks you and holds you down and pulls your hair, oh, those children I will sew back to the wombs of their evil mothers, and those mothers I will slay; and I will do the due rites so that when those wicked children are born of cold flesh they slither inside a coffin, and six feet under hammer a wooden box hoping for a resurrection that will not be their lot.

To nuns, nothing; nuns, especially the Children of Mary in their white robes, are nice and have nice boots. To be one, hold on to your faith and don't let anybody tell you otherwise!

And the child was comforted, smiled, and went back home.

But priests heard of the apparition, and the local priest came and asked the child what she had seen.

And the child answered, Guuh. Ga ga. Pretty colors. Pretty pretty. Must go pee-pee. Hihi. Splish splash.

And the priest went away in disgust, for the child had been doing unclean things even as she spoke.

The next time the child heard the apparition saying, in a voice like her mother's,

Bring me a candle, a long, thick one, like the arm of a strong man. Leave it here, and I shall cover it in manna such as will make its odors sweet to men.

And the child brought a candle to the cave, and its parents were worried.

Do you suppose the wretch ate the candle, the mother wondered.

I rather fear she rendered herself unfit for marriage through it, the father said.

Oh! No, the mother cried, then we will never be rid of this drooling syphilitic little piece of shit. We must find her a man who does not care what has been in her, if she has not found such a man on her own already.

What, cried the father, you have suspicions of this sort?

Why, the mother sobbed, is it not universally known imbeciles like our feeble-minded child are so due to sins committed in Heaven before their birth, and in anticipation of various sins they have a weakness for; for indeed our God is just and without fault. So by the ugliness of her face and the febleness of her mind can we know our child is a monster, sinful beyond speech, predestined to damnation; and you likewise are a dreadful sinner for siring such a creature, for God is unerringly just. It must be true what is said of you, that you lie with other men. Has not God always decreed that a mortal sin? Have not pyres unending burned devouring shrieking men for that transgression? Suppose you that God has recently reversed his eternal judgment, and pardoned all sodomites from the fiery torments of Hell,

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and replaced them with the saints and prophets who told his will on this and were never contradicted by a thunderous voice from the sky?

And the father struck the mother across the face and said, Shut up bitch. Thereby he combined the theological and the personal.

In the meanwhile, the child went and told the priests to build a chapel near the cave, one with a nice roof and some mumbled thing in the cellar. The priests laughed and refused, so serpents boiled out of the ground and bit them, and they writhed in agony. But this happened only in spirit, so the priests did not notice this as they drove the child away with blows and curses.

The next day the child again wandered away and across the fields, trailing drool and piss, and the neighbors shook their heads and hoped the child would die.

This time the apparition was in the cave.

The apparition commanded her to drink the water.

The water of the fountain or the well? the child asked, but was told no.

The water of the dirty spring, here at the back of the cave? the child asked, but was told no.

The water of the brackish pool, here on the muddy ground? the child asked, and was told yes.

The water is dirty, the child said, and will upset my stomach.

Drink it, *connard*, the apparition said. I will clench your stomach with my burning fist, and if there is no water there you will die.

The child quaked in fear and fell on its face and drank the awful water, which was half mud and tainted with dead birds, stagnant and reeking of putrefaction and piss and feet; and a great fever and shaking came on the child, but though her mouth flooded and her guts roiled, she miraculously did not throw up.

Then the apparition commanded her to throw up, and she did.

Then the apparition commanded her to pick it up and eat it again, and she did.

And three times did she expel her stomach, and three times did she eat it again, as the holy woman commanded. And this did she say in prophecy: This is my body, which I eat in memory of you. This is — on the third time — my blood, which I eat in memory of you. My lips make this holy, and my stomach makes this water a part of me.

And the apparition said,

What you drank had the accidents of water, the brown color of water, the stench of dead things and the taste of sickness and decay, but in substance did you drink the Flesh of God, and when your expelment brought out the blood of your insides, you did collecting it back into your mouth drink the Blood of God.

This you did as much as the first disciples did, when they feasted on the maggot-ridden corpse of their Teacher, stolen from the commoners' grave after the Cross, and made a garden of worms and feverish love of the dead for all of them. (And after the Teacher's body was all devoured, they killed and after three days ate Judas, their leader and the Beloved of God, in similar fashion, and similarly loved his dead body; but afterwards they did so only to children, for only children were pure.)

When the child told her parents of all this, the parents fled shrieking and sent for priests and exorcists, and denounced the child and never spoke to it or of it again, and threw stones at people who came to them to ask them about the child.

Thus they combined prudence and exercise.

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But when the priests ordered the child to ask who the apparition was, the apparition straightaway answered and told the child,

I am of the only God existing; the one who commanded all the visionaries and prophets, all of them, and made them thirst for the blood of the infidel, and denied them the pleasures of flesh, and made them distrustful of difference and hateful towards variance, and gave them the endless gift of delighting in misery, deprivation and suffering.

I am of the God of the Pit, the only God existing, the God who put a knife in Abraham's hand, the God who laughing rained fire on Sodom and Gomorrah, and gave eternal death for passing fancies, and drowned the world in a flood, and battered and hacked at and raped his chosen people who only cried for more.

I am of the God of the Damned, the God who set a man murdered and screaming on a piece of wood as his sign and ordered his followers to do likewise. By the suffering of the poor, he is named; by the beauty of their crawling in filth, is he glorified.

I am of the God of Multitudes, that told one man to swing his saber at the neck of his neighbor, and told his neighbor likewise. I am the Lord of All, the Creator and the Killer, the wolf in the flock, the parasite in the brain, the merciless Sun over your last moist breath, the uncaring Moon over a night of tears and blood; I am the worm which conquers, and the lord within a radiant, fair, stately palace's fever-burned ruin.

I am of the God of Fists, the God that commands women to obey those that beat and abuse them,

even as I injure and throttle their abusers with disaster and disease. I am of the selfish God, of the jealous God, of the only God you shall have for there is no other.

I am of the Tyrant, the imperial commander, the one at whose feet you grovel, in fear and awe of me, the one whose name you worship, in dread and adoration of me, the one you love more than your parents or children, and in whose name you will shovel your parents and children, yea, even all your loved ones into fires and flames in fear of the flames I have set apart for you.

I am the mother of this God, and so became through his will coming over me. I was a virgin, before he intruded upon me, and remade me pure again after his defilement of me.

I have felt the hands of God on my flesh, and the mouth of God on my breasts, and the burning hardness of God within me. God has thrust himself between my legs, and nine months have I dwelt in the ecstasy of God within me until he expelled himself and walked on two fleshly feet.

Yea, in the dark of night God came on me, the betrothed of Joseph, and pinned me and stripped me, and I was naked before his gaze. As if three was he, in the size of his manliness; as if three in one was he, in his fury of despoiling me. And not like men did he consume me, and not like men did he consummate his marriage by divine right; for as men took me by the front, after this, after Joseph cast me out, so did God take me front behind, like dogs do, and broke his divine phallus off into my behind, so that I after swelled of excrement as much as of the son of God, and in giving him birth I was a swollen

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thing, legs and arms buried in me; and I expelled the Son of God in a fountain of liquid filth, in a brown flood did I release him, in a rush of such volume and noxious mass that three men were slain by the mere sight of it.

I am a sacred virgin; even after my violation did my frontal hole stay closed, sewn by giggling angels after each day's violations. I am a virginal mother, and in worlds above the whore and wife of God, again his bedmate as I was to give birth to him in flesh; and the pains and pleasures of flesh are as if nothing compared to the fervor and violence of our rutting in spirit. I lie with the Lamb of God, and his fleece is as soft on me as his animal demand is hard on my thigh. My rose is red and rent by his entrances, and weeps white tears of his glory. Glory, glory to God in the highest, and in me his piece, and white spill over the heads of men!

I am the one worshipped by the people, until the priests made theology of me. I am the one echoing swollen-breasted demon-goddesses of long ago, the long-tongued one whose cleansing licks arouse you. I am the mother dashing my children against the rocks, the mother of wandering hands and unnatural desires.

I am Mary, betrothed at twelve to Joseph, an old goat and a despoiler of virgins, yet saved from his encroaching lust by the divine pox that destroyed his manhood, and saved from his pursuing wrath by the divine cancer that made him weak. I am Mary who god-pregnant ran away from that awful man and gave swollen birth in a ditch, nude in the view of leering men. I am Mary, my son's lover from the first day and before, ever virgin and ever bleeding my first for

his pleasure and my pain, the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God.

And as the child slack-jawed listened to the apparition only she could see, the priests held a heated conversation on whether she was syphilitic, hereditarily simple, a lying bitch, a demon-possessed wretch, an attention-hungry little whore, a drooling imbecile kicked in the head once too often, or a genuine prophet of God.

And as she stopped making cooing noises, and as piss stopped dribbling down her thighs, a priest asked her, is she an evil, unchaste demon? In which case we will torture you to death and throw your bones to dogs.

And another asked, or is she the Immaculate Conception? In which case we will worship you, give you a nice place to live, and never let your parents beat you again.

And the child said, She is that second thing.

And the priests said to each other, she must be telling the truth, for she is a simple, syphilitic child and would not know the word otherwise.

But one priest persisted, and asked, Dear child, don't you understand that's not a name?

The child said, You said it.

The priests roared, That's a quote from the Scripture! Hallelujah! From the Gospel according to Luke, 23:3, it cannot be anything else! This incontrovertibly shows the apparition is genuine and divine! Let us build a chapel here!

So a chapel was built there, and the place was called holy, yea, even by the highest men of the Church; but they never fully said so, for in their hearts they believed the child to be either syphilitic, hereditarily simple, a lying bitch, a demon-possessed wretch, an attention-hungry little whore, a drooling imbecile kicked in the head once too often, or a genuine prophet of God — all of which would have been greatly embarrassing to them. And the highest priests said, If you are helped and healed by a visit to this place, this ver-

ily is the awesome power of God. But if you are not helped nor healed, then it is your own fault. And if this seems cruel and evasive to you, well, you try appealing the decisions of the silent Lord of All, who on a bad day struck down cities with fire and brimstone, and on good days kills infants by diarrhea and parasites. Better for you to crawl down on your face before us and God, than to risk offending the omnipotent, capricious, sadistic, petty, legalistic Lord God, and us his servants who emulate him in all we do, amen.

And the child, the fount of healing and help, was sent away to a closed place by the priests. She was not sure that was right; but the priests told her that as Heaven had chosen her, she must choose Heaven; as God had spoken only to her, she should speak only to God. Seeing how happy logic of this sort made them, she was struck speechless, and she took the white robe of the Children of Mary, which she had long wanted. In the company of sour women, behind strong walls and away from people she remained herself, and grow up sickly, drooling and infirm, the same she had ever been; and in the end she fell ill, and lost a leg, and her last wits, and in raving syphilitic lunacy died aged thirty-five. And it is said that in their grief her devotees brought her body to the cave and the pool and submerged it there, but it did not live again, it merely came apart.

And the apparition spoke,

I put my spell on this place! No matter how grimy and tawdry it becomes, people shall love it! No matter how vain and empty its promises and pretensions, men shall grow wistful over something divine whispering here — it is me! Me, in a plastic flash of water, me, in a sneering plaster saint! No matter the moaning of the cripples as they're trampled, no matter the cries of the syphilitic as they flounder and drown in the pools, no matter the tears of those whose symptoms return — my glamor will rush in their

ears like the wind on that first day!

Those that have not seen this place shall dream of it, in pink and hope!

Those that only journey here shall see it over the next hill, ever brighter and brighter!

Those that come here, shall be blinded by their desire — yea, though there is no healing here, nothing but money-changers and brackish water, they will throw away their crutches and tell themselves they are healed!

And as God laughs, with every step away from here their infirmities shall return, their sicknesses grip them anew, and their self-delusion and excuses multiply! Let the fools blame themselves as God laughs!

None shall recover their arms, that have lost them! None shall regrow a leg that has wasted away!

Year by year, fewer miracles as the medical-examiner's art grows!

Year by year, a brighter past to blind the hopeless day!

Year by year, more people, more people, leaving full of disappointment and doubt!

Year by year, more people, more people, more witnesses that witness'd nothing! More nothings, out of nothing, nothing witness'd!

Year by year, more cripples that crippled leave — more lame, that crawl away crutchless — more syphilitics and feeble-minded and cancer-ridden, that carry their afflictions away but leave a little here with me!

The greatest betrayal, the cruelest joke, as God laughs!

CHAPTER 95. LOURDES

* * *

Again, it should be noted that this chapter has been a divine revelation just as genuine and sincere as any other. If you don't like it, you're an intolerant bigot. If this should insult you, blame the source which is God, but just remember that theologically speaking God can't be blamed for nothin'.

Iterations of Solomon

In ancient days, King Solomon ruled, and was presented with two women, each holding an arm of a crying baby.

“Silence that brat”, Solomon said, and a guardsman struck it in two straight down the middle.

“Good grief!” said Solomon’s minister of publicity.

* * *

In ancient days, King Solomon did rule, and was presented with many cunning problems to vex his ruling-muscles and keep him from the chamber of the Royal Council.

One such problem was this: two women entered, disputating loudly, and after them was carried a child, which both of the women claimed as her own.

“Find the father that gave birth to this child!” Solomon cried.

“Good grief!” said Solomon’s biology teacher, clutching at his poor old heart.

“No, wait,” Solomon corrected himself, “let’s rather see which woman it fits back inside in. That’ll do the trick!”

The women, the child, and the biology teacher all died.

* * *

In days of old, Solomon ruled. Two women and a child were escorted to the throne-room; both claimed ownership of the child.

CHAPTER 96. ITERATIONS OF SOLOMON

“Which of you has the hair of the child?”

The child had no hair; hurriedly, both of the women took shears and made themselves likewise.

“Which of you has the face of the child?”

The child was pudgy; hurriedly, both of the women slipped and slammed their faces against the floor.

“Which of you has the wiener of the child?”

At this the women cried, “But it’s a boy, your royal highness!”

“I repeat, which of you has the wiener of the child?”

One of the women snatched a dagger from a guardsman, and emasculated him. She was declared the true mother, because no other would do something that drastic.

* * *

A long ago, King Solomon ruled. Two women and a child were brought into his throne-chamber. Both claimed the child.

King Solomon summoned a demon, as he often did, demons having built his palace and everything. He posed the question to the demon.

The demon looked at the child; the women were outraged.

The demon looked at the women; they were scared.

“Okay,” the demon said, “which of these is the child?”

* * *

Two women and a child were brought into King Solomon’s chamber, for both claimed the child and could not come into an agreement.

King Solomon took the child as his own, and gave each of the women one of his bastards. As he was the king, the women could not complain.

* * *

A child, with two women both claiming to be its mother, was brought in front of King Solomon.

“Decide, O Wise King!” the courtiers said.

King Solomon had them both tortured until the false mother confessed. Then she was put to death.

* * *

King Solomon judged over the case of a child and two women claiming to be its true mother.

The king brooded long in judgment, and then an awful expression bloomed on his face.

He called for a knife, a needle, gut-string and a tarp to collect the blood. Divers lackeys went to get these. The king ordered the three disputants to be stripped — the liar confessed.

* * *

A child was brought to King Solomon, with the message that two women claimed it, and the lower courts could not decide.

“I am bored, I should just kill this child”, said the monarch.

“What if the child is the prophesied Messiah?” asked a pro-life advisor.

“Then will not the Lord protect him?” Solomon said, with a sigh.

“Unless ’tis to see your nature revealed in this decision”, said a pro-choice advisor.

“Ever a rodent in your maze, oh Lord”, Solomon sighed, upwards.

The child was paraded around Jerusalem in cloth-of-gold, with garnets in its hair, carried by its two mothers; and then Solomon decreed the first lesbian marriage in history.

This made Solomon’s god angry, so the god made Solomon grow weak and blind, and then dead; and made Solomon’s

CHAPTER 96. ITERATIONS OF SOLOMON

kingdom diminished, but a reeking tradetown of camel-men and barbarians, a place of mud walls and less than a thousand souls; and being a god, made this so in the present, and in the past also.

ACT/ADD

In the beginning, the Anarchical Creative Thing made the mortal creatures: fish and fowl it made them, and then came to the making of the mortals that think the most, feel the most, and suffer the most — the third wasn't in ACT's plan, but was inevitable.

“Bee”, ACT said — this final creature being made, he turned into this task of making the thinking things. In a great jumble it made them, the thinking parts and the parts of perpetuation stuck together in great happy heaps and chunks and singlets, each of them happy in the configuration it took.

Now order intruded, as inflexible and misguided as always, which is very, and shrieked at the sight of this variety. While the ACT was away, the Archical Destructive Demon divided the thinker-piles into different piles of piles by their mass, which made no order, into different piles of piles by the greatest circumference, or the smallest one, or their noisiness or mean temperature: but all this made too many categories for ADD, known for its short attention span, to endure.

Thus ADD took a sword and, with great screaming, began to strike the thinker-piles apart. In the end, the place of creation was awash with blood and ruined; and ADD was red in tooth and claw, and in a great hurry besides — knowing that ACT would return — and so kicked the separate

parts together, giving each a thinking part and a part of perpetuation; and then it beheld the work of its villainy and saw, blindly, only two kinds of a thinker-thing; and departed.

Now ACT did not return, for as ADD is inflexible and misguided, so ACT is unforeseeable and unguided; and so the thinker-things mopped up the blood, called themselves Humans, and were sad.

For each of them had a thinking part (which were brains, but were called spirits and souls and other such nonsense by those who knew not of ACT and ADD), and for some those thinking parts had been in a pile with two of them: and those Humans and later Humans of their like felt the need to find a similar thinking part and to form a Human pile, no matter how temporary and sexual, with it.

For some this missing opposite was of the same flavor as they were themselves, and this was called homo-sexuality, because to ancient Greeks, unlike to modern hooligans, “homo” meant “that which is similar to me”.¹

For others this missing part, this half of their heart, was of a different flavor; and for this the Greek word was “hetero”, or “that which is different from me”.²

Some of these first Humans had been in piles of more than two people — most of them actually, for these had been some big piles, some of them — so their want was partly aimed at the same flavor, and partly at a different one. Some wanted just one other to complete themselves. Some wanted more, in equal or greater harmony. Most could settle for either flavor, though their taste preferred one over the other. And some were content to be alone, as they had been in the beginning. And all of this was neither good nor bad, but just how things were, and are.

¹Then again there are theories that this is what modern hooligans signify when they scream the word, though they do not admit it to themselves.

²Curiously, “that which is different from me” has also been used as a hurtful identifier.

These thinking parts were the essence and the main thing of these Humans; but neither they nor ADD could really well see these parts.

Each of the Humans could see and had a part of particulation and perpetuation, which they called a body and genitals. And for some these were the wrong ones, cleft apart by ADD, and hastily put together wrong. Some were in their thinking part the flavor called Woman, but were encased in the parts which were Man; and this was a great pain.

And the pain was much greater because many of these Humans could not understand why this was, and sought to deny and ridicule it, and said: if your heart's wearing the wrong coat, why don't you change your heart?

Now the ADD had seen only two kinds of these body-parts, being blind and not inclined to stare into crotches or groins; but as ever with ACT's actions, there were more than two sides to this. For as the thinking parts' affections were flavors, or colors, and thus varied in gradations as tiny and wide as any taste or throw of color on a canvas, so too were the differences in the body-parts both great and subtle. The ADD could call them just two types, being blind and in a hurry; but Humans themselves were neither. True, there was difference in height and weight and color of hair, but there were subtler differences: some Humans had breasts, or testicles, or ovaries; and these came in many combinations of absences and presences, some rarer and some more common, but none of them bad unless they discomfited the brain within.

It is said that in latter days these Humans sent an embassy to find ACT, and to ask why they had been made as they had been, and whether they could ever be put together again, for their suffering was great, and their tools to complete themselves, to find the right bodies and their missing parts, were lacking, and many of them had been made hateful by delusions denying the primordial truth of this true tale.

And it is said that in a far place beyond burning forests

CHAPTER 97. ACT/ADD

and glass lands the embassy found a black castle on the edge of the world, and in a tower spiralling into the yawning colorful skies of night they found ACT, at work on some anarchical and creative project; and they posed their questions, and begged for their maker's help.

It is said, finally, that ACT killed them all for this, for it was the maker, not the owner — and they were Humans, not Pets.

Crank, up the volume

RECEIVED
THROUGH
DREAMS

Methinks I shall conjure up a few stone tablets, a chisel, and a hammer, and start calling them my organic notebook.

No, don't laugh — I have good reasons. Listen.

Do you know the ways paper is made are unnatural, with a lot of wasteful byproduct toxins? Bleach, turpentine and sulfuric acid — are these the things you want in your child's sketchpad? Have you been fooled by corporate propaganda into believing you must buy, have and consume white Chemically Modified (CM) poison slices rather than sweet, clean, healthy, natural stone, used by the people of Mesopotamia for thousands and thousands of years? Can our society afford papercutting itself into oblivion? These are all deep, important questions with easy, slogan-like answers; so read on. Paper is litter, paper is poison — but stone doesn't even need to biodegrade, because stone's a part of nature already.

Also, paper's so dull, so bland, so uniform — so white, actually, though I wouldn't go so far as to openly accuse paper manufacturers of being racist stooges of the evil Western-Imperialistic Big Cellulose that's trying to keep your little local homegrown stone tablet makers and other proponents

CHAPTER 98. CRANK, UP THE VOLUME

of different ways of writing down while they reap the profits from the cooling corpses of those slain by their heartless pursuit of profit and their black-clad torture assassins — while every tablet of stone is unique.

Stone inspires; stone loves you. Paper, meanwhile, just brings nausea, stress and headache, and you know this — it's no accident every bill you receive, or every bad grade your children get, are inscribed on the evil industrial pulp. Organic stone couldn't hold such hard, impersonal, toxic thoughts. It's no wonder leading physicians all over the world are diagnosing thousands of people daily with Cellulose Derangement Syndrome (CDS), whose symptoms are discomfort, anger, depression, fear of letters, estrangement from nature, and violent tendencies — or as the organic notebook movement calls it, *paper rage*, the symptom of our age and the "paper anniversary" of its divorce from healthy and natural ways of life.

But that doesn't need to be so. Can you see it? A world more loving, more tolerant, more secure, with a million college students hacking away at their essays with smiles on their faces, mothers knapping letters on rose-colored granite to their daughters, a million pebbles with confessions of love passed in classes — picture that, and ask yourself if you see any future for this industrial poison-based papercut hegemony of ours? Our once so vibrant culture has been reduced to nothing but printers spitting our ream after ream of hateful inanities — the arts that once produced Gilgamesh and the Adventurers of Indi-Jo-Nesh are nothing but a wasteland of paperbound rape, violence and greed! But together, we can change all this — we can cast away the poison paper, destroy its peddlers, free its slaves, melt down the printers and the presses and the computers, burn the pens and pencils, and pound into the rock of ages this word: "NEVERMORE!" — and we shall live happily ever after!

And the alternative: ask this of yourself — what was written before paper? Beautiful, spiritual books like the

Bible, the Bhagavad Gita, the Goat-Man Prophecies, and the Oracles of Inanna. What was written after? Why, Darwin's racist tome and the Mein Kampf. Paper was an integral part of the Holocaust — it is no exaggeration to say that the racist and xenophobic writings of the Nazis went hand-in-hand with paper; and without paper, such an industrial genocide would never have been possible. Before paper, perfect natural health and spiritual harmony; after paper, greed, intolerance and genocide. Paper is what happens when scientists, instead of people who really understand nature, are allowed to meddle in things men are not meant to know — why, they say paper is safe, but the last time scientists told me to trust them they were telling my grandparents to go into the showers — to get gassed! In Auschwitz! That's what science, and evil unnatural exclusionist paper science especially, is all about! Dropping poison gas on naked people! That's what the corporate shill poison sheet apologists are defending!

Ask them how they can live with themselves — and see, they have no answers.

They've never had any answers.

To ensure that my tablets are as natural and uncontaminated by modern toxins, pollutants and hurtsies as possible, I've decided to open a vent into the burning intestines of Mother Earth herself, using a large quantity of explosives; but thanks to the machinations of the poison flat peddlers and their paid-for spineless government yes-men, my applications for the generation of a medium-size volcano on my backlot have all been returned rejected, some of them with coffee sprayed over them.

And I doubt it is organic coffee, either.

The seven signs your cat is God

- Levitation. Normal cats fall. (This is a safe first test, since normal cats always fall on their feet. Divine cats remain levitating where you dropped them, and overwhelm you with feelings of regret and suicide.)
- Eyes that glow even in the absence of all other light. (Cat eyes reflect light, but they should not appear “as if endless twin tunnels lined with coals and twitching forms of those burning”, as per Winfrey.)
- Intelligible speech in Ancient Sumerian — you understand it even though you don’t know either Ancient or Modern Sumerian. (Animal vocalizations can appear to contain words and fragmentary phrases of languages you know. This is perfectly normal, and not something to be afraid of unless you are in the witness protection program.)
- Dogs spontaneously burst into flame if within a line of sight of your cat. (However, if this is the sole symptom, look into doing an animated all-animal adaptation of Stephen King’s Firestarter.)
- Worshippers seek private audiences with your cat. Normal visitors only ask to talk to the cat in your presence. Asking for private audiences denotes acknowledgment of feline divinity, or ailurophiliac perversion.

CHAPTER 99. THE SEVEN SIGNS YOUR CAT IS GOD

In either case you should deny these requests as long as you can. (When you feel yourself a puppet of the cat's will, it is already too late.)

- The cat increases in apparent size while staying the same absolute size. If your cat seems taller than skyscrapers and able to swallow your house whole, yet easily fits outside through the catflap, you have problems. (If your cat has transcended the geometric definition of size, and all categories of corporeal existence, it is probably already too late.)
- Your cat answers your prayers; OR, your cat condemns you to inescapable, hellish, endless mockery of life, consisting of tears, pain and futile regret. (Given the cat view of human affairs, both of these may happen at the same time, possibly through the cat jumping on your chest and staying there.)

The seven signs your dog is God

- The mailman lies on your lawn, crucified to a cross of bone, unable to escape the coming canine gnawing.
- Cars driving past your place undergo a miraculous transformation into beef jerky, yet still function, though too slowly to escape the coming canine gnawing.
- All your beloved ones are transformed into half-dog hybrids, forming a willing harem to the Lord of Bones. (It is well known all dogs are bisexual.) (If you still retain the mind to consider these signs, the dog is not interested in you.)
- Your lawn is littered with chew toys. These are not tribute; they are a miraculous transformation of birds that flew overhead.
- The dog's food and water bowls are now bottomless, and do not require filling.
- Your house is surrounded by howling endless winds of hell, and your dog keeps hanging its head out the windows.
- The dog comes to you and says, "Because of the aid you gave me when I had not yet come to full cognizance of my powers, I am going to give you a five-minute head start."

The seven signs your hamster is God

- Your house is the cage now.
- The great wheel compels you to run or die.
- Your fridge is now a food dispenser.
- The floor is wood shavings.
- You have been neutered.
- A vast, bloated, hairy intelligence leers at you from beyond the barred windows of your home, roaring commands you cannot understand.
- At times it pulls you up to dizzying, terrifying heights, and clumsily juggles you back and forth, and will not let you down until you soil yourself for its entertainment.

The seven signs an ancient Sumerian tyrant emperor is God

- He demands constant worship in this life and in the next one.
- He demands songs to be sung in his honor, uncritically and extravagantly, all where his subjects gather, and monuments be raised to him, everywhere under the sun, and acknowledgment as the inspiration and power behind any individual act of goodness.
- He demands to be acknowledged as the sole lord in existence, and the sole judge over you, with the power over eternal life and eternal death at his sole, unappealable discretion. His word defines truth; his memory, reality; his decision, the law. He has always been of one mind, and the same opinion as now; it is treason to suggest he has changed.
- His is the army that has crushed the absolutely Evil Enemies; his is the army that shall always do so, and any setbacks in this are because of the treachery and weakness of his servants.
- His is a court and a palace of such beauty you yokels have never seen its like; to breathe its airs along with him is the greatest blessing available. His radiant

CHAPTER 102. THE SEVEN SIGNS AN ANCIENT
SUMERIAN TYRANT EMPEROR IS GOD
visage outshines the sun; his touch heals the sick; at
the speaking of his name, cripples walk!

- He rules by right, always has and always will; in him, might and right are unified; to reject his rule is to be branded forever Evil, and also Foolish. You deserve nothing, save what crumbs he in his infinite compassion and mercy grants you; were he strict, you would scream in pain for all eternity; but he is merciful, as long as you debase yourself in front of him and give yourself fully to him. Oh, and all other rulers are evil demon monkey spawn, all of them as depraved and evil as he is virtuous and good. Their protestations to the contrary are all lies, because all they say is all lies, just as all he says is true and can be taken in without any critique. (Also critique is poison and treason, because there's no need to critique that which is, by definition, the truth.)
- He knows all, hears all, sees all, and perfectly judges all. You should have no secrets from him. You should disagree with him. You should beg to work his purposes and not your own; indeed, you should love him more than you love your parents, spouse or children, or yourself. The only way you're allowed to love yourself is to love him more and more.

The Three Keys of Skifree

Skifree is a computer game. It shows, in the beginning, a ski slope with trees and rocks, viewed from above, and a skier (you) skiing down it, in the down direction of the screen. You move left and right, stop, take halting ski-steps upwards, and most of the time move down.

Eventually, an Abominable Snow Monster leaps into view, much faster than you, and eats you (the skier) up; this is the game over.

What was not well known in the heyday of this simple game, and is almost proverbially well known these days, is that if you punch the key “F” when the ogre appears, you will speed up and outrun the death.¹

But — what happens if you continue playing the game, and skiing ever longer downhill?

Eventually, a second ogre appears, larger and faster than the first. The key “F” will not save you this time; the key “G” will; it make you move even faster, outrunning even this monster.

Some have said, in BBSes without names, that if “F” is “faster” or “free”, as in Skifree, then “G” is God. Through God’s power, or through becoming God, you escape the second ogre.

What happens if you continue playing the game?

¹See <http://www.xkcd.com/667/>, “SkiFree”

CHAPTER 103. THE THREE KEYS OF SKIFREE

Oh, I forgot. Before you meet the second ogre, something strange happens in the game. The snowy slope turns red. The rocks turn to skulls and piles of bones. And the trees turn to crucifixes, with crudely animated human figures writhing on them. The other skiiers seem to be wearing a darker shade of red, and ski masks with horns. If you touch them, you fall down and leave a lighter red stain on the slope.

Do not use the ramps.

Did I mention the second ogre looks like a stereotypical horned, cloved-hoofed demon — a big enough bunch of pixels to be really ugly?

Anyway; as you play on, though this takes a longer time than the first change (though there's a solitary skull-rock and an empty red section of the slope even before the first ogre), there's a second change. First, the red turns back to white. The obstacles, bones and crosses, end. You might think you've returned back to the beginning, except there is none of the ski slope detritus there was to hinder you in the beginning. Then a new element intrudes: holes.

Blue gaps in the white slope; if you ski into one, you fall, fall, spiral down into a single pixel and blink out, game over.

You're skiing on clouds, high above the living world.

Then the angels come.

They're bigger obstacles than the previous ones. You can't see their heads, they're so tall. The first ones stand still. Then some move their wings, buffeting you from side to side. Then there are ones that move, chasing you. If they catch you, the computer makes a sound like a dying animal, and there's an animation.

Do not use ramps to jump over the angels. It is not worth it.

When the angel with a sword comes after you, you must push "H". If you escape the angel with a sword, you will get to the throne. The throne is empty. If you get on the throne, you win.

The First

This is an ancient brotherhood, dating back all the way to the Mark I network in the early 1970s. Mark I was a British equivalent of the American ARPANET, a precursor of the Internet. Once the Internet's dawn began, Mark I was laid aside by its makers — the UK's National Physical Laboratory — and replaced with “Mark II”, the Internet front-end. This led to reduction in the workforce in part of the Mark I people; and one wet night in a pub in Teddington, a few of them swore an oath that would change the world. They called themselves the “Mark the First Club”, or merely “The First”. They were computer professionals, some with decades of experience, and now this newfangled Internet thing was making them jobless. They swore eternal opposition against the Internet and all its fruits, partly out of spite, partly to destroy this dangerous international foolishness and effect a return to the nation-based computing whose experts they were.

This was their program:

1. The Internet is anonymous and/or pseudonymous. Therefore it is trivial for a small number of people to impersonate a multitude. Through this, we will make the Internet seem a haven of morons and a village of idiots. We will paint the users of the Internet as such flaming wankers, tossers and gits that nobody

will want to persist in their company.

2. The Internet is place-free. Therefore it is trivial for anyone to be from anywhere, employed anywhere, and experiencing anything. Through this, we will make it an accepted fact that an Internet user is a liar: always a berk from Berkshire, a gormless muppet, a cellar-inhabitating mom's boy with no educational or employment prospects, but plenty of racist, sexist, classist and otherwise repellent opinions. When this is accepted as the average — indeed, the sole — Internet user, people of other sorts will not want to be associated with it.
3. The Internet is swift. Therefore it is ideal for uninformed panics. Through this, we will cause misinformation and lynch mobs to form; we will flood the electronic mail delivery boxes of innocent persons with hateful bile, and reveal their physical mail delivery addresses for the delivery of tangible bile and other such items. This will dissuade anyone from using the Internet.
4. We, the First, will leave our signature at places for people to find, and circulate documents revealing the signature's meaning, our identity, our origins, and the purpose of our crusade. We will cast these revelations in the mould of sarcastic comedy, and thereby prevent Internet users, even if they should learn of us, from taking seriously this existential threat to their foul invention.

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--- BEGIN GEEK CODE BLOCK ---
G1ST !d s---:+++ a+++ C++++ U*+++++ P++++
E+++ W----- N----- o? w----- O-----
?t ?G e++++ h++++* r* !?z***
--- END GEEK CODE BLOCK ---

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North Korea: A Call for Apocalypse

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Communism is dead. Soviet Russia is no more, praise God; Communist China is totalitarian, but not all that Communist anymore; praise God.

There remains only one bastion of that Satanic ideology; only one place where it still freely perverts every decent impulse, and shackles all men in the chains of death without hope.

That place is the Stalinistic, Satanistic, militaristic, opportunistic, socialistic, sadistic, totalitarianistic regime of oppressive tyranny which is the Democratic People's Republic of Korea: the Hermit Kingdom of North Korea; the Abomination of the East.

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In the true spirit of the decrepit ideology of Communism, the country's current and Eternal President still is Kim Il-sung, dead and frying in the fires of Hell since 1994. The position of President remains his, though he is gone to his punishment; so do these atheists make false gods of their own bestial bosses of brutality.

Many think North Korea a small, harmless nation — but it is not so. It has an army of ten million, I repeat, ten million ruthless, fanatical soldiers, backed by more endless millions of brainwashed and inhuman slave drones; it has half a century of ceaseless burrowing in the cold hills of Hamgyong, resulting in the most formidable chains of fortresses and catacombs this world has ever seen. It is the opinion of US military experts that even full-scale nuclear warfare would not be sufficient to neutralize these strongholds. If it comes to that undesirable end-result of global thermonuclear war — the monsters of North Korea will be the only survivors!

Given that there are 24 million of these North Korean fanatics, and ten million of them are armed and trained to never surrender, there can be no normal war against them. What war ever counted on the armed, organized hostility of fully one half of the enemy's population? An invasion of North Korea would be a bloodbath beyond all imagining even without the forts — and the fortresses are vast enough to contain all of the population many times over. Reputedly they may already do: paranoia and fear of invasion has led North Korea leaders to form vast domed cities underground, fed by spiraling limbs of fungus farms; the children of those dark places never see the sun as they wait to die to kill the enemy that is sure to come.

And this is not all — the bloody Korean War of 1950-53 left almost 150 000 American, British, French and Australian soldiers unaccounted for, lost behind enemy lines; they were all assumed dead, murdered in cold blood. But according to Steve Wan Lon, a defector from behind the Korean Curtain, that was not the case: the prisoners were herded into minework pits for slave labor, and then into ever longer underground tunnels, until today half a million half-Korean, half-American brainwashed fanatics crouch in caves under Paektu-san Mountain: half a million self-loathing slaves eager to serve, ever ready to infiltrate the hated enemy and bring it down from within.

Their numbers, and their nihilistic zeal, have been added to by the inclusion of Communist escapees from every single failed Communist state: Soviet Russia, Romania, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, East Germany, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Albania, Luxemburg, Liechtenstein, Cuba, China, Vietnam — all these, and the exiles of thirty more nations, being the trash deported by the valiant, alert stormtroopers of godly, Christian democracy!

In that vast cauldron under Paektu-san the mix and brood and bide; a hybrid race of all the world's evil. As all races and nations are represented there, so are all the vices and depravities of the world: sadism, molestation, pornography, homosexuality, atheism, agnosticism, cannibalism, murder, rape, "heavy metal" music, necrophilia, zoophilia, florophilia, nudism, self-pollution, caffeinism, mail order fraud, and even shamelessly open ritualistic orgiastic hedonistic voyeristic Satanism!

Their days are filled with the piping voice of speakers

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hung in every room that drone and squeal of the supposed glory of the filthy, filthy, filthy ideology, and the supposed immoral depravity of the pure Christian Western opponents.

Their nights are filled with the same, for the speakers are never turned off!

There is no rest for them; the daily, ritually, desecrate the holiest symbols of their enemies, and thus their contempt of us grows. They wipe on the flags of the free world; they urinate on crucifixes and busts of our valiant presidents; they tear up Bibles for notepaper and napkins; their children are swaddled in the cassocks of murdered priests; their nails have images of saints on them so they may build by hammering and mauling the holy, striking them until their features are obliterated by this savage underhanded assault; there are even rumors of monstrous punishments in hidden places to those deemed disloyal: crucifixion or worse.

Outside, things are not much better. The mountains of North Korea are storm-swept, thin of vegetation and thinner of air; it is this howling solitude which keeps their tops free of human habitation. But not from all habitation — for in the manner of their Stalinist masters, the evil scientists of North Korea have committed the ultimate blasphemy, and made a woman mate with beasts, resulting in unclean offspring which are an abomination unto the Lord and in the eyes of men. These hairy ape-men are tall, rangy, flat-faced and long in jaw and thigh, sloped of shoulder, and covered with matter white fur that only enhances the bestial, slaving moral idiocy of their twisted, fanged, noseless half-human faces. These are the yeti of Korea; their cruel claws and cold rifles keep the mountains clear of all foreign intru-

sions, and their cannibalistic raids are the reason for the dead cordon of the Demilitarized Zone that rings this evil empire.

Who is the leader of all this? The leader is a tyrant, a supposed god on earth, a king, a master, a president, an emperor — these words are all the same in their Communist cant; and the ideology of North Korea is called Juche, or “For the Emperor”. They live and die feeling more ardently, more passionately, their supposed bond to this false god than the bonds to their own families. They starve to feed his gluttonous table; they die in malnourished droves to raise ever higher atheist temples to him; they swoon in evil blindness when an orator berates them for their tardiness and unwillingness in their slavish submission to the shadow of this phantom, and tells them this callous, ungodly mission: “The ideal of Juche is this: the great revered leader is your heart. Until your love of your own life and all in it, until your love of your family and children is as hatred compared to your devotion to the great revered leader, until that is as clear as breathing to you, Juche will not be, and you will not be true Communists.” Even the less draconian commandments don’t stray from this masochistic theme: “Worker! Adore your fellow worker and adore your Revered Leader, and the Communist paradise shall be ours!”

Who is this Revered Leader? He is the same malign spirit that has animated this abomination against God ever since its first inception in the Communist fires of the Second World War: Kim Il-sung, whose name means “the Dragon of the East”. And he is a Dragon, as is told in the Revelation! Many think him dead; they foolishly think mere cancer, age, cirrhosis, nephritis, syphilis, AIDS, heart attacks and chest

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necrosis would be enough to kill a man so evil as he. Most official accounts will say he died in 1994; this is a lie, and anyone who tells it is an uninformed spawn of Satan.

Kim Il-sung is not dead.

Those that serve Satan as loyally as he has never die if they can find any blasphemy to avoid their judgment, for they know God is not a God of mercy, but shall judge them harshly and sent them to eternal fire and the worm that gnaws, where they will be a subject to unspeakably painful torture that never lessens, that never dulls the senses, never ceases its rending, mind-tearing, soul-crippling, agonizing pain; the pain of whips and hooks, fires and broken bones, crushing pressure and the horror of losing one's body; and that, repeated again and again, without the respite of familiarity or madness, each second as vivid and agonizing as the first, for all eternity, for millions of millions of millions of years, which is the merest first second of it, shall not be enough to atone for the hurt his lifespan of villainy has wrought.

No, the beast formerly known as Kim Il-sung lives on: for no crime is unknown in that shuttered land of sin; and so from the millions of the downtrodden slaves a perfect candidate was found, and strapped down on a gurney of stainless steel, and murdered in mind and soul; and then the sinblackened disembodied brain of Kim Il-sung was inserted into the victim's clean-scraped cranium, so that in a new body the old brain might live again, as a nominal son of the unspeakable father. What humanity, what promise was in that new shell was snuffed out, scraped out, dumped into a trash-heap: the body became a merely inhuman shell for the Satanic intelligence of his lord and master; and the tyranny

went on. It shall go on for a long, long time, too, because there are endless warm bodies to house his diabolical intelligence, for though bodies fail, the human brain never needs to die.

What will you do with this knowledge?

Rest easy, thinking your beyond this monstrosity's reach?

Ignore it, spurning the Christian compassion of those who delivered it?

Doubt it, placing your soul in mortal danger by so ridiculing the messengers of the Lord?

Or wake up to this monstrosity, this abomination, this blasphemous, godless, pornographic affront to all that is decent and good which is North Korea?

If you would not be found sleeping when the Lord cometh and the Day of Judgment arriveth, rise, rise now, and call on Caesar to prepare for a Holy War against the godless demons of Korea! God's cleansing thermonuclear fire shall scour them off the face of this good green earth, if we but send our missiles on their way trusting in the Highest — his hand shall guide them, his breath shall confound the foe; his fist shall strike with them, and blast their teeming warrens of mountain fastnesses in half and cleanse the rot within! They will all die! The iron hand of Lord God Yahweh will kill them all! Praise Jesus! Amen!

Send your donations to the usual address.

Hölmölä

The following is adapted from *Hölmöläiskimara: Hirvi elefantti kissa kyy kissa banaani* by the noted Finnish ethnologist Etunimi Sukunimi.

The letter “ö” is pronounced like the “u” in “fur”, or the “i” in “Sir” or “bird” — at least for some variants of English. The letter “ä” is like the “a” in “cat”. Finnish words are pronounced by pronouncing every single soddin’ vowel and consonant in them. Every sound is short; if it was long, it would be written twice. The stress is placed on the first syllable; don’t stress it if you don’t know what this means.¹

Somewhere in the depths of Finland is a village called Hölmölä — so called mostly by its neighbors, since the name means the Village of Fools. To the village’s eternal misfortune, the first surveyor to come through those parts was in a hurry and stayed in the next village over. He canvassed the inn’s folk for local placenames, and did not think of old, local grudges. Thus when, ten years later, a headman of the Crown came to hold justice in the next bigger village over, plenty of people went to see the map the headman had to guide his deliberations. According to a rumor, it had been

¹Now that you know this, you can turn to page ?? and start reading out loud! Amaze your friends! Scare your neighbors!

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painted from the back of a great eagle, one of the eagles seen in the royal seal. (To which an elderly man sniffed, and said: “Eagles? In a seal? Nonsense, must be the other way round—”) Thus then the villagers of Kaunola (The Village of Beauty) gazed upon the work of the mighty, and despaired — the map read Hölmölä, the Village of Fools.

The best and the brightest of the village then resolved to go to the makers of the map and complain; but as at the time Finland was under foreign rule, the map-makers were a foreign company with a distressing name, across the waters in the foreign capital. Undaunted, the village’s best and brightest teamed together and hired a ship — the ship sank, and the village sunk to the level of its new name.

* * *

Several generations after this, a man of Hölmölä built a house. It was a splendid house, with big plain walls and a big heavy stone roof, but when it was finished the builder found it much darker than the other houses in the neighborhood. It probably had something to do with the walls having no opening but the door, his father said — the father was still a half-wit. The son, the builder, undaunted gathered his friends and a quantity of burlap bags, and ran with them around the yard for a few hours. Finally his father felt compelled to ask what they were doing; the son said they were trapping sunlight in the bags to bring inside into the house.

The father shook his head and headed towards the well-windowed local pub.

After a while, the men brought the bags into the building and whacked them empty against the walls; the house did not fill with light.

They thought for a long moment about this, and then saw the problem: of course you could not bring light into the house when it was full of dark! They carried many bagfuls

of dark out, and much light in; but the situation failed to improve.

The brightest of these persons trapping sunlight in bags then opined the local sunlight was too wan and weak; the rest despaired, thinking they were being propositioned to go into distant lands with funny-looking people who spoke very bad Finnish — but the speaker suggested the house ought to have windows.

The whole lot of them were dumbstruck with the genius of this idea for several minutes; indeed, one of them was permanently struck dumb. He gained reputation as a man that never spoke the wrong word, and died well-married and happy.

Before that, though, many saws and axes and pitchforks were produced, and the men attacked the walls in a wild frenzy of fenestration. Soon a small hole was made, and light streamed in; a discordant cheer went up, and out of the hole. Soon a bigger rip opened in a different wall, and the window-makers could actually see one of them had stuck a pitchfork in another's back — a third window, even larger, was made and the wounded man was helped out through it.

Eventually the windows were so many and large one could see the forest and the lake and the village and the fourth wall's direction also — but at that moment too much of the walls had been taken away and the heavy stone roof fell down and killed most of the men.

The people of Hölmölä learned from this tragedy, and from that day on never built a window anywhere ever again.

* * *

One other time a housewife of Hölmölä was returning from the mill with a bucket of rye flour in hand, when a spooked cow ran past, as often happened in Hölmölä, and the bucket went flying and landed in the lake. The housewife went angrily home, and told his husband what had

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happened. The husband, being known as the most commonsense man of the village, asked what the flour had been for.

For the making of soup, the wife said.

No problem then, said the husband, take your biggest spoon and follow me.

The husband went from house to house, telling of a great plan he had; and each household of Hölmölä came to the edge of the lake, with bags and buckets of flour in hand.

Then they poured all this flour into the lake, and the wives busied their biggest spoons in stirring the lake as best they could, and the husbands built a great raft and set it afloat and afire on the lake to heat the water.

In the end this communal soup was not very rich or thick; but just as the most commonsense man of the village had promised, there was enough of it for everybody and more.

* * *

There was a poor old couple living in Hölmölä; so poor that the man had only one blanket. (The wife had a dress and hairy feet, and so needed none.) One cold winter day the man moaned that his blanket was too short; it left his feet bare and they were cold.

Oh dear, the wife said, and took some extra cloth from the top of the blanket and needled it to the bottom.

The next morning the man complained that his chest and neck had been cold, so the wife cut some cloth from the bottom of blanket and sewed it to top.

* * *

One winter the men of Hölmölä were cutting down trees in the deep forest for the making of their windowless houses. They were big trees, and gave terribly big boles, and as they were loaded onto the sleigh, the horse pulling it rolled its

eyes in fear — but there was nobody there smart enough to understand a horse.

The sleigh was piled high with tree-trunks, piled left-to-right in terrific profusion, so that from back or front it seemed like the wall of a house, with big vertical logs piled up and high.

The horse could not pull such a weight, so the good-natured men pushed; the horse stepped freely with slack tack and no rolling of eyes.

After a few sweaty miles and a high-stepping horse on the front of the sleigh, the lot of them came to trouble: the track went through a narrow space between two lots of trees, and the trunks were so wide to the left and to the right that they could not pass in between.

After something like thinking, the men took their axes and with great screaming and flailing of hand cut down a tree — two — a dozen of them, and cleared way for the sled.

After a few turns of the track they came to a second, similar impasse.

After they had cleared the third, their wives came to see what was taking them so long. Watching them come, a young man jumped up and screamed in joy. Most thought this was because he was still newly married; but he pointed, and the rest of the men screamed similarly, much to the consternation of their wives.

Along the wives, a chicken had wandered into the forest, with a bit of hay stuck to its tail, dragging lengthwise after it.

That's how we should have done this from the beginning, one of the men cried.

So they took the sleigh back to the beginning and unloaded it.

The hypobabical argument

One day a preacher said, “If you kill a man, you kill more than a man. For what of the descendants he might have had? The children he did not conceive, the grandchildren, the endless generations of persons just as valuable as him, snuffed out along with him? To kill a man is to kill multitudes.

“But if you kill a very old man, you kill someone whose seeding days are done: there, only a man dies, for his children, if any, are long since made.

“And if you kill a child, why, that is the greatest crime of all, for all of the child’s children are but potentials, all still residing in him.

“But if a man is infertile, a castrati or an ash-egg, there are no children to be had for him: his life is of as little and limited worth as that of an old man.”

There was then applause, and a frail-voiced question from the audience: “What about women?”

“Women, ah, a woman is involved in the making of a man’s descendants and thus the descendants must be considered in some lesser part hers as well.

“But consider that it takes nine months for the woman to produce a single child — or some small amount of them, given that twins and such exist. But even if the woman produced nonuplets, nay, even if she brought forth undecaplets for her labor of nine months, why, such numbers pale in

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comparison to the number of offspring a man might make in the same span of time. Nine? Eleven? A manly man might put to production that number in a single night.”

At this point there was a commotion in the audience, and the asker of the question was removed.

“Thus clearly the killing of a man wreaks much more havoc in the tree of potential descendants; and the killing of a man is a much greater crime than the killing of a woman of similar age, no matter what age that might be.

“With the exception of the old, of course; there both men and women are equally bereft of worth.

“But with this preamble, we finally come to the crux of the matter: abortion.”

There were boos from the audience.

“It is not, as we commonly hear from the lips of commentators, that the doctor’s knife might cut off the life of an Einstein, or a manly man who is not a Jew; but that that act will destroy entire lineages and nations. For truly there is no murder that is not mass murder; and there is no abortion that is not genocide. For if a man holds multitudes-in-potentia in his loins, and child still vaster unplumbed legions, what of an infant yet unborn? There the vastnesses are that of a child, plus one: the unborn himself.

“For there is no man that does no good, except the ungodly, against whom there is a herbal remedy; so the death of one is not merely the death of his descendants, and an abhorrent genocide, but also injury against all he would have met. For that man will not meet his wife, and that woman will grow old and barren childless, and go to shadow cursing the absence of the man meant for her. That is what the women called spinsters and lesbians are, my dear listeners: they are those whose destined husbands and masters were quashed in the womb. And reckon, dear listeners, the spite and iniquity that festers in the hearts of women un-governed by a manly hand, and denied the comfort of the manly rod of law; they are gossipers and homewreckers, prostitutes and cat-fanciers suspect of unspeakable bestial-

ities; and the root of their wrinkle-faced evil is the same evil they advocate for all, to further plunge all of mankind to misery, to thereby drag all others to their level, to deny happiness from other because of their own wretched, sinful misery: for there is no greater advocate of abortion than the woman who is bitter, and old, and alone.”

At this point several other members of the audience were removed.

“Dear listeners, the alert among you may have noticed how this commonsense argument explains the incidence of lesbianism in these latter fallen days, as a result of abortion. But what of the much more offensive and unnatural vice of gayism? What about gayism?”

There was a shouted question from the audience; the preacher waved a hand.

“Not goyism. There is nothing bad in not being a Jew, and in fact — well, that’s a whole different sermon for a whole different day. *Gayism*. The medical term for being a queerboy.

“No no, *queer*. I’ve got nothing to say about choirboys, thank you very much. The ho-mo-sexuals, that’s what I’m trying to convey to you. Openly pink-faced people. Polestraddlers. Knights of the Meat Lance. Spelunkers of Satan’s Hollow. Men. . . with. . . men!”

Someone from the audience shouted at this exact point: “Oh, *those* people!”

“Yes! And they are difficult to describe, for gayism is actually a dozen different sicknesses, all of which should be referred to as gayism without any differentiation because they are all the same thing and none of them occurs except in gayism! Men lying with men, and lying about all kinds of things too! Men with children, and animals, and bicycles, and the dead and the unborn — it’s all the same! Dressing as women, wanting to be women, likin’ hurtin’ people, likin’ bein’ hurt, likin’ the feet of people more than other parts, likin’ fat people and buxomites and cursed soulless redheads — it’s all a part and parcel of gay-ism I tell you!

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“That’s what all gayism is all about! And occasionally bestiality and worstiality too!

The audience murmurs.

“Oh, you know the first... involving yourself with animals! And the other... is... *worse!* I cannot sully your ears with its description, dear listeners, I cannot; my tongue literally cleaves through the roof of my mouth, flooding my nasal cavity with blood and shattered bits of teeth even as I think to think of it; it is an unspeakable, indescribable, abhorrent abomination of a thing.”

There’s a final question from the audience; many there are glancing at their watches.

“Ah? Oh, yes. Yes. Gayism and abortion... my notes... so many papers, so little time, you know how it is, talking to people, talking to myself, talking all the time, wouldn’t know what to say without my little piles of notes... oh, that’ll be a doozy for the next time, be sure to show up for that, that’s brimstone *and* burning doo-doo and no mistake. But all right, gayism and abortion.

“Who performs abortions?”

“Who in their right mind would do... that kind of a thing... to a pregnant woman?”

“The answer is pretty obvious: *nobody* in their right mind would do it; only a sick, twisted, amoral, immoral, unmoral monster would do it. Only a soulless shell-husk of a man! And that, dear listeners, is where those abominable people are to be found.

“Eh?”

“No, I’m not saying medical school turns people into... like that. What I’m saying is... people like that... go into medical school... to get that job. For the sick, twisted pleasure of thrusting their hand down a pregnant woman’s... throat... and slashing about with their knives until they kill the baby. Then they pull it out and the mother can *taste the blood!*

“Now where man-lovers actually come from, I think they are a cult. They have secrets places out in the deserts,

the mountains, the wind-swept hills, hidden caves, guarded by warrior eunuchs with black robes and Roman armor. Do you know one hundred thousand people go missing in this country every single year? That's where they go to! Enslaved in vast underground cities of sodomy and darkness! Bowing to immortal devil-kings with goat-headed phalluses, authors of communism, feminism and greenism alike — makers of the veritable rainbow of vice: pink, red, green, all the colors of the rainbow! Do you know light blue is the color of feminism — millions of cars are manufactured in light blue every year though nobody wants them, because their seats are overlarge and lewdly sexual — they are stockpiled to be the cruisers of the giant-mutant-sadist-robot-monster many-genitaled policewomen of feminism's Satano-Marxist New World Order!"

At this point the preacher tore off his tie, which happened to be light blue, and stomped on it, frothing at the mouth. He was then restrained and removed, while he continued to scream something about molemen burrowing where they oughtn't.

The Christmas Gospel of the Red and Green Heretics

*Being selections from the newly discovered and authentic
as gospels are Gospel According To Fame-Wulf.*

* * *

As is well known, Jesus did not die on the cross. He woke from a cold fever like death three days after, in a dusty darkness redolent of old death. As he moaned against the rock closing the tomb, the Roman legionaries on the other side of it looked at each other and decided they rather wanted to keep their guard at the crossroads instead, a good two hundred paces away and behind the turn of the cliff.

Thus, when two fearful women came to the tomb, even themselves quite unsure of their purpose, or whether they should have asked for men to accompany them, there were no guards there: and no voices, for by that time the entombed one had collapsed against the inside of the stone door, crying and cradling his pierced hands in the darkness.

But there was a young man there, clothed in a robe of exceeding whiteness and smoothness; or maybe he was a young woman; the two women who had come could not say

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for the white-robed one's beauty confused and frightened them, for he was as white and smooth-skinned as his robe.

"Who are you?" they cried, in low voices for they feared there might be guards close by. "You are no Roman, no Jew: why do you haunt this tomb of our master?"

"I have come to seek my father", the youth in white said, and the women were shocked.

"He who lies there cannot be your father", they said.

The first, named Mary, who was a doubter, said: "He is too young to have a son as old as you."

The second, also named Mary, who was not a doubter, said: "He is too old, ancient as the world itself, to have a son as young as you, for all his sons are as ancient as the world itself, and much taller than you besides."

The youth then smiled and said, "He is not my father of blood that I seek. In his youth he came to my land as a wanderer, and though we could teach him nothing, we learned much from him, and would learn again."

And he strained against the rock and cried: "Father! Take a chance on me!"

* * *

On the Midwinter Day, he rose and spoke: "I am born today, for I have come from shadow as weak as a newborn. Let this be known to all."

He ate, prayed, and then asked of his three followers: "Tell me, what do the people of Jerusalem say of me? In my delirium I saw the curtain of the temple ripped apart, and a great cloud covering the sun; all the tombs of the City burst open, and the just and unjust dead alike wandered forth, haranguing the living in God's name to repent, to turn from their sinful ways, to prepare for the Coming End. I saw the Roman fortress burning like a torch, and its soldiers like candles; I saw the palace shuddering and Herod, that foul pig, swelling of sin until he burst and covered his court in

the blood of his iniquity. Tell me, how much of this was true vision?"

"None of it", the three faithful followers said.

"Drat", said Jesus. "Maybe Jerusalem is not the place I thought it was."

* * *

"My robe is red", the teacher said. "Behold! Red for blood."

"Your sleeves are not red, not at your wrists, or your robe at the hem", the doubting disciple said.

"No", the teacher said, "yes, you are right. For in my agony, did I not clench my fists so that blood fled them. The robe's wrists are white for that agony."

"And the hem?" said the doubtless disciple.

"Was I not wounded in the feet also?"

"Hang on", the third disciple said. "Your crown is red, with a white brim. Why's that?"

"The crown of thorns", the teacher said. "The blood runs out, and then there's nothing more."

"Hang on", the disciple persisted. "What about the wound in the side? There is nothing white in your robe there."

"Shut up", the teacher said, "if a side wound stops bleeding you're dead."

* * *

"You", the teacher said, "are the leaf off the tree-stump of old. Wear you then these greens, you sparkling kingdom, grown off the one of dirt."

* * *

"Must you leave us, teacher?" the three asked.

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“A day is as a year to me”, the weary teacher said, “and a year is a year. Only a day can I give you; a day each year.”

“Which day is that?” the third disciple said. “But name the day and we will prepare a feast for you, bedeck the house with lights for you.”

“Prepare no feast”, the teacher said, wearily, “for I do not crave feasts. Eat you well yourself, and sate the hunger of the blood; for it is not well for the blood to hunger while the spirit feasts.”

“No feast at all?” the doubting disciple said.

“Maybe a glass of milk. Maybe cookies.”

* * *

“**T**he salt of the earth are we. Let us then salt what we eat.”

“But the eating of this is forbidden.”

“How can it be forbidden? What we eat becomes us: in us the unclean becomes clean.”

* * *

But Romans had surrounded the house, for they wished ill for the teacher, and had heard this was the day he came here. And the disciples were terribly afraid, for they could not leave the house, and did not wish for their teacher to be seized and beaten and hurt by the Romans again. And they wrote letters and threw them outside, where some followers of the old disciples read them and said, “This is blasphemy!”

So the day passed, and night came; but the teacher did not come.

The disciples tried to stay awake, but like the old disciples, they too fell asleep one by one, nodding by the hearth.

There was no sound but the slowly dying fire, and the clink of the legionaires’ armor as they paced outside in the

cold; and then the fire died outright, and the house was dark.

There was a rustle, yet nobody heard it; the milk was drunk, and the cookies eaten; and as the morning came, these were the signs the disciples saw: that the milk and the cookies were gone, and there were sooty footsteps on the rug; that there was frankincense and myrrh under the leaf, wrapped in foil of gold; and that each of them still felt a kiss on their brows, and had dreamed wondrous prophetic dreams all night.

And they burst out of the house, laughing and crying and singing, and went from door to door proclaiming their joy.

* * *

But for the frankincense they could find no use, and they gave it to their neighbors.

* * *

“Here is a lesson”, the third disciple said.

“Here is a lesson?” the doubting disciple said.

“Here is a tree”, the doubtless disciple said, looking at the others. “A small tree, even; a tree with not many branches, one of which we must cut for the holy days.”

“Yes”, the doubting disciple said. “Not a lesson, but a tree.”

“Could not a tree be a lesson also?” the third disciple said, fingering the sleeves of his white robe.

“No”, the doubtless one said, “you see, a tree is much leafier and—”

* * *

CHAPTER 108. RED AND GREEN HERETICS

So they did according to the lesson and cut off the whole tree in place of a leaf; but the doubtless one did not cease complaints of the leaves falling off and littering the house.

* * *

They went out, and were as their teacher had been, and offered what they had as gifts to all they came across. But no-one wanted their robes, or their undergarments; and the disciples were confused.

“Do we still follow our teacher”, the doubting one asked of them, “if we give away our own to those who do not desire it?”

“What else should we give?” the doubtless one answered. “The possessions of other people? Should we break into people’s houses, take their stuff, and then give them onwards? Say this is surely not the way to go, because I know people and I am tempted.”

“That is not the zeal”, the third disciple said. “Obey the law in all your works. If your robe is not winsome, then sell it to the ragmonger and buy candy.”

“Why candy?” the other two asked.

“Everybody loves candy.”

* * *

All robed in white the youth was, but a youth no more; his hair was still white, but brittle with age. His skin had not escaped blemishes, and his nose was a red stick in a face of white planes and gently grooved smoothnesses. His eyes, formerly burning coals of zeal, were black and dull.

As he — or she; they never knew — stood there in the howling cold wind, growing as cold as the wind, the two wept and prayed, until there was no difference between the wind and the one in white.

And in years after, they made many statues of the youth in the full bloom of his or her beauty, combining all that is lovely in the female and the male form; but when the cold winter nights came, they up-built a figure of snow, with a red nose and black eyes, and wept in remembrance.

* * *

This I wrote, I, Rudolph of the Reindeer tribe, of the three disciples Mary and Mary and Snow-white-man or Snow-white-woman, and of their teacher, whom they called *abba*, that is, Father, and *Ex-Mass*, that is, one that has abandoned solemnity for gaiety.

The disciples have gone to the shadow, but the teacher still lives; I, Rudolph of the Reindeer tribe, have seen him and heard his laughter on the wind, as he passes the cassockmen in their cold stone churches and flies to give gifts to children.

Crime and punishment

"It's religious, boss."

Inspector Fy Fann sighed. Religious crimes were always messy. "Ours or theirs?"

"Neither, boss. A Zen Buddhist."

"What, that's a thing now?"

"They got a history."

"Okay, tell me."

"So this freak—"

"Dammit Jason, you know we aren't supposed to use the f-word. Any f-word."

"So this *valued community member*—"

"Not the tone either."

"So this *guy* operates a hot dog stand."

"Right. Not— not any we'd been to?"

"Naw. Out in the— you know, that direction. Where there isn't an ocean."

"Right. There."

"So he operates a hot dog stand there, or like the sort of thing with wheels and then when you close all the things you can take the thing and push it — pull it — push it somewhere. Like to a, to a place where some damn young ones won't wreck it, light it up, shit on it—"

"Wrong order!"

Inspector Fann gestured angrily, and the interrupting constable went by.

CHAPTER 109. CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

Jason blinked a few times, then went on. "Right, wreck, shit, then light it up. Burnt ass job otherwise."

"Right. So the crime was?"

"Uh okay boss. So, the best we can tell, one day a guy comes to the stand and tells the guy, 'make me a hot dog', or something. So our guy hits him over the head with a wrench and—"

"Jason, the way this is going, you're *absolutely* sure I ain't ever have eaten anything off that damn cart?"

"Sure boss, unless you've gone that way. But it ain't that way. So this guy wakes up in a fur suit. You know, like in CSI. Made up like a dog. And stinking to high heaven. Some hormone slop poured down his trousers, or whatever you call them. And in a kennel. Seven hours before they open up, get him out. Dozens of other — of real dogs in there. Were all over him, real bad."

"What?"

"I guess this psycho heard, 'make me a hot dog', and took it badly. The guy's in therapy. Took weeks to get this much out of him."

"Right. So the guy — the stand cart whatsit guy — he's done this again?"

"Not this. Not quite. There was this one guy glued to the inside top of the big room they got at the planetarium. Like where you go with your kids, they like make it look like stars except more stars than I've ever seen. Glued to that ceiling, would you believe it. Naked. Again found when they opened the place up. Would have been a real biological show if they hadn't."

"Right. So he ordered. . ."

"Make me one with the universe.' The sick whacko."

"What's the next one?"

"A corn dog."

"What the fuck did that get into? What's a fucking 'corn dog' if not food?"

"I called the eggheads, boss, I did. Sent a biological grabulate student into conniptions. Gave me like a list, ten

things, that the poor guy looked like. One of those fur suits again, except more glue and pointy bits this time. Lookat the photos."

"Yikes. That's no damn dog I've ever seen. So the guy did a runner?"

"No. Wouldn't have gotten him, except we got him in on an unrelated and then realized, holy shit, this is the hot dog, universe, corn dog guy."

"What kinda unrelated?"

"Wouldn't give money to a customer."

"Huh?"

"Customer gives him a tenner, gets the snack, the guy won't give the rest back. Buck fifty or something. The guy — the customer — says, 'Hey asshole, where's my change?' This guy — the stand guy — won't give it. The first guy calls us, we take him in."

"What, taken in for a buck fifty?"

"So we had a slow day. Blame us, serving the public."

"So the guy had anything to say in his defence?"

"Just one thing. Don't know what it means."

"So tell."

"So the guy asked for his change. So this guy, he just keeps saying, 'Change comes from within.' Fucking weirdo."

Hate and love

(From the text-files
of St. Toothache;
originally titled
“Hate is stronger than
love so fuck you all”)

“Love is stronger than hate”, that’s what you hear, right?
Such utter bullshit.

Where’s love when someone shoves a gun in your face?
When masked vigilantes come to beat your face in because
they hate you — the traitor, the pervert, the foreigner —
whatever you happen to be to them — do you suppose love
will save you?

Do you suppose putting on a brave face and telling them
you love them will quench their hate of you? Hate doesn’t
work that way. Hate sees love as a weakness, or as insincer-
ity, a devious plot. Love sees hate as a darkness, to be con-
quered by its light — but hate has teeth, and a face that’ll
make love’s light shudder.

Not that love will give up — there are millions of bat-
tered wives to witness for how love doesn’t give up, even if it
should. “My love can change him”, they say. But it doesn’t.
But love is willing to lose a thousand times because it can
imagine a counterfactual fantasy where it doesn’t.

CHAPTER 110. HATE AND LOVE

You maybe haven't noticed this, because Reader's Digest only publishes stories on racists that fell in love with someone with a different hue of skin — but they publish these because that is freakish novelty, and the opposite is everyday business: that one bad experience with an Other can make you dislike their kind, and two experiences has you hating them, three and you're out with a baseball bat and an armband — too common and too depressing to be reported. And we tend to think that everyone that's different is a bit troublesome to deal with. . . a bit of a bad experience, the first time.

Take something from history, some big thing, that you think was done because of love. It is trivial to find less cuddly reasons for its doing; hard, cold, nasty, selfish reasons. Not so with hate. Hate is pure. Hate isn't a cloak for anything. If you say something is done because of hatred, it is. But love?

“I gave money to that org because I love helping people.” Sure, and that's why you're telling that to us, telling us how noble you are. That's why that org gives you a pin you can put on your jacket: so that others can see how good a person you are.

“I signed the law, because love.” And because of the coming elections, and the shift in popular opinion, and regard for how history will see you. Because this was a good moment to jump a sinking ship, and none dare say it because they need your voice.

Now if you take something done for hate, there's no urge and no need to look for other motivations. And even if you do — if you say, “Stalin didn't hate the kulaks, and he needed to distract Russians from their problems” — then you just end that with, “by giving them someone to blame, someone to hunt, someone to hate.”

Not that hate is nicer, better or preferable; but it is cleaner, simpler, truer. People usually lie when they speak

of love, because everybody wants to be a lover.¹ Most of the times you've said you loved somebody that has been a necessary answer, or an outright lie. (If not, congratulations; you have done well this far.) When people speak of hate, they speak their true hearts. Just imagine a situation where people can speak without a name, without consequences. Is it your experience that this makes love bubble out of them? Or is it rather that they will spew out such hateful bile as you've never thought was in them? What you typically see in an Internet comment thread isn't an aberration but people are they really are, under their sugary shell.

Finally, there are kinds of love that are just cousins of hate. "I love my country." Sure, your country is so much better than those other places... those other disgusting, alien, hateful other people... you would gladly kill those aliens, kick their teeth in, fortify your borders, to keep them away from what you love. To each their own; you say loving one thing doesn't make you a hater of others, but I say you set your love on such a high pedestal a lot is left in its shadow. You could say you love all humankind... but you don't, really. You got your own and the rest can burn.

¹Except the young and the old. The young don't know what it feels like to be hated, so they hate freely and frequently. The old live in an alien world where everything they've known slips away. That leads to fear, to anger, to hate. And then suffering blooms like mildew.

Iterations of Bloody Mary

- BM 1 – Girl: walk up a stair backwards in the dark, with a candle in one hand, a hand-mirror in the other. You will glimpse your future love's face in the mirror, or a skull if you'll die before love. (In these modern times, an upwards-turned flashlight will do.)
- BM 2 – Child: Go into the bathroom and turn off the lights. Face the mirror, and call Bloody Mary's name three times. Close your eyes. Call her thrice more. Reach out and turn on the lights. Call her three times more. Then open your eyes and see.
- BM 3 – Boy: Get a mirror, a bowl of salt and a double handful of ice cubes. Go to a dark room with a window opening into a dark place — a forest, a road, the like. Sit three steps back from the window, legs crossed, the bowl on your lap. Drop the ice cubes in the salt bowl, then use your hands to mix them. Then put your hands in the bowl, and grasp the cubes as if they were the head of a girl; squeeze them tightly, and do not let go. All the while you are doing this, *do not look out the window*. Wait, pushing the ice. Imagine it is the head of a girl. If your hands get really cold, raise your gaze very slowly, and look out the window. You will see a girl.

CHAPTER 111. ITERATIONS OF BLOODY MARY

BM 4 – Lay down on your back in a dark room. You should not be able to see the ceiling. If you have glasses, take them off. Place a flashlight between your legs so that you can turn it on with your toes. (It's okay to practice for a while. When you're ready, turn off the light.) Take a small mirror, and raise it as high above your face as you can. Turn it so the mirror-side is upwards. Start turning the mirror around so the mirrored side alternately points upwards and downwards. Turn it quicker. When you can't turn it any quicker, turn the flashlight on, and look in the mirror. You will see a demon, and if the light goes out it will leap out of the mirror and eat you.

BM 5 – For this, you need a mirror and a camera. Go to a cemetery when it is dark. It needs to be one where one side borders a forest, or even a little stand of trees. Sit down at that boundary — it is best if it is a low wall — facing the graves. Hold the mirror in front of you as far as you can. Hold the camera close to your breast; practice beforehand so that you can take a picture of the mirror without looking through the viewfinder or at the screen. (Remember to put the flash on.) When you have the mirror and the camera ready, close your eyes and wait for one minute. Then say,

“Bloody Mary, Bloody Mary, Bloody Mary.
Behind me, behind me, behind me. Push
me into grave, push me into grave, push
me into grave. Don't look behind me, don't
look behind me, don't look behind me, Bloody
Mary, kiss my face.”

Then take three pictures. Keep your eyes closed. Put the mirror in a pocket, and turn the the camera off and put it away, both without opening your eyes or looking at them. Say, “Bloody Mary, Bloody Mary,

Bloody Mary, go away.” Rise up and turn around three times, repeating the words after each turn. Then open your eyes and immediately leave. Do not look at the pictures before the sun is up. If you wake up before that *you must resist* the temptation to look at the pictures.

BM 6 – This works only in a forest, and should never be done alone. There should be no less than two, and no more than four of you. Sit around in a ring, facing outwards, in the dark. Each of you should reach a hand behind you, and hold some strap or object you all can hold without touching each other. It should be something that cannot be easily pulled apart. You should have a mirror, a small one you can pass clockwise around the ring you make. Hold it with the reflective part outwards, say “Bloody Mary, come to the mirror.”, and pass it to the next person. When you feel ready, say “Bloody Mary, are you in the mirror?” instead, and look. To look, raise the mirror up, and slowly turn it around so you can see what it shows in front of the person(s) behind you. Then say, “Bloody Mary, mirror lady, come no closer, come no closer.” Then pass the mirror on until someone else wants to look. At all times keep one hand on the object which keeps all of you together. If your feet tingle or feel like somebody pinched them, keep hold of the object and *do not scream*.

BM 7 – Adults. A “Bloody Mary” is a drink with tomato juice and vodka. This is not unrelated to the supernatural legend of Mary of Sighisoara, grandmother of the more infamous Elizabeth Báthory, but most people would not want to replace the tomato with blood. Anyhow, one can take the ingredients to a dark room, pour the vodka, and drip the tomato juice into the glass from a height. One should say

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out loud how many drips or drops one will put in the drink, and say “Young and pretty, young and pretty” as put drips them. One the final drop, one should reach out and drink the drink before it spills on its own.

- BM 8** – Lock yourself in a bathroom between two mirrors. (If one is much smaller, you’ll want to be facing that one.) Look in the mirror and say “Bloody Mary” three times. Turn off the light, and do the same. Leave the door ajar if you must, but do not do this in absolute darkness. After each time you say the name, you must jerk the mirror — move it suddenly and violently, as if shaking something off it. If you see light in the mirror, do not look directly into it; close your eyes if you must. When you’ve said and shaken six times, bring the mirror close and breathe on it. Hold it so you can see your breath fading off it. The shape your breathe makes is the letter you love’s name begins with. If the shape is a skull, lick the mirror and say: “Bloody Mary, doesn’t taste so bloody” and turn on the lights right after that.
- BM 9** – Put a spoon in your mouth sideways. Then lean your head inside a microwave and put it on for fifteen minutes. Mutter “Bloody Mary, Bloody Mary” until you see a figure in white above you, asking how you’re feeling. Tell the figure you’re feeling all right. Then follow its instructions.

Hand of Glory

A Hand of Glory is an object made from a hanged man: you take and dry the left (sinister) hand, and use it as a holder for a candle made from the dead man's tallow and hair-wick. The Hand of Glory lights your and only your way, renders others motionless, and makes you invisible.

Now in these days hanged men are in short supply, and creating your own isn't easy — the man ought to be convinced by a court of law, and few courts deal out hanging-convictions. (But if you need to, connect with the poorest junior attaches at the embassies of Egypt, India, Iran, Iraq or Japan. The pertinent body parts are difficult to transport except by diplomatic mail, and these countries anyhow have the necessary skilled artisans for the production of the finished product.)

If this is no practicable — after all, campaigning for judicial reform just for this purpose is maybe not worth it — then one must find alternatives. Serious herbological and necromantic research has, after all, found replacements for most elements, literal and figurative, used in traditional magic, magick, magicx and alchemy. The alternatives for human bodies are found in pigs — in the case of hanged criminal men, this means hamburger. A plastic glove can be used to bring the hamburger to the desired hand-shape; instead of drying, lamination or glue-coating is perfectly acceptable. The man-wax candle can be replaced by a small

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pink birthday candle with a drop of pig's blood (available in most supermarkets) dropped on the wick before lighting. Use a rubber band to fix the candle to the glove. Be careful, or the glove could catch fire, burning your fingers. Pro tip: If you think raw hamburger is "icky", you can wear the other glove while handling the Hand of Glory!

If you don't want to mess around with hamburger, which may be a big mess, especially if the Hand of Glory is a crafts project for your wee ones, you can substitute "special Play-Doh" for it. Just add 3 cl of criminal blood to 1 lbs of putty, and you're good to go! Note: Select US and UK for-profit prisons sell non-mortem criminal blood; the sale of mortem criminal blood is obviously unlawful under the Seventh Amendment (US) and the Bodies of the Quartered Dead Act of 1689 (UK). You can specify the age and gender of the source, but in this it isn't all that important. (Do mention you want "crisp" (UK) or "face quality" (US) blood; Hep B and AIDS play a merry hell with the Hand's invisibility.) Don't buy blood over the Internet. Most anonymous Net blood is Chinese prison blood, which means it's definitely mortem or warm-over, and Hep B or worse.

It's traditional, and practical, to dispose of the Hand of Glory by burying it. One downside of these ethical Hands of Glory is their effects last only for 48 to 72 hours, or 24 to 48 if you use pork-beef hamburger. If you intend to bury the Hand, please use a biodegradable glove — Mother Nature loves those with a bit of consideration. If you don't have the space for burial — after all, going to the cemetery with a shovel can look suspicious! — burning is a good alternative, though there can be some smell. If even this is impossible, as it can be, with the plight of the modern urban witch, then one can rely on the services of one's local Coven. Most Covens maintain a small oven on the roof of this high-rise or the other, or have an understanding with some local undertaker.

Have fun with your Hand of Glory!

Other fun and arcane projects for you and your wee ones

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include the Black Cat Bone, Painted Pebbles, Lorsch Bee Blessing, and Mother's Still-Beating Heart.

The Apollo Delusion

Imagine twenty-four men as elect and unique as any double dozen even was: the twenty-four men who left Earth's gravity and flew on the wings of Apollo to the Moon. Select men. Elect men. Ruggedized, idolized men. Men who walked on a different world.

Well, only twelve of them walked on the Moon. The other half went round and round it and afterwards felt uncomfortable whenever they were introduced.

These are men that can be worshipped by nearly everybody. To old-fashioned people they are granite-jawed Real Men, penetrating virgin territory; square-jawed military heroes. To utopians, they are space men; the first space men, those whose footsteps our children will one day follow, and extend. To science folks they are explorers, carriers of experiments, supreme long-distance lab technicians. To poets and to children they are gods.

To Moon landing denialists they are evil demons sitting at the left hand of Lucifer.

They are a more select group than the Presidents of the United States; no four-year span, not an eight-year span even, produces more of them, and at least the country that spawned them does not seem to be in a hurry to make more.¹

Now, these men are shit.

¹Which only adds to their myth: for forty years they've been the Heroic Astronauts, because nobody better has come to take their place.

CHAPTER 113. THE APOLLO DELUSION

Harrison Schmitt, the sole scientist among these military men, thinks the environmentalist movement is Communism. Literally; he thinks it's where Communists went once the Cold War ended. Also, he thinks pissing more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere is a good idea; and he's not all that hot about global warming either.

He's not the only denier of fact and science, either; if one wants an explanation one can say a man at 30 is not the man at 70. A man might find a good and special place to stand in on the road of life; but if he stands still others will walk past him. Or, as saith the raw proverb, "It only takes forty years for a wise man to become a fool without changing a single idea."

James Irwin maintained later in life that "Jesus walking on the earth is more important than man walking on the moon"; then he went looking for an actual physical Noah's Ark on Mount Ararat.

To this one might say: A credential for subject A is not a credential for subject B. The mental and physical fortitude required for spaceflight, the training and technical expertise of an astronaut; none of them translate to experience in philosophy or historiography, or even theology.

One can make excuses such as this for all of the Apollo men, and all their faults and problematic positions; but the problem is not the problems but that we do not expect them. We have thought these men different from us, and better somehow: and that is how confusion starts, then turns to denial, and then to bloody evil. We have elevated them, raised them above us; and then we act all surprised when their piss does not rise into the sky but falls on us.

One should just remember this: August legions grow less in winter.

The Companion of Man

The following excerpt is from “Giddyupus: the First Book of the Hobo Bible”, by Gordeon Seedyname

Jaffa had done a lot of creation, and seen his creations good. He grew hungry for more, then, and made a Man in his image, in the image of Jaffa he created him; male he created him, for Jaffa was no hermaphrodite.

Of dust Lord Jaffa made the Man, and named him Red, for he was made of red dust; and Lord Jaffa blew the breath of life into his nostrils, and with a sneeze Red came to life.

Of this, later wags said Jaffa blew Red, and Red came; such wags were given a thundersmash from one, and a sharp stick from the other.

Into the Garden of Edam did Lord Jaffa place the Man; and the Lord said, “It is not good for the Man to be alone. I will make a suitable helpmeet for him.”

“You could be with me all the days of my life”, the Man said.

“Nonsense”, said Lord Jaffa, “imagine that if you want, but I have lots to do.”

Now the Lord brought out all the things he had made before: from his pockets, birds; from his trousers, weasels; from his sleeves, doves; and from his hair, worms. And he

CHAPTER 114. THE COMPANION OF MAN

presented all of them to Red, and asked for names for them, hoping Red would find a companion from among them.

None of these was a suitable companion to Red: for he took the weasel and put it in his trousers, but the trousers of Man are not alike to the trousers of Lord Jaffa, and Red cursed the weasel and cried great big tears.

“Very well”, said Lord Jaffa, “verily well: I am pressed to offer you something from among my greater creations. Wait here in the garden; I will shoo them to you.”

The Lord went, and Red sat under a tree split into two and waited.

* * *

The first to come was a man, or so it seemed, in white trousers and smock, with a smile on its face and a crooked stick in its hands. “I am sent”, it spoke. “I am as is the One Who First Was; I see it would be meet if I were the protection and consultation you need.”

“You would be my companion?” Red asked, rising.

“I would watch over you, and keep you from straying, and be your confidante in all your secrets”, the beautiful thing in white said.

Red thought long and hard. “So I would be your companion, but you would not be mine? Say the name of the one who sent you.”

The one in white flinched at this, and fled; Red saw him no more, though the one to send this angel did come to see him later in the tale.

* * *

The next was a beast on four legs, not terribly big or small, not a steed nor a 'squito, and it had fur all over and friendly eyes and a bark.

“Dog I dub thee”, Red said, and rubbed the dog, for he was quite taken by the devotion in its eyes.

Yet Red was troubled, for he knew kind of what the help-meet of Man should be; so he resolved to see if the dog was fit for all the things he had dreamed of.

The dog was fit, but Lord Jaffa did not see this so, and with a big stick drove the dog away and chastised Man, and told he did not wish to see a breed of people half dogs and half men loosened on the world.

So was Red divested of his best friend; yet he did not forget it, nor did his children in the days to come.

[And a fear came on Red, and all his children, for they did not know what was right and did not dare ask. Because this they did plenty that was no right, and left undone plenty that was; and it was a shame.]

* * *

Jaffa brought Red to the lake's edge, and conjured out of the lake a coiled thing, and called it a Leviathan.

And Jaffa boasted: "I had winds and flames in my quiver, and my nets encircled the sea's dominatrix. In my chariot of storms I came to the battle, a spell on my lips and a poison in my stomach. I came to the sea, and the sea I won. I came to the pond, and the pond was no more. I smote the Leviathan, and it licked my feet. Did I make the Leviathan? I unmade it. It is my creature now. Leviathan I name it; it alone of all creatures I name, and not you, Man."

But the Man would not touch the Leviathan, for he was afraid.

* * *

A night came, and a new creature came to the Man: made in the same mold as him, in appearance alike to him, except more pleasing: a rounded creature instead of one of lines and rough edges. Not a thing of stubble and veins, but silk without silk and milk without milk; and Red was much enchanted by this creature for which he had no name.

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“Lilith”, the creature said, “I name myself.”

“No”, Red breathed, “that’s a dumb name. You should have a prettier name.”

And Lilith went away, and Red never saw her again, nor the Goddess which had created her.

* * *

Booted by Jaffa an animal came to Red, a creature of curves and sly eyes, a yawning oilslick on the waters of life; Red named it a cat.

“Really?” the cat said. “Three letters, no better than the dog?”

Red said nothing very much, given that he had not expected the cat to speak.

“Ah but cats speak”, said the cat. “Though most often there does not seem to be any reason to. What king needs to speak, if the servants do the unspoken will?”

“Buh— buh— what, king? Servants?”

The cat yawned in disinterest. “True, I have no crown, and you see no servants — but mark my words, Man, power resides where it resides, and few see their fancy confers power over them to those they fancy.”

And the cat laughing departed — in after days many doted on cats and never saw this was exactly as that first cat had foreseen.

* * *

A man came to Red, or so it seemed. He brought gifts in excess, and Red had a good time, for the stranger had a tongue for the slick tale, and a hum for shameful song; and they built a fire the like of which the Garden had not seen, and danced drunk and smoke-lipped round it.

“I would call you a Mate”, Red roared; alike roared, Lucifer roared back: “That’s the word of a real Man!”

Then came a morning.

Lucifer was gone.

Red had a headache.

Jaffa's house's windows were broken, there was wee against the wall, and Jaffa was wroth.

Red's headache was really bad.

Lucifer was nowhere to be found, and the rips in Red's trousers corresponded to the shreds in the spikes of Jaffa's house's fence neath the windows.

Red resolved that Lucifer was not a Mate, and not good company for him, and Jaffa was in agreement.

* * *

Jaffa told Red: "You have seen all the living things, all my creations: have none of them pleased you?"

Red shook his head.

"Wouldn't you lower your standards, Man?"

Red shook his head again.

"What do you want, Man?"

Red shook his head a third time.

"Tell me, Man, what do you most like in yourself?"

Red thought, long and hard. "My ribs, I guess."

"Huh? How come?"

Red looked Lord Jaffa in the face, squinting, and spoke. "My face could look better. My armpits could be better washed. My arms should be stronger. My legs, I could use them a touch faster. My thigh a little thicker, too. My chest isn't hairy enough, my ass itches all the time, my heart bursts looking at my maker, my bowels turn and churn, and my lungs fill with coughs I haven't got time for. I reckon my ribs are what I can't complain about, so that's what I most like in myself I reckon."

So then Lord Jaffa took one of Red's ribs, and Red was depressed: but Lord Jaffa shook the rib against the dust, and it came up a living being, and Red in excitement called it: "That's a Wow-man!"

A quick how-to for the revolution

- ★ Get armed: street toughs, bodyguards, religious fanatics, anybodies that agree things are Wrong. Concentrate on pointing out everything that is wrong with the current regime, including the fundamental flaws of humanity as instantiated in them, and the fault for the country's agonies of economy and culture as fully instantiated in them and only in them. (Everything that's good = the character of the nation, deep ranks of hardworking normal people, etc.; Everything that's bad = the ruling class, clique, family, ethnic group or income bracket)
- ★ Get the military on your side: either be a military person yourself, or be the only sane would-be civil authority that understands that sometimes gunpowder smells *right*. Hint that the current regime is planning loyalty-based purges of the military, and loyalty to you is the only way out. Also soft on crime, soft on iron on the border, likely to give land to foreigners, not ready to defend the border, sluggish and stingy, *won't buy new toys*, etc. etc.
- ★ Make the regime look bad. Organize atrocities and corruption attributed to the regime. Start spreading rumors of sexual deviancy (to the populace), of greed and excess (to foreigners), of forthcoming purges (to

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your troops). It's not important whether the rumors are true; enough of them, and it does not matter. Even if specific rumors aren't true, they can't all be false, right?

- ★ **STRIKE!** detain former leaders, seize the methods of communication, close the borders.
- ★ Mass executions prevent a restoration of the former regime; if possible, let the most larcenous and unpopular members of the regime escape beyond the borders. (If any members of the regime are still popular, shoot them and hide the bodies. If you can't hide the bodies, put guns in their cold, dead hands, and say they tried to use their women and children as human shields.)
- ★ Recalcitrant or unreliable portions of your regime can be sent somewhat unarmed against resisting portions of the former regime. (Also, if possible whip up mobs of women and children, and direct them to attack heavily fortified former regime strongholds. Imply there are food stores, money, and lootables, and the Bastille is opening. Send a few cameras after them; publicize thugs firing on unarmed protesters.)
- ★ If the people aren't all that into you, let the chaos continue for a few more days: looting, fires, murders, worse. Set up a tank-guarded enclave that shows how nice everything will be once you step in. When you restore order, string up everybody that looks like a looter. Make the people complicit in this, and in ratting out the looters and their shifty and/or too-rich neighbors. With some finesse, you'll recruit a nice initial batch of informers and local bosses!
- ★ Institute a regime of terror. Come up with a catchy name for your revolution; colors usually work. Declare a new day and a time to move forward with-

out looking back; acknowledge nothing of what you've done and promise all the vague, nonspecific absolutely terrific good things you can. Find some old mass graves; hide the new ones. Take pictures of grimy children standing on toppled statues and send them out of the country; don't get in the picture yourself, because that's gauche.

- ★ Give little concessions to everybody. The four main groups you need to keep happy are the crazy idealists, the xenophobes, the religious fanatics / hidebound conservatives and the Americans; three of the four is enough. (Depending on your geopolitical situation, substitute “the Russians”, “the Chinese”, etc. for the Americans.)

- ★ Offer to step down; offer to respect the will of the people; offer to organize immediate elections; choose from two alternatives:
 - a) Brutalize the electorate; ban parties that are former regime loyalists, fronts of foreign interests, or not your party; rig the elections; win the elections. Trumpet your victory in the first free elections since whenever; blame former regime loyalists, terrorists and foreign agents for election irregularities.

 - b) Work to make sure the elections are fair, and bow out of them, even; call in the UN and the Americans and the French and everyone to watch; make sure the most pure and idealistic twit wins and the most reactionary religious zealot comes second; wait six months as the area descends into partisan chaos; emerge as a stability-maker and take over as a strong man and the state's last, best hope.

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- ★ Continue the reign of terror; count on revolution fatigue to keep you safe for the years that it takes to build a functioning secret police. (People don't have the patience to occupy squares and public parks forever. Don't give them an excuse to get marching. Just let them sit it out; open a few jails and point the pick-pockets and rapists in their direction.)
- ★ Remember: your words might not have credibility even if you get an interview in Time; but the state you create in your state has the ultimate credibility. If you have done your job well, the opposition to you is fractured and without a clear leader. Hunt down the competent leaders and the unifiers, and leave those least palatable to local or foreign supporters alone. Once there's nobody who can speak for the opposition, organize bombings and shootings under their flag, and loudly condemn them. Invite the opposition to talks when they can't come without getting a knife in the back. If any come, come to an agreement where they must act first, and then blame them when they can't control the other 95% of their party.
- ★ Know what you can get away with, and use that to maximum effect. In some parts of the world you can strip, shame and brutalize women all you want, because *smack those uppity sluts*; in other parts you can use pepper spray like perfume because *smack those dirty hippies*. In some parts inconvenient people can just disappear; in others, they need to get a public cell and a court day on some future day when nobody cares no more. Opening letters and e-mail is okay everywhere; people don't care unless they can see a battered face.
- ★ Choose a permanent member of the UN Security Council and suck their cock forever. Offer air bases, natural resources, influence in the region, all you have.

The permanent members are China, Russia, US, UK and France. These days only the first three are worth the effort. Remember: only your Security Council member can protect you from invasion!

(If the above seems too brutish for your country: Listen to the people. Listen to what they want that the political system cannot give them, and promise it to them. Better sunsets; easier jobs; less darkies; yesterday's mores; nothing scary and new; nostalgic ghosts that never existed; quick and folksy fixes to difficult, complex problems; money out of thin air; and breathtaking cruelty and selfishness to those who think it toughness. Distance yourself from all political classifications. Blame the elites, the foreigners, immigrants, homos, feminists, atheists, post-modernists, abstractionists, the money-wasting intelligentsia, everybody with nuance and complexity and other beguilements of Satan; tell the people they are perfect, blameless, beautiful simple commonsense saints whose dyspeptic guts are the greatest prophet and the wisest guide; and the mewling, witless morons will call you a *hero!*)