

THE RED-HEADED MAN

by

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Quetzalcoatl first appeared in written form as a symbolic set of lines arranged in a circle. Such form, however lacking in depth or eloquence, was a rough pictographic design surrounding the heads of skulls found in burials between 2008 and 2009 by traveling bloggers in the lowest land of Central Mexico. It was never understood that this was not only a circular scraping in the earliest-dated decorated skulls, but a symbol of the past God, who cut into the mind a process that allows the body and the brain to become separate. This is what Lacan and Derrida respectively refer to as The Lack or Différance. In simpler terms, this meant a culture for the newly evolving homo sapiens sapiens: in taking apart the behavior and intent, or reasoning, the difference was evolved between the biological and the behavioral, the biological and the cultural, and, eventually, the biological and the sociological.

The symbol itself was first discovered on a skull by an early anatomically modern human whose mate was pregnant and had a terrible scar running along the back of his entire leg. He had been digging in the same spot for a very long time. Of course, he had no reasoning capabilities at this point, so he was basically having fun as a dog would in the backyards of homes; digging for an old bone, perhaps.

Upon pushing the root of a tree out of the way as a challenge, the hairy beast pulled at the jaw, uncertain of the grey, rocky substance. The nature of the material soon became evident, however. He held the slightly moist pieces, still covered in dirt, up against his face in recognition of the similarity. Thus, the homo sapiens sapiens was born.

In fact, there is no biological difference between the early anatomically modern humans, homo sapiens, and the first homo sapiens sapiens. The evolutionary gradient reached is merely theoretical. Its drastic change, however, enacts the right of scientists to break the evolutionary category. And so humankind began a new stage of development.

It was not long after, geologically, that societies and civilizations were built. Burials became custom around the time an emotionally evolved set of decisions were put into place about the symbol of the scraped skull and the necessity of health reasons related to disease flow and bacterial material in the burgeoning irrigation systems. Huge temples were built, myths were created, symbolic speech became a vital technology; those who did not have the capacity for more and more complex speech were being sent off and labelled as what Americans might have called "Retarded." The concept of entertainment was beginning to unfold in storytelling and drawings on one's hut. Many of these stories were thought of and considered real, such as in the formation of religion that occurred later.

The frightening ghost of a madman with no clothes was the rumor going around about the woods at night. The children at this time were frightened of it, and many of the adults were as well. These types of fears allowed a controlled environment by those who had somehow decided just not to believe in the ghost in which many workers were isolated at night in dark caverns in order to avoid an encounter with the madman's ghost.

The madman had first began appearing in densely populated areas bearing horrible wounds on the top and back of his head. Where there was hair, long strands of white and black stuttered out, thinly covering the spaces where fat, new skin had formed around harsh, blackened scars. He came inside the homes of families with young children screaming out in gibberish words that they could not understand.

"Help me now! Help me now!" he screamed in their faces. "Help me now," he whispered to men who had responded to their wives' shouts. They seemed to have calmed him when his hands suddenly rush up and punch them in the faces. He runs off into the mountains to be seen again. This occurred between five and six times, each occurring within a short distance of each other. The last time it happened, the man did not punch them in the face.

The men who had collected him from the homes and taken him to a stone building in the center of town were expecting his attack, but it never came. He just sat there.

Soon it was night, and they brought an elder from his sleep. The elder spoke softly to the man, but could get no response. He just sat without moving his lips. He would move his head around, but otherwise just looked relaxed and indifferent. They left him there to die; fully expecting him to ask for food at some point, but he just sat there. No one went to check on him, and eventually the smell of his defecations required the burial of him and his shit at the farthest edge of the dump site.

The ghost had been seen many times, appearing silently in one's bedroom until the family wakes up at night and finds the man staring down at them from a standing position above. They scream out, but of course he is gone.

Eventually, the rumor of his ghost became tied to the scars on the head of the ancient symbol. The power of the symbol, and the fear it inspired, reveal the dawn of control and vast social inequality. The biological category was now overshadowed to include sociological and cultural

difference, inspiring the connection between a human emotion, dread, and antagonism toward the "other;" anxiety and interpersonal relationships; and many causal elements that lead to war: grand, interpersonal battles of imaginary relationships.

The rhetorical use of the madman's ghost combined with an unstable political environment allowed for the creation of Quetzalcoatl. As a symbolic idea, the sky and creator god took the idea of the skull to a brand new level. The image of a skull being cut had already been related to the separation of one person and another, but to a different degree. They considered it to be what makes individual different: a personality. Now, at that point personality meant how much food they hunted or gathered, how well they could bear children, and, to some degree, how the body was shaped. However, this was complex enough to eventually include hair color, hygienic habits, facial expression, communication ability, taste in music, Myspace photo, and which operating system you choose to run.

When the story of Quetzalcoatl originated, the symbol still represented this idea of one and another, but more importantly a split within oneself: between the mind and the body. The mind had been created upon that first homo sapiens sapiens's discovery of his own mortality, and the body remained. They recognized this difference much less scientifically than we might now, but the significance was apparent to them as well.

BOOK ONE

El Arreglador del Mundo Sagrado

CHAPTER ONE: How It Becomes

The first time he sat on the boulder shaped like a Volkswagen beetle, Arthur Venada had never even seen a car in person; let alone one named for and conceptually based on the black pests he would find in his boots. The Volkswagen company would not be around for another hundred or so years. Travel was not complicated for Arthur. His horse, Libra, had palpably concrete legs that reinforced her stature against the unimposing height of Arthur.

He sat on what would have been the beetle's hood and felt in control: he knew where he was going, and he would be there by nightfall the next day. His horse was fed, his belly was full, and the cloth sack holding a loaf of bread and his brown canteen full of river water was tied to Libra's girth. His boots were off now, and he rested his head into the slight decline of where the sunroof would be.

To the right of a nearby hill, a spark of light got Arthur's attention in the beige of the Mexican desert. Assuming it was light reflecting off of the bell of a tall church in the distance, Arthur hoped that he was somehow within sight of his destination. He climbed the hill to get a better view, and to estimate how long the trip would take. At the top of the hill, Arthur scanned the horizon for a town or the light he had seen. When he found it again, Arthur discovered that the light reflected from something in the dirt. No matter how he moved his head, Arthur could not find a position that would allow him to look directly at the object without a blast of sunlight

searing his vision.

He decided to approach the object, although it was somewhat out of his planned route. By the time he reached it, Arthur could tell its shape, how much of it was probably buried in the surrounding dirt, and a sense of what it would be like to touch it. He did not recognize it for its purpose, its anachronistic placement, or its identity as a "manhole cover," despite its cryptic engraving of "drainage entrypoint - District 24, New York Department of Sewers." He also did not know that it was manufactured in India, that its designer died of cancer at the age of 46, or that beneath the strange silver disc was a cylindrical tube entering a network of sewers connecting more than 148,000 identical holes. Arthur, however, had found the only accessible hole, which was currently covered by the metal disc that he had now bent over and begun to investigate.

Through a set of holes in the object, Arthur could tell that there was empty space under the disc. He decided to get it out of the ground and see what was down there. Using the tips of his fingers, he scraped away the surrounding dirt and pulled the disc from its wedged position above an expansive hollow space below the ground.

He recognized what looked to be the rungs of a ladder planted in the neck of the tube and decided to investigate. Pure curiosity led him into the hole, yet as he climbed lower, his hands trembled tentatively. Soon, he was lowering his feet incredibly slowly, questioning whether or

not this was a good idea, and whether or not he would eventually get to the bottom of this strange entrance. He imagined the sounds of what beasts may exist below. He could still hear the light clops of Libra's feet above him, stomping impatiently for her owner's return.

Just before he decided to scuttle back up the tube, the toe end of his left foot found the wall behind him to have given way to empty space. He kicked about, realizing he had discovered some sort of chamber, and descended more quickly until he found himself on a platform. He could see nothing in the chamber, but could feel a light breeze moving from his left to his right.

Soon, his eyes adjusted to the darkness and he could perceive himself to be in some sort of cylindrical hallway. Arthur leaned against the flattened space in the wall where the rungs had ended and weighed his options. Above him awaited Libra along with a job in a nearby town as a farmhand. To his left and right awaited mysterious blackness within this incomprehensible structure.

Arthur could not return to the ground above him. There was simply too much to learn. What was this structure? Who could have possibly created it? How had he never heard that such a place existed out here in the wasted plains of northern Mexico. What encounters may exist within this tube?

Arthur stood and began walking. He decided on moving to the right arbitrarily because

he was right-handed. Soon he recognized a second space in the wall with an upward-leading tube above and ladders against the break in the cylindrical shape. He placed his coat on the floor to mark the spot and continued.

After two hours, Arthur had discovered corners, conjunctions, and dead-ends within the wide corridors. The pipes were bone-dry, and Arthur needed to continually sip from his nearly empty canteen in the baking air. Arthur began to notice a sound, somewhat like the sound of an approaching herd of horses, but it was steady; a mechanical hum. Arthur had gradually become accustomed to the sound, but could not identify it. He began to worry, and decided to hurry backward toward the tunnel leading back to the surface. He noticed the coat he had left below a set of rungs, signaling that the exit to street-level would be the next set of rungs. Finding it, he began ascending the ladder toward the manhole cover, which had somehow been replaced across the entry. The noise was much louder at the top of the passage, and Arthur could see sunlight beyond the holes in the metal disc.

Grand, vehicular traffic buzzed above Arthur's head, and when he lifted the manhole cover, he found a fleet of objects zooming in his direction. He nearly fell back down the tube, but managed to hold his grasp on the top rung attached to the cement of the sewage channel.

The first thought that ran through his mind was that this must be the wrong hole. There had been many in his path, but he was nearly certain that this was the one through which he had

entered the tunnels. He looked out from the hole again, and the metallic beasts of many colors were no longer moving. They had stopped close to the hole, however, and Arthur worried that they were merely preparing to devour him as soon as he exited the tunnel.

“My God,” Arthur thought, and began descending the rungs of the ladder. He reached the floor of the tube once more, but became increasingly aware of the strange hum that he heard from all directions. A frightening presence overcame him; he sensed that he was not alone, that some force existed with him in the system of tubes below ground. From the distant darkness of the space to his left came an increasingly present yellow light. At first he thought it might have been the candle of a stranger’s approach, however as it grew, he believed it to be a star that had fallen from the sky. Finally, the light grew much larger, and Arthur imagined that it was the sun itself getting closer and closer to the earth by way of these mysterious tunnels. The light urged him upward on the rungs of the ladder. Arthur reached the top once more and jumped out quickly. The vehicles were stopped, and he ran past a few of them to the wall of a nearby building.

Arthur looked around, entirely confused, and let his body drop to the sidewalk, where he dozed for almost three hours. In his dream, he found himself back inside the sewer. This time the yellow orb was in front of him, fluidly tracing the path before him toward the familiar ladder. It led him circuitously across a great distance in the tubes, eventually stopping before a drop-off

of the cylinder's surface, expanding into the cosmic realm of space. Stars and galaxies appeared before him, and the contrast between stars and the blackness was tensely portrayed in his mind.

Suddenly, the stars disappeared and the yellow orb had become a black arrow, outlined in pixilated white against the darkness of space. The darkness became light with the movement of the arrow, and soon Arthur was aware of being in front of a white space with this moving cursor. He could move the cursor with his thoughts, and after a few moments awoke.

With a great thirst and the shock of being moved such a great distance, he began to tremble slightly, approaching walls and structures warily and with awe. His body shook with fear at the rapidly moving machines with people inside of them. Buildings towered above him higher than the most immense trees of Arthur's region of birth. The seemingly endless concrete and exhaust filling the space made Arthur feel like an insect; small and insignificant in the presence of a greater set of beings. More people than he had encountered in his 27 years of life so far were present, each with peculiar clothing and hairstyles.

Arthur wore a pair of jeans with rust-colored stains covering the majority of its fabric. He carried the coat he had used as a placemaker in the tunnels over his right arm. His canteen stuck to his belt, he sipped it hard enough to spill all over the front of his beige cloth shirt with ceramic buttons and hand-rolled cigarettes in its front pocket. Checking to see if they had gotten wet, Arthur decided to light one and plan his further action. He would not enter the hole again,

he decided, for it could transport him somewhere even more shocking and frightening. He was trapped. There was no way out. He must adapt.

He first started asking questions, but realized quickly that no one understood his language. Not only was he speaking Spanish, but also he was dressed like a Mexican cowboy from the 1830's. He knew the year it was when he entered the sewer because he had seen a printed newspaper a month before. It was the first he had seen, and its small writing let Arthur imagine that an endless amount of words could be written on the document. Though he could not understand the words, he recognized the numbers, "17" and "1834." The printed code "month" was out of his reach.

Arthur knew how to write. His fingers knew how to spell out the symbols of "m," "e," and "s," meaning "month" in English. Arthur's European ancestry had continued the tradition from Spanish explorers to his father's father's father's father, who insisted that *his* grandson teach *his* grandson until Arthur found himself writing letters to an Uncle, a short poem about the field where balls were thrown, and eventually his own name in urine-melted snow on a freezing winter morning in the interior highlands.

The newsprint had incredibly different for him. The font was incredibly small, and had unusual serifing vowels, truncated "t"s, and thickly horizontal "e"s. The text was in fact so small that Arthur imagined a similar piece of flimsy paper could contain every thought he ever had,

from a description of Libra to himself reading numbers in newsprint and contemplating the complexity of a grander newspaper holding details of this latter newspaper. An incredible feeling blushed through Arthur's body at that moment, and he thought he could read the headline on the newspaper: "LA CABESA ROJA EN EL CENTRO." He could sense fear at reading this, but did not know why.

Arthur could see pages of newspaper tossed about on the city's streets, in doorways, and against containers of garbage. He wanted to read each one, but the writing was painfully above his understanding. When he had seen the first newspaper a month before, he at least was comforted by the knowledge that someone nearby could read it to him. Though on that particular day, when approached with an article written in an antiquated version of Times New Roman font, Arthur had not asked the words be dictated for him. Somehow the title which he could now fully see had not been "LA CABESA ROJA EN EL CENTRO," but "LA RUBIA RICA EN EL CENTRO," and when another man summarized the article, it seemed to be about a visit from a rich white woman.

Arthur decided to take a torn piece of newsprint from a square hole on the side of a metal box. He could read a few numbers appearing midway across the ragged strip. Arthur could make out a "1" and a "200-," but the final digit was illegible. Arthur thought it looked like a four, but the top of it had been distorted to look more like one of the letters he could not

distinguish. Arthur tossed the paper into the metal box from where it came, and backed away from it in surprise.

A man wearing black walked close to him and threw a white piece of paper into the metal box. Arthur stuck his hand inside the hole and pulled the paper out. It was thick, almost the consistency of cotton, but folded neatly into a many-layered rectangle of sheets. The paper was horribly wrinkled, and when Arthur pulled it apart, he noticed a green marking on the center. After a few moments of attempting to distinguish what the green shape was intended to represent and who the message was for, he understood suddenly that the metal box was built to receive refuse. The paper was a handkerchief and the green marking was unremarkable snot. The metal box was not a receptacle for coded messages or a dispenser for newsprint. The metal box was meant for those passing by to expel waste. Arthur threw the paper down onto the ground and spit on his hands, rubbing them against each other and against the legs of his jeans. He began to cough in disgust, and kneeled on the cement. "Dear God, what world is this?" he thought. Soon after, he stood and attempted to converse with others.

Those he interacted with assumed his insanity, and ignored him to the best of their abilities. After a few minutes of frustrating attempts to receive aid for his confusing predicament, he decided that his thirst was a more important need.

Arthur's sense of smell was one thing not consistently surprising him with incoming

surprises of novel intensity and shocking depth. So overloaded by the sights and sounds of vehicles, 21st century clothing, and blaring stereo systems, Arthur let his body follow the odor of strong coffee onto the premises of a Starbucks. He stood in the patio amidst tables and chairs occupied by citizens of varying ages and personality types.

An attractive young woman stood at the counter inside of the crowded Starbucks location. Through the window, she could see Arthur shouting and waving his arms at the people sitting outside. She watched as a guy in gym shorts and a t-shirt with no sleeves pushed Arthur away from an elderly woman wearing glasses.

“...the hell is this guy doing?” the employee muttered.

She stepped out into the fight and said, “What’s going on here?” Her uniform with “ABBY!!!” written in sharpie on its fabric gave the guy in gym shorts a reason to back off. He picked up the paper cup he had left on his table and left the patio.

At her appearance, Arthur had quickly stopped talking in thickly accented Spanish and stared at her until she turned her focus from the guy in gym shorts to Arthur himself. To have this woman look at him politely! He snapped his head away, and looked around for a place to run. He felt the power of her authority. By this time, most of the remaining customers had rapidly exited the premises.

“Now, how can I help you?”

Abby was of average height with pale skin and blonde hair. Her ponytail was tucked

through the back of her hat, and she held her hands on her hips as she spoke to Arthur.

The cowboy kept struggling in his foreign tongue.

“I can’t understand you if you don’t speak English, she said. “Hold on, let me get Karen.” Karen was almost forty years old, and her job as supervisor left her in a back room with her laptop during most of the day. The two women had met only one week prior to this event, when Abby was transferred to this Starbucks location from one located three blocks to the Northeast.

Abby rushed back into the store and, with a raised finger, told a customer that she would only be one moment and went behind the counter.

“Is it that son of a bitch in the Nike sweatshirt again?” Karen asked.

“I don’t think he’s wearing a Nike sweatshirt, Karen. He looks pretty rugged.”

The customer sipped his coffee and waved hello to the two women as they left the area behind the counter and approached the front door.

Back outside, Karen, who majored in Spanish at NYU in 1989, was attempting to figure out what Arthur wanted.

“‘Bees’? You are trying to buy ‘*bees*’? This is not somewhere you can buy bees, I’m sorry.” Karen winked at Abby. “Look, can you draw a picture? A *drawing*?” She held a pen and pad of paper to Arthur. He looked at it, but made no motions to take it from her.

“Is he speaking Spanish? Maybe we should just shoo him away if he’s not,” Abby

suggested.

“Sounds like Spanish, but it's not making any sense. Go in and grab him a glass of water and then tell him to get the hell out of here. He's not buying anything.”

The way Abby Edway swayed her hips as she walked back into Starbucks made Arthur's mouth open and his hand moved unintentionally toward the antique gun in his belt. Resting there, he rubbed the handle lightly until Karen saw the rusty pistol. Her perception of Arthur quickly shifted from a harmless young drug addict to a café-robbing psychopath.

“Everyone run, everyone run!” she screamed. She began waving her fists in wide circular motions, coming toward Arthur with a rough snarl on her face. Having worked at this Starbucks location for over three months, Karen was determined to protect it.

With his hand in front of his face, Arthur began to squeal with fright. It was a high-pitched moan not unlike a train's whistle. Karen struck Arthur wildly on the sides, coming up against his thighs, against his arms. A loose slap to the face brought Arthur down across an empty table, and his body plowed through the thin metal wiring of its surface. Karen placed a triumphant foot on Arthur's stomach, which had become wrapped up within the tangled black table. Trapped, he lay still. It did not even occur to him to expel the weapon from its holster. He could not handle the emotional decisions-making required to both find oneself in such a surprisingly transformed world and kill another human being all in one day. Especially a

woman.

Overcome by shock, Arthur began to urinate. The liquid falling against his right inner thigh warmed his entire leg, but even in such a foreign context he recognized how shameful it was to piss one's pants. Karen crossed her arms across her chest in disgust at the wetness spreading across the front of Arthur's pants. She lifted her hold on Arthur and the table, shouted "Get the fuck out of here!" and watched as Arthur stood against the cumbersome weight of the table wrapped around his middle.

Abby came back outside in time to see Arthur stumbling backward down the street. He kept staring at the two of them as he retreated, but eventually he walked around the block and the two of them went back inside.

Abby, raised in a family of Christian Scientists, felt pity and decided to do what she felt was the right thing. She ran after Arthur, picking change from the front pocket of her apron.

"Hey! Guy with the gun! Wait a minute!" She stretched out an arm as she approached. 83 cents in her palm, shining and mysterious artifacts from the future. Arthur took the items and held them tightly with both hands. He maintained eye contact with Abby, and she smiled, unafraid of the firepower he held at his waist.

Arthur clanged against the brick of a bank behind him, overtaken by this white woman's beauty. The distorted table still tangled around his midsection kept him from getting too close to

her. She had turned, and he stared at her legs and ass while she returned to the Starbucks. Karen stood with her hands on her waist at the patio.

“I’m sure he’s not going to spend that on *drugs*,” said Karen. Back inside the Starbucks, Abby served the patient customer a packet of cream.

Once around a corner, Arthur realized that the city environment stretching before him and behind him also stretched, again seemingly endlessly, in the perpendicular directions. Wall Street became more than the narrow valley with flat-faced, penetrable mountains; Arthur saw it to be only one of infinite concrete worlds that strung with each other across the flattened plain of the pavement. The already overwhelming grandeur of this odd city had increased exponentially.

In awe at the intersection of this new axis, Arthur found himself clinging to Wall Street against the edge of the brick bank as if he would plummet southwest down the intersecting avenue. Deciding to remain on Wall Street, he continued in the direction leading away from the Starbucks where anyone who had seen the previous incident had been replaced by a new batch of customers on the patio who ate scones and sipped at paper cups of latte and milky steam.

Arthur kept silent, walking toward the open space ahead of him. The road pointed him forward and the buildings guided along where he could not pass and forced his perspective to continue along onto a vanishing point far in the distance. Continuing for hours, walking painfully slow to take in the textures of walls, the faces of others, and the fear of cars, he came

upon a body of water that spanned left and right and straight ahead was another land of buildings and smog. To the left was the gigantic Brooklyn Bridge and on the right, Arthur could glimpse an imposing female statue around the corner of more buildings.

Arthur curiously got behind a group of Asian men and women whose facial features made Arthur feel cold and surprised. He crossed the street using them as a shield from oncoming traffic that had paused twenty feet from him before a set of changing lights. An orange pickup truck honked its horn and its driver waved at a set of young women dressed in neon pink leather. The skin of the young women was nearly as orange as the truck. He was unwilling to speak, let alone enable a horn device to call attention to a flashy color and a quick wave. Arthur marveled at the variation in human skin and the interactions so seemingly simple for everyone else.

The group of Asians had made it across a street and onto a grouping of benches at the edge of the water, where concrete barriers separated deep brown waves from the gravelly dirt at Arthur's feet. To his right, he could better make out the form of the statue he had seen earlier. It was still partially occluded, however, by more and more buildings that seemed to have sprung up in the past moments. Arthur ran from the Asians, who now sat eating burrito-like packets of meat from silver paper.

"I must see this woman!" Arthur thought, and upon discovering another set of benches against the water, these positioned such that he could view the towering beauty who looked out

over New York harbor, Arthur looked at the crude halo of spikes around her head, the concerned and proud face, and the shining torch she held high above her head. He looked at himself: the spurs, cowboy hat, and gun; the taut tan skin, rough beneath the soft hairs of his arms; the smell. Arthur stank of sweat, dirt, and his own waste. Hygiene, a step toward social interaction, would present itself to Arthur in a dream he had in the following hours.

After pondering the meaning of such an enormously stationary woman and why he had been so attracted to her, of all things in the shocking environment, Arthur laid his head down on the bench and stared at the clouds. The clouds were a rare element of familiarity to Arthur, and he savored their form and careful movement. For the first time, the clouds called upon his memory. Instead of simply enjoying the abstract wisps and blobs of the white or gray bodies above, he began to compare. He found one that looked like the face of a young child. Another resembled the fruit of a red pitaya cactus. Moving quickly across the sky was a black, arrow-shaped bird that reflected the sunlight back into Arthur's eyes. He blinked, and realized that the bird did not flap its wings, and fly perfectly straight. This great dead bird flew through the sky, and Arthur looked away from the clouds once more to the buildings on the street.

He began walking after realizing that he could not sit on the bench for the years he had left to live; that his death would not come soon enough.

Finally coming upon a patch of grass after moving northeast along the street, Arthur

huddled against a tree. It was the first he had seen since arriving in the city, and he enjoyed its bark, his fingers loosely prying and squeezing. He took a piece and held it in his right hand.

With his left, he took the 83 cents that Abby Edway had given him and threw the coins as hard as he could into the air. Arthur then put the bark into his pocket where the coins had been and left the grassy area. He continued along the road until eventually a unique odor drew him to pry open a metal door and seek shelter within an abandoned warehouse adjacent to a Haitian deli.

CHAPTER TWO: First Sight

On the Monday afternoon in the summer of 2004 that Arthur arrived in New York City, Lotrell Wallace had been given a total of 83 cents without asking for it. Some kind soul had tossed it onto the ground between his legs while he was staring at the front page of a newspaper that had been left beside him. The headline read, “TEEN STAR ENTERS REHAB ONCE MORE,” but Lotrell was mainly concerned with what he considered to be the strangest eyes ever drawn, then photographed in black and white. The eyes were drawn on the cloth of a low-cut dress with a screen-printed black-and-white image of Che Guevara’s face. The black beret he always wore in this symbolic pose was squeezed tight between the breasts of a teen star as she enters research once more.

What was so strange about the eyes of Che Guevara in this drawing on photographed cloth was the placement of the nose, or its odd misplacement. The bridge of the nose was practically a single line as cleavage crossed by the meeting of his Che’s eyebrows. It appeared as if the photograph had been specially made this way; that Che’s face had been centered on the fabric in a manner specifically tailored to the teen star’s bosom, creating what appeared to be the number eight, horizontally dividing the face of Che with the symbol of infinity: 8 on its side.

After hearing the jingle of coins hitting the cement below, he immediately looked from the paper to see if something had fallen. Some things had indeed fallen. Three quarters, a

nickel, and three pennies bounced and still spun below the hem of his filthy jeans. Looking around to see who had thrown the money, Lotrell could not tell which of the walking people had done it. Everyone was walking so quickly, and no one looked back at him from either direction.

He *got* an idea soon, though. He mumbled to himself, “Yo, coffee time. *Wake* my ass up!” He walked out of the park, to the street, and down a few blocks to one of the nearby Starbucks locations. It was on this Monday that Abby Edway would meet Lotrell and soon fall in love with what her mother would later call “the *black* man.”

Once inside, Lotrell scanned the chalkboard for whatever happened to be cheapest. He got in line behind eight or so people, saw nothing less than \$1.29, and planned to bargain with one of the young white ladies behind the counter. He hoped that 83 cents would be enough to get a small, hot cup from them.

In the meantime he listened to two businessmen holding a conversation within earshot. They were standing a few places ahead of him in line, and Lotrell had to lean forward slightly in order to hear what they were saying. His interest had been piqued by Business Man One’s tight fist, which held a few crumpled bills. Hoping that he would drop the money or somehow discard it in such a fashion that he could pick them up without Business Men One and Two noticing, Lotrell paid close attention to the men. He considered taking the money by force, but decided that the necessary intimidation would create even more obstacles in his path toward a cup of hot,

black coffee. Lotrell was used to intimidating those who deserved it. In fact, he enjoyed it most often. He would often have to deal with shady drug dealers who tried to encourage his downward spiral with crack cocaine; angrily complain to supervisors of retail stores when they accused him of shoplifting; and attempt to outyell the occasional racist loudmouth exercising his or her right to free speech on a streetcorner.

“I don’t know *how* the fuck he heard me!” exclaimed Business Man One. “I mean, I was in the goddamn *parking* lot.” Business Man Two just shook his head, seemingly shocked at whatever had preceded Business Man One’s remark.

Lotrell leaned in a little closer to them. “Anyway, he *did* hear me. So he’s mad, right? So I’m just looking at him and he grabs my arm, pulls me close, and goes, ‘I heard you say, “that *dick*, Roger, is going to have some extra work for me, since it’s Friday,” and guess *what*, asshole? I *do* have some extra work for you!’ This is where it gets nuts. He turns to my desk and just *tosses* everything off it!”

Business Man Two muttered, “Shit,” in surprise.

“Yeah, but *this* is the wild part! He puts both his hands in the air, like this, and he brings ‘em down to his waist real fast. Immediately, I hear glass break behind me. There’s a filing cabinet, the one from Jim’s cubicle, fucking *levitating* outside the broken window, like *ten feet* from the damn building! Suddenly the fucking thing comes *back inside* and goes right back to

where it was. I'm fucking *shocked*, and I don't know what is going *on*, and Roger's just standing there *shaking*. I go to look out the window and, when I look back, Roger's just gone. I don't know where he went, but he must've gone real quick. So I'm like, 'Did anybody else just see that?' and no, like nothing in-fucking-sane just fucking happened, everybody's just sitting around doing their work!"

It was time for Business Man One to make his order, but he was visibly upset in recalling these events to his companion. Stammering slightly, he asked for a caramel cappuccino.

Business Man Two was anxious to hear the rest of the story. "*Then* what?"

"I was scared out of my mind! I had no idea what happened! I got the fuck out of there, drove home, and just watched TV all weekend. I had no idea if I was just crazy and none of that happened, or if I was in some kind of Twilight Zone or something." He jammed change into his pocket and started to walk out of the store with Business Man Two.

"What about today?" asked Business Man Two as they were passing Lotrell, who was still waiting in line.

"Ok, so, I get there today and..." At this point, the two men were out of the store and making a right onto the sidewalk outside. Lotrell cursed to himself at not being able to hear the end of this story and shook his head, knowing he would never see these men again or have an opportunity to find out what happened in their office building.

Abby Edway's cute uniform soon distracted Lotrell enough that he no longer considered running after the men to hear more. It was green with a nametag that said "ABBY" followed by three exclamation points. As customers walked away with drinks, Lotrell became more and more nervous in anticipation of trying to talk to this attractive woman.

"Are you finally going to buy something?" she asked him when the person in front of him walked out of the way. Given that this was Lotrell's first time seeing Abby Edway, Lotrell was puzzled. Abby's fingers nervously tapped on the countertop. She was clearly scared of Lotrell in some way.

"I. Uh." Lotrell stammered while Abby maintained a strong glare on his eyes. "I ain't, uh, I mean, have we met before? My name's Lotrell." He placed his hand between the cash register and a display case filled with gum, mints, and CDs. She did not shake it.

Instead, she brought both hands up to her cheeks, and gasped. "Oh god, I thought you were this other guy. I'm so sorry, my manager told me to get rid of the black guy with the cornrows and Nike sweatshirt. I thought it was you, I just assumed. I'm so sorry!"

Karen, who now sat in the back room laughing occasionally at one of the DVDs she had brought from home, had warned Abby that a black guy in a Nike sweatshirt would use the restroom sink as a personal bath, wipe his body with paper towels, and leave without buying anything. The regional Starbucks office had issued a memo to Karen about problems concerning

the homeless in their location. Located around the corner from many popular sleeping locations for the poor, her Starbucks had to be vigilant in order to maintain the policies of the corporate chain. Abby was to refuse the man entry and call the cops if necessary.

Normally, Lotrell would get into a racially motivated argument with someone who he felt had mistaken him due to stereotypes based on his skin color. Abby's cuteness somehow kept him docile in this case. Abby was a spark of interest in his otherwise sad and meaningless life.

"It's alright, I understand," said Lotrell. The two of them smiled.

"So, can I get you anything?"

Ashamed, Lotrell pushed the few coins he had toward Abby on the counter. For some moments the two of them looked down at the meager payment.

"What's going on?" someone asked from behind them, somewhat rhetorically.

"Come on," someone else said.

"Jesus!"

"I've got about... thirteen minutes before I miss my ride."

"Fuuuuuuuuuck," the final voice sighed longingly.

Lotrell kept his face pointed downward, not knowing what to do. Looking over his shoulders, Abby told him to hold on just a sec. "Go sit by that window, and I'll be over in a minute."

Lotrell abandoned the change and sulked to a barstool against the ledge of the window

next to the front door.

“Here you go,” she said, bringing over a tiny cup of steaming coffee that, to Lotrell, was heavenly. She grabbed his hand and placed the change he had left on the counter into his open palm. “Do you need dinner tonight?”

“What?” Lotrell wondered what could be happening at this moment. Was this beautiful white woman asking him out on a date?

He had been involved with women previously, of course, but had never been on an actual date. Most recently, his interactions with women were purely sexual and almost always occurring in a winter month in his freezing and cramped apartment. Fits of crying usually accompanied these relations, and Lotrell was sometimes unable to gauge the difference between the throes of passion and the hopeless sobs of drug addiction, economic annihilation, and personal terror.

At the mere thought of sitting at the same table and conversing with Abby, Lotrell became even more nervous in his interactions with her. “I. Uh.”

“Come by the Church of Christ on Houston Street. Thursday night. We welcome all those in need.” She smiled once more at him and started to walk away.

“Hold up,” he said. She looked at him cheerfully.

“Yeah?”

“What’s your name?”

“Abby. Abby Edway.” She put her hand out and he shook it. “Lotrell, right?”

“Yeah, Lotrell Wallace.”

“Nice to meet you, Lotrell,” she winked and walked off.

Lotrell sipped the coffee quickly and imagined himself in the arms of Abby Edway’s cheerful embrace; the two of them kissing hard in the doorway to an apartment building while it rained; in the backseat of a taxi on the way to a home they shared; at the hospital while she cradled a freshly born infant of beige skin color. Lotrell threw away the cup once he emptied it and left the café with a polite wave to Abby on his way out.

Taking the subway to his home at the Jackie Robinson Homes housing project, on the ninth floor of the A building. Lotrell pictured the warm embrace she would give him as he entered the Church on Thursday night. “I love you!” she would say.

“I love you too, Abby!” he would say.

CHAPTER THREE: The Three Rs

When Arthur entered the abandoned warehouse, his nostrils filled with the scent of pineapple and pepper, he had found piles of clothing infested with insects of all kinds. Each floor of the towering warehouse contained two rooms, an alternating staircase in the center of the floor, and countless items of women's garments. Dresses filled with spider eggs, slacks covered in slugs, and damp t-shirts crawling with ants and flies. On the fifteenth floor, a ladder led to the roof, where Arthur now slept beneath a darkening sky. The four ledges surrounding the exposed floor were ten feet tall, giving Arthur a view of nothing but sky. Climbing to the lip of the northernmost ledge, Arthur was afforded an ample view of New York City. Arthur could see cars moving and people walking around on distant streets. Many of the buildings he had walked among earlier now seemed part of an imaginary landscape. Another mechanical bird flew near the sun, and Arthur recognized the statue of liberty, which he had seen earlier. He did not know that she represented liberty and, from his position behind her, assumed she was some kind of goddess leading the city somewhere across the water.

He remembered the time his father took him to see a statue of the Holy Virgin that towered above shops and was claimed to have cured the ill. He stood in a line with his father for hours and eventually stood at the Virgin's giant feet. He recited a prayer and waited for a few moments. Nothing happened, and he spoke to his father on the long walk home.

“Your mother wanted me to bring you here, but I saw no purpose.”

“Is she a good woman?”

“The Virgin? Yes.”

Arthur sat on the ledge while he saw the surrounding structures become lit with electronic lights and the sounds of vehicles and machines hummed without pause. He lowered himself from the ledge and laid down on the surface of the roof, facing the darkening clouds.

As he dozed, he watched the torch of the gigantic woman become a bright yellow sun that did not set. The ledges of the building disappeared, and Arthur could focus solely on the glow. All faded to white except for the glow, which became a cursor once more. Words began to flow behind the cursor like drips of ink in Times New Roman font:

The first time I sat on the boulder shaped like a Volkswagen beetle, I had never even seen a car in person; let alone one named for and conceptually based on the black pests I used to find in my boots. The Volkswagen company would not be around for another hundred or so years. Travel was not complicated for me. My horse, Libra, had concrete legs that reinforced her stature against my unimposing height.

Somehow Arthur could understand the sentences flowing before him. It was as if they had been spoken from his own lips and transcribed onto the pure white sky. The text continued until Arthur found himself awake on the first floor of the warehouse wrapped in white t-shirts months later. He remembered the dream and how this text spilled before him on the great vista

of space and was reminded of the endless quality he had sensed from the newspaper's tiny print. This text was much smaller, though, and he had seen it move. The text in the newspaper had not moved on its page, but the words of his dream had moved upward, allowing sentences, paragraphs, and chapters to spill beneath.

Bugs crawled all over him, and he stood quickly. Apart from the tiny creatures, he was not alone in the room. Fearfully, he jumped against a stack of shoeboxes. The yellow glow that Arthur thought was the sun had given him the story, and Arthur knew that the three Rs had arrived.

On a warm summer night in 2004, three Cuban men padded back and forth on the cement floor of the warehouse on the first floor of the warehouse. Arthur first noticed that they were speaking a language that he could understand. Some differences certainly existed between more than 150 years of linguistic change over the geographic obstacle of the Gulf of Mexico, but the Cuban Spanish these men spoke was close enough to Arthur's that he grew extremely enthusiastic about encountering them.

"Tell your mother you were caught spitting in the beans, Raul. She'll respect you for that," chuckled one whose voice was throaty and dry.

"Maybe he won't even fire you. Maybe he'll just take your weed for himself," laughed the second man.

“Sure, and then I can start selling out of the deli and he’ll give the three of us a share in the business,” chuckled the one named Raul. The men joked, but Arthur could sense a tension in their voices.

Charles Guerrier, the owner of Guerrier’s Haitian Deli, had yelled at Raul earlier in the day for arriving to work high on marijuana. Raul had been working in the deli’s kitchen for only a week, and desperately needed the job to afford the apartment he shared with the other two men present in the warehouse whose names were Ralph and Ramon.

Charles, as his boss, had acknowledged the smell on Raul’s clothing by screaming at him about family values and proper work ethics. Though he had rushed away after receiving a phone call, Raul had been concerned the rest of the day. Even now, he worried that Charles had called the police and any minute the three of them would be dragged away in handcuffs.

As he lit a joint, Ramon’s face was visible in the darkness of the warehouse. He had dark hair, dark features, and a thick eyebrow that lasted nearly the entire length of his hairline. Raul, Ralph, and Ramon silently passed the joint a few times and eventually Ralph put it out beneath his sneaker. As they began walking toward the metal door, Arthur decided that the time was ripe for his introduction. These three men, the first disciples, heard Arthur call to them.

“Stay! We have much to accomplish.”

The three Rs were not frightened. Upon hearing the unfamiliar voice and noticing the

menacing figure of Arthur Venada amidst the clothing piles of their hiding place, Ralph, Ramon, and Raul pitched their faces forward into a collective nod and sat cross-legged on the floor, not necessarily knowing why they were doing so.

“Starting with you three gentlemen, people of the Holy World will have solutions. By playing the games of humanity, I will remove all negative force from the globe and provide satisfaction from all that lacks.”

Ralph imagined the face of his mother when he was fourteen and she was on her deathbed compelling him to ride the boat to Florida and then the bus to New York City.

Ramon remembered his Uncle Paco riding around in the car he bought for \$2000 that had a gold-plated steering wheel. He remembered wanting to sit in its driver’s seat, but also that he had not been allowed.

Raul saw the extreme close-up of his first kiss; Juana whose nose was thin and eyes were crossed.

“Goodness shall flow in the hearts of mankind, and gold shall rain into the rivers of the economy. The skies will be filled with light, and there shall be no dirt. The imperfections, terror, anxiety, the existential horrors: all will be relieved.”

The three Rs bowed their heads and folded their hands.

“The mechanisms of thought that powerfully change one another are malleable, and we shall act upon them. I can speak English. I can talk the talk and walk the walk. I can spell.

Have you men a problem?"

Raul spoke up. "I do. I have a problem."

"Tell it to me."

Raul explained to Arthur that the three men shared an apartment and that if he lost his job he would not be able to afford the rent that would be due soon. He explained that Charles Guerrier, his boss, had caught him using weed and that he would probably be fired the next day.

"My first task! Thank you, Raul. Ramon and Ralph. You shall help me. When we have finished, we shall move onto another task and another and *another!* Together we will make change!"

CHAPTER FOUR: Second Sight

Lotrell Wallace groaned and spat as he pissed into the toilet and threw a balled-up tissue into the trash bucket under the sink. His forehead was sweating, and the florescent light above twitched like the dying limbs of an insect.

Months had passed since Abby Edway had stood him up at the Church of Christ, and he had been to nearly every Starbucks in the five boroughs looking for her. When he had exhausted the locations in the Wall Street area, he decided to span all of Manhattan in case she had been transferred. Over the spring, he had taken the subway all over New York City looking for the pale-faced beauty who offered him kindness. No luck.

Finally, after putting on a tall-sized t-shirt that he had found in the bargain Tall basket at a retail store and rolling up the legs of the same jeans he had been wearing months earlier on the day he had received the 83 cents from Arthur, Lotrell Wallace met Abby Edway on a streetcorner while he ate a hot dog with cheese and chili. Her hair was not in a ponytail and it had been cut. Also, she was not smiling. She walked briskly, and if Lotrell had not seen a car he liked riding in the opposite direction, he would have never turned to catch a glimpse of her swinging arms and hips moving from behind a bus stop and away from him on the sidewalk.

He moved quickly and matched her pace within seconds, slowing once he had come to being a few feet behind her.

“Abby?” he asked. She stopped walking without turning to face him for just a moment, and in that period of time, Lotrell decided to run; that this had been a bad idea, she would not remember him, and his instinct told him to duck to the right, trying to hide. His feet slipped on a plastic bag that had once held tomatoes, but was discarded after one burst in the heat. The seeds and juices remaining in the bag squeezed onto the palms of Lotrell’s hands as he struggled to keep himself from falling completely onto the ground. He could hear Abby giggling softly.

“Hello?”

“Yeah, sorry, I didn’t see that bag there.”

“Do I know you?” She had stopped giggling at him and remembered that this strange man had called her by name.

“I met you a while back. At Starbucks, and you said to come meet you someplace and then you didn’t show up. The people there were dicks, but I don’t think they even knew who you were.”

She giggled. “Oh, wow. I never thought I’d see you again. I didn’t miss the meeting though, you never showed up to the church.”

“Huh? I *went* there. Some asshole told me he didn’t know you.”

“What? That’s weird. Are you sure you came to the right place?”

“Said ‘Church of Christ’ on it. Real big letters.”

“Wait, *how* big?”

“Pretty fucking big. Like the size of a person.”

“Our sign is like the size of a dog or something. Let me show you, its right around the corner.” She grabbed his hand, and began pulling him up the sidewalk.

“Is it on your way?” Lotrell asked, not sure why. He wanted in no way to discourage her from spending time with him. Even if she was en route to someplace else, he should feel blessed and accept that she chose to give him priority over whatever plans she had previously made.

“It *is* my way.” She smiled. “I’m meeting my dad there. He works there and I’m going to start working there.”

Lotrell was ecstatic. This meeting was going much better than he had imagined in his head. The scenarios he had imagined were either entirely pessimistic or sexual fantasy, and this situation provided him with a middle ground of realistic expectation.

“You know, there was something about you in that Starbucks that I really liked. You were so cute and vulnerable. I don’t know, it just seemed like we would really hit it off.” Abby was inflating Lotrell’s sense of accomplishment and satisfaction with every word. As she held his hand tighter and tighter leading him amidst passing strangers, newspaper dispensers, and assorted obstacles, Lotrell began to feel as if his romantic dream had come true. The clichés of love at first sight, having a soulmate, and feeling at one with the world were tangible and accurate in the presence of Abby’s actions. He could feel the movements of the muscles in her

hand against his, and when they finally reached the Church of Christ, Abby had become like the idealized cartoons Lotrell and his childhood buddies used to draw on notebook paper and tape to their bedroom walls.

CHAPTER FIVE: Libra's Return

On the morning Arthur Venada turned twelve, he woke up to find hair growing on his testicles and a screaming neigh coming from the back of a nearby river. He ran to Libra, but found that both of the horse's rear legs had been broken and her front legs were barely wrapped onto the ledge of earth that quickly crumbled from the winding of her enormous jaw in circles against the dark dirt. Frightened, he ran to her. Arthur understood that she must have fallen into the water, struggled to free herself, and slipped onto the hard rocks during her scramble to free herself from the current. Knowing he would not be able to pull her out alone, Arthur ran back to the house and told his father, who had already been awakened by the great pained noises of Libra's open mouth.

Arthur pretended that he did not know why his father was carrying a shotgun until the two of them came upon her.

"You should have stayed back at the house, Arthur. This is what must be done. She cannot run, she cannot move. She will be happier with the lord."

Arthur's face turned red with anger. The lord would not have Libra. Arthur burst into flame, and for the first time, Arthur envisioned the great open space upon which words could be written:

Arthur Venada rode his beautiful horse Libra across a great open plain. His short black

hair tussled with the wind as the two of them sped across the Mexican landscape. It was Arthur's twelfth birthday, and he was on his way home from fetching seed in the town one hour away from his family's small farm. Arthur expected a chocolate cake when he got home, and Arthur would not be disappointed.

On July 27th, 2004, an important article appeared in *Bodega Revista*, a small publication concerning current events in the lives of Central American entrepreneurs. The article's headline read "Holy Mother Defies Burrito Logic," and showed a picture of an elderly woman in tears. The woman was holding a burrito that was clearly shaped like a traditional image of the Virgin Mary. Inexplicably, the burrito maintained its hold on the rice, beans, corn, and ground beef that the article stated were inside despite the flimsy shape of its veil, the virgin's eyes, and the praying hands that extended from the burrito toward the face of the old woman.

The article focused on the deli from which the burrito had been produced, Guerrier's Haitian Deli, particularly the cook whose hands had built the miracle. Raul Chavez, the cook, would be honored with a mass at the Church of Saints Simon and Jude, a Catholic church in Brooklyn at 5 p.m. on the 30th. An advertisement for Guerrier's Haitian Deli followed. In the advertisement was a photograph of Raul slicing meat and smiling.

CHAPTER SIX: The Monitor

When Lotrell Wallace and Abby Edway arrived at her father's modest church, the first thing she pointed out was the sign above the wooden door that said "Church of Christ, Scientist" carved into red stone against the gray cement of the front face. On the left of the building was a clothing store and on the right was the office of Martin Sandala, DDS. She led Lotrell into the building and Abby approached a gray-haired woman sitting behind a counter.

"Mary, this is my friend, Lotrell. I want to show him around."

"That's nice, Abby. Your father's in his office if you want him to give a tour or anything."

"Thanks," she said. She was still holding onto Lotrell's hand, and Mary frowned slightly as the two of them continued into a brief hallway and through another doorway. The room they had entered was filled with books concerning Christ, medicine, and the divine power of the mind. Lotrell scanned the titles such as *Spiritual Footprints*, *Poems of Spiritual Thought*, and spiral-bound digests of something called *The Christian Science Monitor*. Abby sat on a couch in the center of the room and motioned for Lotrell to sit.

"Lotrell, did you know that the lord works through us in all ways?"

"Um, yeah."

"He can do anything you ask him, and it's *us* who are the vehicles for his actions." Abby had leaned in very close to Lotrell.

Lotrell's open lips were only inches from hers, and she closed her eyes.

Suddenly footsteps could be heard coming through the hallway from which they had entered the room. They could hear a man saying, "...only four times that percentage. Not feasible. We need at least..." and Abby put a finger to her lips that told Lotrell not to speak. She stood and walked toward the doorway.

"Abby? What are you doing in here?" He looked behind her at Lotrell, who had crossed his legs and arms. He pretended to be interested in what sort of fabric made up the left arm of the couch.

"Daddy, I want you to met a friend of mine. This is Lotrell. I met him at the Starbucks I used to work at."

"Which one?"

"The one on Wall Street. The nice one."

"Oh, alright. Well, I expected you to be downstairs by now. We have to have those abortion pamphlets boxed up and in the mail by Wednesday, otherwise they're not even going to make a difference. You know how those protestors are; always punctual, always a pain." He patted Abby on the shoulder and stepped backward into the hallway. "Nice to meet you, Lotrell."

Lotrell cleared his throat and said, "You too, sir," as the older gentleman walked back into the hallway.

“He’s a nice guy. You’ll like him.”

“Yeah?”

“The lord works through all of us, Lotrell. There is a reason to want everything, and no reason not to have it all.”

CHAPTER SEVEN: Having it all

Two days after Raul Chavez was interviewed and photographed by the editor and photographer of *Bodega Revista*, he was asked to appear on the David Letterman program.

David Letterman was a host of a nightly interview and variety show which often featured unusual citizens such as a man who could balance thirty ping pong balls on his nose while singing the national anthem; a woman whose face would sweat blood upon the pressing of her hands into the small of her back; and two young boys who trained their pet ferret to speak American Sign Language.

While Letterman himself did not even make the call himself to Guerrier's Deli, Charles Guerrier shouted, "David Letterman is here! Raul! Raul, he wants to speak to you!"

Raul dropped a grease-covered spatula onto the floor, spattering pale brown liquid onto the cabinets and counters of the cramped kitchen of Guerrier's Deli. He ran forward into the dining area where Guerrier stood clutching the cordless phone.

"Where is he?"

"Here!" said Charles, holding out the phone.

Raul was disappointed that the host was not actually in the room, but was still excited to hear the famous man's voice.

"Mr. Letterman, is you?"

"Sir, I told the other man that I am not David Letterman. I am an intern here. My name

is Richard. I work for Mr. Letterman, and one of the producers of our show has asked me to call you in order to set up a visit to the show. We'd like you to build a special burrito for us on television."

"My god, of course! Yes! Yes!"

Charles was so pleased with Raul that he allowed him to take the rest of the day off from work. Upon leaving the deli, he immediately circled the block and entered the abandoned warehouse to speak with Arthur. In particular, he wished to thank the man responsible for the burrito.

CHAPTER EIGHT: Churches of Christs

Months before, Lotrell had stepped into a relatively empty space filled with pews neatly arranged to accommodate an aisle leading up to a large altar with an enormous wooden cross. A few men in white shirts tucked into black pants stood around a table covered in loose paperwork.

“Yo, where’s Abby at?” Lotrell said to them from the doorway. After some quiet arguing amongst themselves, the oldest among them came toward him.

“What can we do for you, sir?”

“Looking for Abby. Said to meet her here. She around?”

“I don’t believe I know an Abby. If you’d like, you can pray with us. Are you saved?”

“*Saved?* I’m just looking for Abby. She works at Starbucks.”

“I don’t know anyone named Abby who works at Starbucks, now if you don’t want to pray with us, I’m afraid we’ll have to ask you to leave.”

Back in Abby’s church, Abby chuckled. “So you went to the *other* Church of Christ!”

“I didn’t even know there was more than one.”

Abby laughed at this; there were hundreds of thousands of church buildings that said “Church of Christ” on it in the world, thousands in New York City alone, and multiple Christian denominations have used that term on their meeting places.

“I know where you went. That’s a Mormon church. Was it across the street from Shorberg Jewelers?”

“I don’t know, maybe.”

“Those guys are jerks. Elder Jeremy has a stick up his ass about a lot of things. My father got into an argument with him at some city council meeting. I think it was about September 11th or something.”

“What does your father do here?”

“He runs pretty much everything. He and my mom raised me and my brother to be full-on Christian Scientists, and I’m eternally grateful for that. My life would’ve turned out so much shittier if I didn’t use the power of Christ.”

“How’s that?”

“Well, for one, I’ve never been sick, I’ve never broken a bone, and pretty much anything I ask for, I get. I’m not spoiled. I work for what I want. Still, it’s God who gives me everything and all I have to do is ask.”

Lotrell nodded. He wished he had that kind of outlook, but years of living in poverty had destroyed his positivity. His mood was constantly sour, and he was persistently unsatisfied.

Abby leaned in close to Lotrell on the couch. “You know, I think we should start seeing each other. Like dating. Will you be my boyfriend?”

CHAPTER NINE: Preparing for Letterman

When Raul entered the warehouse, he was surprised to find that all of the clothing had disappeared.

“Arthur? Are you here?”

Banging could be heard on the floor above him, and Arthur came down the stairs wearing athletic shorts and no shirt. He held a hammer in one hand and a roll of duct tape in the other.

“Arthur, what’s going on here?”

“I am Repairing,” Arthur said. The word he had used in the actual conversation was *arreglo*, which comes from *arreglar*, meaning either to repair or to arrange.

“You have to come to meet David Letterman with me!” Raul nearly shook with excitement as he put his hands on Arthur’s arms. “We’re going to be on T.V!”

“We are not yet ready for television. There is much we must do in the warehouse before we engage in publicity events. There are plenty of nails around. I hope you’ll help me with this table upstairs.”

“Listen to me. We are going to get to meet David Letterman himself.”

“Raul, sit with me. We must discuss things.” The two men sat on the floor facing each other with their legs crossed. “What I’m doing here in this building is more important than the David Letterman show. What matters is that we appear on the program and we give the messages that we need to give to the world.”

“You already knew that we were going to be on the show? I just spoke to Richard on the phone.”

“Who’s Richard?” asked Arthur as if the answer did not matter to him. “We are going to be on television, correct? On the David Letterman show?”

“Yeah, they want me to make a burrito.”

“That’s fine. I will go with you.”

“Yeah, I was coming over here to invite you. I figured that the guy who showed me how to make that stupid burrito would at least get to sit behind the scenes and eat free food with me. Richard said that he would call the deli tomorrow to set up the details. I hope they tell us when the show will be on. I want my mother to see it.”

“I will appear on the program with you, Raul, and we shall make ourselves known to the general public. Once this happens, we will need to have a location, a place of operation. That is why I am working so hard on repairs here. I found tables for a waiting area. They’re behind those stacks of boxes.”

“Wow, where did all of this come from?” Raul was inspecting a package of nails.

“I gathered it from places.”

“What do you mean? You stole it?”

“It was given. I’ve been interacting with local businessmen. Let me show you my suit.”

Arthur climbed the stairs and returned wearing a plum-colored suitjacket and carrying matching

trousers. “I got these things at the thrift store where young people shop. The prices were high, but I persuaded a manager to donate to my cause. I wore this suit talking to shop-owners all day. Some took pleading, others were willing to agree to my promise of a favor in the future, once things are *arreglado*. When people begin to arrive, we will have to appear presentable.”

Raul put his hands in his pockets and nodded his head in agreement. “I will help in any way that I can.”

CHAPTER TEN: Comedy

Abby burst into laughter and even slapped her knee. She had been kidding, not at all serious about what she had asked Lotrell and what she had been hinting at.

“Joking! I’m not insane, I wouldn’t just come right out and ask you something like that.”

Lotrell’s face did not move. He looked at her with confusion, anger, and the persistent desire to hug her tightly. “I was just playing around. We just met. But I do like you!”

“Yeah, for sure.”

“Can I have your phone number?”

“I don’t have a phone.”

“Oh. Um, do you have an email address?”

“How do you think I would have an email address if I don’t even have a phone?” he laughed.

She laughed too. “I don’t know, maybe the library?”

She stuck her hand into her pocket and pulled out a piece of paper and a bright pink pen.

“Here’s my email. Go to the library and email me. We’ll hang out.”

Lotrell pictured himself at the public library and imagined the inevitable angry white man yelling at him because he did something wrong while using the computer. Still, he nodded his head in agreement and took the piece of paper.

“ ‘Abbycan84@gmail.com?’ ”

“ ‘Abby can,’ ” she said. “As in, *Who can do it? Abby can!*” She giggled, but Lotrell just looked at her, puzzled. She sensed his misunderstanding, “Like a cheerleader cheer. I don’t know, I was just messing around when I came up with it. Had it since high school.” Lotrell, for the first time, began to seriously question how old she was. He could tell that she was under twenty-five by the way she wore her hair: it was tastefully well-kept, but not styled confidently. It parted more to the right than the left, and fell more forward than backward.

He had assumed before --but was glad for the fact to be confirmed-- that Abby was at least a high-school graduate. His initial assumption was that she was between twenty-three and twenty-four, but her cheerful attitude and mischievous quality --along with her mention of high-school, a distant period for Lotrell, who would turn twenty-nine in seventeen weeks-- made him place her age squarely below the legal drinking age. He then realized that the number 84 at the end of her e-mail name must represent 1984, the year of her birth, and felt stupid for not knowing this.

“Look, I know I seem a little weird, but I don’t know, I just felt like we should get to know each other. Maybe we can help each other out.” Lotrell did not know what she meant by that last statement, but nodded again nonetheless and folded the paper neatly into his pocket.

On the way home, Lotrell found a ten-dollar bill wedged beneath a magazine rack in front of an Indian deli. Lotrell stayed up most of the night thinking about Abby and trying to get used

to her sense of humor.

BOOK TWO

The Holy World

CHAPTER ONE: War and Cranberries

In his early twenties, Lotrell had been homeless for about fifteen months. This was after graduating from high school, after his mother died, and after his father pulled a faulty heist in one of SoHo's most popular organic grocery stores and landed himself in jail for ten to fifteen years.

It was at the beginning of the sixteenth month of sleeping on park benches that he began to inhabit an abandoned room on the ninth floor of building A in the Jackie Robinson housing project where his cousin's girlfriends' brother ran things. His name was T-ten, or "T10," as the common graffiti read.

Every door leading to the stairwells of the project's four buildings and every bathroom stall had competing slogans on the walls. Some threatened death to previous authors who may have doubted the sexuality of T-ten or the cleanliness of his mother.

Lotrell had run into T-ten outside of a convenience store where Lotrell had been consistently begging \$3-a-day in change for almost two weeks. Their conversation awkward, Lotrell found himself insisted upon; a two bedroom "condo" with access to the floor's bathroom, a working stove, and six hundred roaches traversing the space between each of the apartment's two closets each afternoon. The only catch was when the white building manager came every three months. Lotrell had to tape a red sheet of paper over the inside of the peephole and be

absolutely silent within the apartment from 2:30 p.m. to 7:00 a.m. three days later. Lotrell never managed to stay awake for that entire amount of time, but when he awoke, the red paper was always taken down and the apartment's toilet had been spotlessly cleaned.

He eventually moved in with Abby for all intensive purposes. His toothbrush was there. All of his clothes, a small boombox, and his meager collection of rap and R 'n' B cassettes were there. She took to him like a white man takes to money, as Lotrell would tell his friends. Her parents did not fully approve even of their relationship, and were completely unaware of their cohabitation.

Until Thanksgiving of 2004, the two of them happily made love most nights, ate meals, and argued in the one-bedroom apartment above a McDonald's fast-food restaurant without Abby's parents being any the wiser. Their arguments were not often, but memorable. Each time, Abby would be surprised at how ignorant Lotrell seemed of the real world, and Lotrell would feel shocked at how ignorant Abby seemed of the way the world actually works. Small differences, like the best way to open a can of beans, whether to leave the bathroom light on during the day, and if the two of them should refrain from making out in public. Abby felt entirely confident about tonguing Lotrell's neck in the aisle of a Korean grocery, while Lotrell became nervous each time he held her hand in front of young children.

On the Wednesday before Thanksgiving, Lotrell watched television and sipped a Coors

Light can as Abby walked in the front door, directly to his right. She stopped in front of the TV with her coat still on, and continued an argument that the two of them had begun in the morning while still laying in bed; an argument of a more serious nature than the two had ever experienced with one another. Neither of them wished to cross the line of permanent dismissal, but each had strong opinions nonetheless.

"I don't care what she thinks of you." She placed her hands on her hips after letting the strap of her purse fall from her left shoulder. "Doesn't mean shit to me. I love you. She can't get that? I'm not gonna let her tell me what's what."

"Right, but she's not going to just let me sit there at the table knowing we fuck."

"You think she cares that we fuck?"

"Yes." He smiled, stood, and placed a hand on the small of her back.

"Don't even say that word when we're talking about my mother."

"What if I mention your father? Do you think he would imagine us doing it?"

"Gross!" She play-slapped his chest, hoping to bring the topic to a more serious center of debate, and not this mild flirtation that the two so commonly shared. "No matter what, they're going to be pissed about us. They're old and old-fashioned. I hate to make excuses like that, but--"

"Sweetie, it's not your fault. I just don't think I should even go."

"My brother's going to be there, and I know he wants to meet you."

"I can go have lunch with him or something. It's not like..." Lotrell trailed off, and Abby looked down at her feet, past the place where their bellies were meeting in a warm embrace. Charles, Abby's brother, had been in Iraq since 2003. This was long after the public blamed that nation for the World Trade Center attacks, but before George W. Bush was unanimously declaimed by the populace. Most of America hated the middle east, and Charles Edway, fresh out of high school, was more than willing to join the war against terror. He would be home this Thanksgiving, and Abby desperately wanted the two to meet. Lotrell would be welcome by no one in the Edway family but Charles. She suspected disrespect from her parents, aunts and uncles, cousins, and family friends, but she felt Charles would be there for her; for Lotrell, in their rebellious love affair.

Lotrell did not want to imply Charles would live forever, but it was hard for him not to think this. Charles had been pronounced dead twice, involved in more than twenty explosions of Improvised Explosive Devices, or IEDs, and had lost all of his hair from that many blasts. Webcam images sent to his family showed Charles with no apparent injury (save for the lack of any body hair) and in entirely good spirits. Charles relied on the power of Christ, as a Christian Scientist, to heal all injury and sickness. For him, it worked. For many others, it did not.

Charles led a popular prayer group on his base that many injured soldiers attended. He had cured the ills of phantom limb pain, post-traumatic stress disorder, and general depression in

many. His invincible, durable body was inspiring to those who had suffered. Lotrell longed to meet the impermeable soldier as well.

They held each other for awhile until Abby spoke.

"I'm not ashamed of you. I want to prove that."

"You don't have to prove--"

"I want to. I want my parents to know we are holding hands under their table. I want my dad to cut the turkey you eat tomorrow. I want my mother to serve you cranberries."

CHAPTER TWO: The Former Production Manager

Meanwhile, Arthur and the three R's were looking at a computer screen showing message board posts from a forum focused on the preparation of large meals.

"Man on Bicycle says it is too late!" Raul worries. He is referring to a post from a user whose avatar is Lance Armstrong riding a two-wheeler in front of blurred trees and atop blurred blacktop. The user mentions preparing the roast two days in advance, soaking it in garlic butter and wine.

"Raul, relax. There are many ways to prepare a turkey," Arthur says from his seat at the desk. Raul and Ramon are at his left and right shoulders, respectively. Ralph sits in a leather chair opposite the computer. The room has wood paneling, plush lighting, and a window overlooking a decaying part of upper Manhattan.

The warehouse is no longer in disrepair. After appearing in front of a live audience during the taping of an episode of the Late Show with David Letterman during the previous summer, members of the audience had offered their support of Arthur's nondescript cause. Much came in the form of monetary donation from those only visiting New York City and attending the show's afternoon filming as part of their vacation. They would send cash wedged between strips of cardboard in the mail, online transactions through a paypal account Richard Tenberg had set up, and photographs of their loved ones, requesting blessings, good wishes, and regard of

all sorts.

The local visitors to the Letterman program were often much more kind. They experienced nearly the same reality in which Arthur had come to find himself in the previous months: a city with so many constructions, so much to become lost within, and so much oppression from every angle. Many came to the warehouse and loaded equipment, brought supplies and meals, and showed much support to Arthur and the three Rs.

Richard Tenberg, perhaps most of all, had aided the organization. He brought his technological know-how to Arthur's online presence through youtube videos of his speeches, the streaming radio of Cuban rap that the three Rs were so fond of, and the website outlining Arthur's main points in public speaking. All of these main points surrounded Arthur's incredibly ambitious task: to solve every problem ever, experienced by an individual or society.

Richard Tenberg had met Arthur and the three Rs during their appearance on the Late Show, and had immediately become infatuated with the Mexican cowboy who spoke deliberately in a deeply accented English.

Arthur was just a guest. Not a guest of the program, but a guest of a guest. Raul had been asked to appear on the program for his recent local popularity in creating a burrito that resembled a praying Virgin Mary in silhouette. Raul brought Arthur along, and from the moment Richard laid sight upon his maroon suit and tightly combed hair, Richard was in love.

Since that day, Richard had been spending long hours at the warehouse. He had set up a wireless network for the many computers on the first and second floors in addition to maintaining their presence on the web. He could never approach Arthur about his attraction, but was satisfied in merely being around the man for so much of his time.

If one were to ask Richard why he could afford to spend so much time at the warehouse with no pay, he would point you back to the exact second Arthur entered the Ed Sullivan theatre. His life was centered around this moment, and any events previous faded into the "before" sorting of his memory.

Arthur and Raul had been given a ride in a limousine that picked them up at the front door of the warehouse, which was still a rough construction zone of Arthur's repairs and vermin extermination, to the revolving doors at the entrance of the theatre. Richard was sitting on a couch near the doors, speaking on his cell phone to someone. He never remembered the persons name, whether it was a man or a woman, or what their conversation concerned. As soon as Arthur appeared in the lobby behind Raul, his mind erased, and the locus of all interest became the man in the maroon suit, and how to get into those pants.

CHAPTER THREE: To Manage Alberto

On the morning of Thanksgiving, Lotrell took a meeting with Alberto Gonzales, a rapper from the same building of the Jackie Robinson projects that Lotrell had often spent evenings with, hanging out in the halls and stairwells of the housing unit. Lotrell had always asked to be the man's manager, had he ever found the need for one, and Lotrell had received a phone a week before asking to arrange a meeting.

Lotrell came to the projects in a tucked-in, white button-up shirt and dark pants. He was dressed for the dinner that would occur in the evening, but did not let Alberto think he was dressed in such a way for any reason other than that he leant this meeting a great deal of importance. Alberto gleamed as he opened the door of his meager apartment for the slender, spiffily-dressed African American.

"Sup, man. Long time no see."

"Yeah, I know, brother!"

The two embraced diagonally, with each patting the other twice on the back with one hand. The two sat on the same couch while Alberto cued a track from his cheap laptop computer, which was covered in stickers. Many of the stickers were printed with such outlandishly seriffed fonts that Lotrell was unable to read them. The ones he could read spelled the names of rappers who Alberto must have idolized.

Alberto explained that a fellow Mexican, a *rich* fellow Mexican, wanted to do business

with him; that his songs and persona were to be tied to a social movement of incredible proportions. The man, of course, was Arthur Venada, and this would be the root of Lotrell's involvement with the cowboy. He was to act as Alberto's manager, in the sense that he would sit in on meetings between the rich Mexican's associates and Alberto and provide a second opinion for any deals the two may come to discuss. Lotrell did not know the first thing about artistic management, and had only come to this meeting because Alberto was a friend. Apparently, Lotrell was the only friend of Alberto's whom he felt that he could trust.

The interest Lotrell had expressed in Alberto's unaccompanied musical performances in the project was highly influenced by alcohol and marijuana usage, but he sincerely felt that the man had talent. Much to his surprise, a four-track demo that Alberto had distributed since Lotrell had moved in with Abby was circulating the underground hip-hop labels of the New York City area. Lotrell excitedly agreed, and the two of them shared a joint before Lotrell had to leave for Abby's parents' home in an expensive part of Brooklyn.

CHAPTER FOUR: The Pale-Red Room

"Who is that?" Richard Tenberg asked an intern who was also named Richard.

"That burrito guy. The one with the Virgin Mary." The intern was filling mugs with coffee and placing them onto a cafeteria tray. "Letterman himself asked for him. Who knows, maybe he found god. Whatever."

Richard Tenberg watched as the man in the maroon suit followed two other men through the lobby and into an elevator.

Raul and Arthur did not speak inside the elevator. There was another man with them, who had also been inside the limousine. Without words, they had followed him into the building and continued onto the fourth floor when the doors opened and the third man walked out. He then turned to face them.

"Ok, so you can head to the green room now, or we can probably get you in with the stylist right now."

Raul and Arthur looked at each other.

"Ok..." The man looked from one to the other and back again. "Green room it is. Follow me."

They followed him to a room that was not green, but a pale red. They were alone in the room for about fifteen minutes before a man wearing a headset microphone opened the door and asked that the guest go to hair and make-up. Raul did not know where hair-and-make-up was,

but went alone into the hallway and waited until the man with the headset, Richard the intern, returned.

"It's this way."

Meanwhile, Arthur sat in the pale-red room wondering why they called this color green and waiting for Raul to return. He nibbled at the cookies and snacks arranged on a table against the wall, and chose a blue aluminum can of soda to take back to his seat on one of the room's many comfortable chairs.

Soon, the other guests arrived. Morgan Freeman first, then every member of the rock group Hoobastank. The members of Hoobastank joked with each other in white, suburban slang that Arthur could not recognize, while Morgan Freeman shook their hands and said "Thank you" after their compliments.

When Raul returned, accompanied by Richard the intern who needed to direct the rest of the program's guests to hair and makeup, he found the group of guests paying rapt attention to Arthur, who was speaking loudly and gesturing large with his palms open toward the ceiling.

As soon as the door opened, however, all conversation ceased. The group of men, now quiet, stared at him. Richard's headset beeped and a muffled voice was the only sound heard besides the light music being piped into small speakers in the corners of the green room.

Somewhat suspiciously, Hoobastank's drummer popped the tab on a can of Pepsi and all eyes

turned to him.

Richard the intern then politely informed them that the show would begin taping in one hour, and that they were to each visit hair and makeup before showtime. He would be back for the program's first guest, Morgan Freeman, in about an hour and fifteen minutes.

"Thank you," Morgan Freeman said.

CHAPTER FIVE: Thanksgiving

Lotrell, with his shoes now off, plopped into bed and turned on the television set while Abby showered in the next room. He listened to David Letterman make an inappropriately dated joke about how hot the city was that day. Of course, it was Thanksgiving night, and the city had begun to receive snow in incremental bits over the course of the previous week. Must be a rerun, Lotrell thought. He watched the bald leader of the band swing his arm in a shiny, flamboyant suit and listened to the melody reminiscent of marching bands and show choirs followed by a commercial break. He heard Abby turn off the shower and unbuttoned his shirt.

Things had gone relatively well over dinner. Charles was pleasant, but unimpressive. Lotrell had somewhat hoped to see him perform a parlor trick with his magnificent durability; perhaps attempt to stick a fork through his arm only to have the frustrated silver bend against his venerably tough flesh, or perhaps see him withstand the heat of an oven-burner against a cheek. Nothing of the sort. However, he had given an extremely beautiful prayer before the meal.

Short of a few frowns whenever he spoke, Abby's parents were nearly pleasant as well. Abby was so shocked at how well the dinner had gone that she flirted heavily with Lotrell on the walk home, implying that she would be extra attentive that night in bed.

When David Letterman appeared once more on the screen, Lotrell could hear Abby humming a few bars of something he did not recognize through the bathroom door.

"Tonight's first guest has appeared in many films including *The Shawshank Redemption* and *Deep Impact*. His well-known voice has made him top choice for narration work--"

"Oh, I love his voice!" interrupted the bald man in charge of the band.

"Great voice, *great* voice! He'll be narrating *March of the Penguins* coming out sometime next year. Ladies and gentlemen, *Morgan Freeman!*"

Normally, the guest would approach David's desk, shake his hand, perhaps whisper something audible only to the host, and take one of the comfortable-looking seats facing the audience. Morgan walked rapidly toward the edge of the stage, within three or four feet of the active camera, as close as possible to the audience without leaving the stage, and stared straight ahead; not into the camera's lens in order to simulate the sense of being watched for those at home, but directly ahead, into the crowd, behind the crowd, and into the world outside the program.

Lotrell felt a chill run through his body as the bathroom door opened. Before Abby stepped out, he heard Morgan Freeman calmly say, "The Holy World is upon us," in his deep, soulful tone of voice. "Ladies and Gentlemen..."

Abby walked out and faced the television screen.

"Arthur Venada!" He stepped aside and allowed his arms to wave Arthur into view, now showing himself in front of the paper skyline of New York City. As Arthur approached the edge of the stage, he shook Morgan Freeman's hand. Morgan then took a few steps back and bowed

his head, folding his hands below his belly. As David Letterman approached them from the side, Morgan placed a hand on David's chest and a finger on his lips. "David, please," Morgan whispered. David stood still.

Arthur, too, stood still. His facial expression was enough at first. Nothing about his emotion showed, but something in his eyes displayed compassion, goodness, and strength. They glowed with perhaps the same glow that appeared to him in the sewers, the same that appeared before the text of this story; his knowledge of what had been and what was to come, revealing itself to him as it was written in the blankness of his mind. Now full with the glory of the Holy World, Arthur expressed all of this silently to the crowd of tourists, Hoobastank fans, and employees of Viacom, the large corporation encompassing many television networks including the Columbia Broadcasting System, which in turn held control of the David Letterman program.

The cameras mere feet from Arthur's powerful stance somehow transmitted the message of the Holy World through the cables, airwaves, and television sets into the homes of viewers around the nation. Specifically, the modest apartment of Lotrell Wallace and Abby Edway, where Lotrell was now sitting up on the bed and Abby was perched atop the footboard with her bathrobe nonchalantly open.

CHAPTER SIX: Richards

On the night before Thanksgiving, Arthur had found over sixty recipes for cooking a turkey that conflicted in edible content, heat, and oven duration. Only Ralph's sigh, followed by a shout of "Fuck the turkey!" from across the desk at the three men, made the other two Rs and Arthur decide to just purchase a precooked turkey at a local merchant whom they called momentarily in order to arrange a pick-up.

Then, they called Richard Tenberg to see if he could pick up the turkey on his way to the warehouse the following morning. Richard did not pick up.

Richard was busily sending emails and arranging a surprise for Arthur: the airing of his appearance on the David Letterman program during Thanksgiving instead of a rerun from 1996 with Sandra Bullock, one of OJ Simpson's lawyers, and the Goo Goo Dolls. The deal relied on the relationship Richard had maintained with the intern named Richard, who still worked as an intern on the show, and had access to the programming tapes before they reached the network.

The night the show was filmed there was a rerun aired from the previous year with Willie Nelson, Jennifer Garner, and a comedian named Fuzzy Tuppons. The videot program was completed as per the usual schedule, complete with cuts for commercial breaks, studio graphics, and additional interview footage cut from Morgan Freeman and Hoobastank's previous visits to other late-night talk shows. The incident with Arthur occurred between the twenty-first and

twenty-fifth minutes of the tape, which was placed on a shelf in the editing room of the Ed Sullivan theatre. No one was to go near it, said Letterman himself.

Richard Tenberg used the words "Yours truly" at the end of each email sent to Richard the intern, and suggestively referred to his strong capability in the bedroom while insisting the importance of actually airing the footage of Arthur's visit on television the night of Thanksgiving. All was set in order, and the program was aired to surprisingly little public outcry. The staff of the Letterman program made no notice of this particular rerun being aired instead of the one from 1996, and Richard the intern managed to keep his job despite both participating in this subversive action and arriving late to work the next day due to spending much of the night awake in the arms of Richard Tenberg.

Tenberg, however, had long been out of a job. This was another reason he spent so much time at the warehouse. A large sum in one of his bank accounts was enough to keep him in his apartment for about two more months past Thanksgiving, and after that he hoped to move into the warehouse. Above the second floor were unfurnished apartments ready to be occupied by followers of Arthur's mission to solve all of the globe's problems, big and small, should they arrive.

When Richard was fired, he did not expect to be slapped by David Letterman, but came to understand the reaction. It was, in fact, his responsibility to make sure things like that did not

happen. Morgan Freeman was to sit and speak with Letterman about his recent and upcoming work, tell an entertaining anecdote, and remain seated while the second guest and musical act performed. This was Richard's responsibility as production manager. Sure, he had other duties, like to comfort a crying celebrity, purchase illicit drugs for singers, or fill out the network's abundant paperwork, but his primary task was to make sure nobody fucked anything up, as Letterman would say.

That day, Richard had done nothing to stop Arthur from stealing the spotlight from Letterman and the scheduled guests. Morgan Freeman had intervened, yes, but it was partially Richard's responsibility also to make sure that even something like that did not happen. He felt justified in his firing; that both Letterman and himself were doing what would be considered "the right thing." His duty, as felt at the moment, was to allow the powerful presence of Arthur to have its place on network television. It was then Letterman's duty to slap him for such insubordination and fire him on the spot.

"Glorious Salutation! Bring the poor to the front. Call to all the weak and tell each man to be strong against that which pulls him down!" Richard stood next to a camera, holding a clipboard. He did not move to prevent the continuation of the message.

Raul then appeared at the back of the stage, walking confidently from the passage between backstage and on-air locations and flailing his arms like erratic pinwheel fireworks.

"Try becoming what you want, and not what those around you want you to be! Explore all that you wish!" he yelled at the top of his lungs. Sadly, he was not wearing a lapel microphone, and the audio of his vocalization would not be heard on the videotape.

David Letterman then broke the shock of what was happening and brushed past the distinguished black man with salt-and-pepper hair who had been softly nudging him out of the camera's frame. He wrestled Arthur to the ground before shouting "Get these Hispanic dicks out of here!" to Richard. Richard did not move. It was his call, and had he simply nodded his head, a team of security guards would have aided Letterman. However, he stood silent, watching this unfold; his eyes on Arthur's body as it writhed beneath Letterman's crude pin.

Richard had attained a noticeable erection by the time the security guards decided to act on the order of Letterman himself, rather than waiting for direction from Richard. Letterman let go once the security guards began to drag Arthur and Raul away.

He walked right up to Richard and slapped him hard across the face. This was not on camera, as the program had broken into a commercial break almost immediately after Letterman's intervention. The audience booed at Letterman after he had raised his arm and struck Richard across the cheek.

"You're fucking fired, you cocksucker," Letterman had said. Richard felt bitter about only one thing. Cocksucker. Letterman never should have used that word. Of course, he

probably had no idea Richard was gay, except for perhaps the visible erection in his pants. He merely used the term as an insult. Richard took it this way, but recognized the cruelty behind the statement. Letterman was justified in firing him, and even *slapping* him, but he had no right to call him that.

Richard, in a fury, packed his things from the office he shared with the show's only female writer and walked the many blocks to his home.

CHAPTER SEVEN: Arreglando

“Lotrell, it is a pleasure to meet you. These are Raul, Ralph, and Ramon. Richard Tenberg will be here shortly, and I would invite you to sit down and make yourself at home. Would either of you like some coffee or a glass of water?”

“Nah, it’s cool.” Lotrell spoke for Alberto as well, and Arthur walked around the desk and sat in his leather chair. The three Rs stood against the wall behind him.

It was the week after Thanksgiving, and all had been going as planned. Arthur had staged an event in Harlem’s Morningside park that had been attended by more than thirty-thousand citizens and travelers in New York City. Lotrell had spent the day reading a book Abby had recommended, but had heard a synopsis from Alberto, who had been granted “backstage access.”

Though this is how Alberto had phrased it, it would be hard to consider there to have been a backstage, or even a stage. Arthur had taken a place in the center of the park, and spoke loudly in front a portable projection screen. “This Ralph guy took me past about a bazillion brothers waiting for it to start, and let me stand right in front. He started talking, and, man, it was fucking beautiful.”

"This is you," Arthur had said, pointing to an image of thousands of Kosovar refugees decaying under a hot and bloating sun. The beam of light projecting from the projector unit on a

stand before him then changed to a colony of ants within a glass-walled laboratory container; a painting by Goya of Spanish dissidents being murdered at night; a diagram of one slave ship efficiently carrying 130 men per floor in cramped, horizontal space; a group of rural coal miners, one of whom was in mid-cough at the time the photo was snapped; and finally the famous photograph of a man falling from the North Tower soon before its collapse in the ninth month of 2001.

"Greed. Iniquity. Hunger. We suffer. Soon, the world shall become Holy." Arthur had spoken perfect English with a non-regional dialect familiar to those working telemarketing jobs and those seeking positions on national TV news programs. "Seek guidance with your inner self. Become like me, in that we understand what others learn in reference to ourselves; what we have allowed to be shown of ourselves. Those who suffer, all of us, we do not present our suffering in ways that allow others to help. Those that try, fail. Those that ignore, are blessed in their ignorance..."

Arthur continued for over an hour, showing slides of various historical events during which certain groups of people, or other creatures symbolically, have been forced to suffer at the hands of others. Arthur gave importance equally to those who possess great amounts of money and those who do not; those who are medically ill and those who are fit; those who are outwardly cheerful and those who weep; those with a loud and wide-reaching voice and those who remain

silent.

As the oratory came to an end, the audience and Arthur had become extremely loud, and cheers, "Amen!"s, and assorted whooping and hollering could be heard from blocks around.

Alberto's smile glowed bright with the retelling of these events.

Now, in the second-floor office of his warehouse, Arthur was meeting Lotrell for the first time. They sat in silence for awhile, as Lotrell imagined Arthur on the Letterman program, and Arthur imagined the future business the two would share.

CHAPTER EIGHT: Carson, the Tank

A few nuts that had seen Arthur's visit on the Letterman program were scared of the ideas and race of his appearance. His general brown-ness confused countrymen such as Roy "Tank" Carson, Jr. of southern Missouri so much so that he created a simple bomb, placed the bomb inside of a box, and paid for it to be delivered to the warehouse where Arthur was setting up his headquarters. The process of finding the warehouse's address and creating the bomb took a great deal of time, so it was not until Richard Tenberg's visit in the week following Thanksgiving of 2004 that the box containing the bomb was placed into a delivery truck, coincidentally brown in color, and driven through the city toward the warehouse.

As the truck left its depot, Richard Tenberg was thinking of contacting an attorney with whom he could sue David Letterman for discrimination. "Cocksucker" could potentially have been enough to bilk millions from the television personality. As can be expected, the truck carrying Roy "Tank" Carson, Jr.'s bomb struck Richard. As it is presented here, the event seems fated. In fact, it was merely a coincidence. Regardless, Arthur's life was saved because of Richard Tenberg. He would then be known posthumously as the first martyr for the Holy World. Roy "Tank" Carson, Jr.'s plan was foiled, and the world would be on Arthur's side. Arthur Venada had set in motion the events that would bring about the Holy World; solutions for every problem. Nothing could get in the way of this fated outcome.

THE END

Kidding! Of course, you must have known that this was not the end. This is a novel, not a collection of short stories, or a novella and then separate matter! It cannot be as short as this previously told tale. You know this.

And what sort of ending would *that* have been? The Holy World has not yet even arrived.

If you are holding these pages in your hand, you must physically sense the remaining pages. Perhaps you even flipped through them and seen the other sections of the book.

Hopefully you have not read the final page, as I know some of you may be tempted to do. If you

are not holding a printed edition of this story, you are reading it on a computer, or other electronic device. In which case the file size or the total number of pages would have given away the fact that the story is not a mere 65 pages long! You should not have been fooled by my prank.

Arthur, on the other hand, believes that previous page to have been the end of his tale. Remember when he read the text of his story, typed across the sky? Well, he only read that part of the story. A seasoned reader and student of language as yourself must have sensed that there was much more to the plot than what was given. However, Arthur was not familiar enough with literature to realize that the Holy World had not yet been created, and he had solved *absolutely nothing* up to this point!

He did recognize the climax of the given story to be his near death at the hands of Roy “Tank” Carson, Jr., and believed this to be the ending event. He assumed his story would end there. Arthur understood that one’s story signified one’s importance in the world, and having been given this predetermined knowledge, he merely acted out what was stated and assumed he was ready to die. Nothing else of significance could happen after the end of the story, correct? Not correct. As you should realize by now, the most important parts of this story are to come. Arthur, on the other hand, does not. I gave him that vision, by the way. I told him the story. In fact, it was I that moved him from his position in northern Mexico to present day New York

City. As author of this book, I can pretty much do anything I wish. Through a number of interventions with Arthur's life, many involving myself disguised as a glowing yellow light, I placed Arthur into the position in which he now finds himself. By allowing him to read the text itself, he was able to understand the English language fully. He knew of the Letterman show, and he knew what he had to do in order to create a situation for Lotrell to come into the story. Now that the pawns are set in place, we can see the true creation of the Holy World and its resulting change in global society.

*

Arthur slept for days after the learning of Richard's death. In fact, months. Long enough for Lotrell's mind to stew a thoroughly obsessive attraction to Arthur. Not at all sexual, but historical, social, *important*. He began visiting the warehouse, making plans, helping to publish pamphlets of Arthur's mission statement.

When he finally awoke, it was 2005. Lotrell Wallace was downstairs on the telephone, organizing a meeting with one of the leading software developers on the West Coast.

"And you thought of us? Really. Well, I know for a fact... Yes, but... Alright, I'll see what he thinks. Happy New Year to you, too." Lotrell hung up the phone.

"What was that about?" Arthur was still wearing his slippers, but had put a sweater on over the white t-shirt he slept in. Below the waist, he only wore boxers, a pair of socks, and the

dark blue slippers the woman working at the Gap had donated to him months before. Lotrell hugged him tightly and shed a single tear.

Lotrell then picked up a pad of paper that had been sitting next to the phone. “Mark Deporn. A computers expert or something. Says he can help us.”

“Sure, let’s do it.”

“Do what?”

“I don’t know.” Arthur moved to the coffee maker and poured some into his mug, which was a gift from the band Hoobastank that had appeared the same evening Arthur appeared on the Late Show with David Letterman. The mug had their logo and a few drawings of guitars and various squiggles around its primary girth. “What did he want to... do.”

“Computer shit. Listen, we can’t just align ourselves with anyone who calls here. He could be—“

“He could be what? An assassin? A Nazi-sympathizer? A communist? I don’t see why we can’t trust people that want to help. You’ll have to get used to people being on our side.”

Arthur, believing whole-heartedly in the truth of his story’s final statement, had vital confidence in others. Because he believed in this whole-heartedly, as he would say, it became true. One of Arthur’s well-known catch-phrases up to this point was, “If you believe in something whole-heartedly, it shall be truth.” Since reading his own story, Arthur had been improvisationally spewing the bits of dialogue not spelled out directly in his tale. Between the

actions of beginning and ending his many presentations, Arthur had to create content. Arthur knew he *could* do it. He had already read that he had done so. Through this confidence, he spoke from his heart. The truths he believed in, which included that truth allowing him to speak from his heart in the first place: “If you believe in something whole-heartedly, it shall be truth.”

Trust. The opposite of fear.

“Do you want to call him back? I took down his number.”

“I’ll handle that later. For now, let’s get something to eat. I haven’t eaten since last year.” They both chuckled. Ha ha ha, they laughed.

*

Arthur had not dreamt of the future since the story ended. The phone call could almost be called a “wake-up call,” if Arthur had not already been awake for hours, laying in bed and taking in the sights and smells of his bedroom, stretching his weakened muscles, and peeking cautiously out the window at the city in winter: his first. Also, it was Arthur who returned the call from Mark. He calmly asked the woman who answered if Mr. Deporn was available, and she exclaimed, “You called back!”

Mark Deporn, a brilliant computer scientist, had the means to solve a number of problems that faced global society through software development and complex mathematics. Arthur listened to him long enough to understand the sincerity and potential in his voice, and when Arthur came to the realization that his organization would be better served in the isolated hills of

California, where computers grew on trees and electricity flowered wirelessly to all, Arthur agreed to make the move. Mark Deporn said he could arrange the acquisition of a large office building, its full networking, and a series of apartment buildings for the employees of his enterprise. After all, wouldn't Arthur be happier in a location geographically similar to that of his upbringing? Aren't we all?

*

The first part of this book, the tale that was told to Arthur, began with his transportation through space and time. Now, we set upon the beginning of a new journey, one taking place between 2005 and 2012. Many speculated that the world would end in the year 2012. These are a result of those who study ancient Mayan myths dealing with the cycles of history, bolstered by scientific calculations of how much oil we were using at the time and how much could potentially be left in the earth. Oil and other fossil fuels were used to create the energy used to provide heat, which could in turn be converted into something called electricity. Electricity allowed people to work at night, transportation and communication to be greatly increased over the course of the 20th century, and computers to simply exist. The use of oil, however, degraded the environment and brought about political situations based on where that oil was found. Oil will play a huge part in the following part of this story. Oh, and did I mention this was a tragedy? That could have been implied by the implication of oil alone, but there will be a much

deeper loss of life by the end of this tale. Yes, unfortunately, someone very important will die at the end of this story.

*

When Arthur, Lotrell, and the three Rs landed at the Los Angeles airport, they were stunned by the sunlight shining down upon their faces. In fact, it was so bright that Arthur felt as if he had awoken once more in a strange and distant land; that a new journey would be taking over from this point on. The story he had known of this world had come to an end, and he would be undertaking a greater, much brighter task in creating the Holy World.

On the way into the airport, the five of them had to hold their hands up as visors above of their eyes even though they were squinting as hard as they could manage. They were greeted by Mark Deporn, a man who seemed much taller on the telephone. He wore a blue blazer with a white business shirt underneath. Its topmost buttons were unbuttoned just enough to allow a few brown hairs to spill over onto his collar. He wore his hair parted on one side, the left, and shook their hands tightly, one by one. Lotrell did most of the talking.

“Mark? Lotrell. It’s a pleasure.”

“Pleasure’s all mine. Trust me, I’m glad as hell you guys came. I want to bring you guys to the office. There’s a lot to show you.”

They took Mark’s car, a 1999 Taurus with vanity plates that read CHPHNCHO. Raul, Ralph, and Ramon spent the entire drive trying to think of what it could mean before Mark

explained that it was a nickname given to him by the Vice President of Sales at Intel, a company specializing in computer chips. “Chip Honcho. That’s what they called me. I sold all the chips. Now I’m out of hardware. I got real into politics after I retired, and started thinking about how I could fix things with software.”

“You’re retired?” Lotrell asked. Mark looked to be no older than forty years old, but he did carry himself like a carefree retiree. His car’s floor was littered with candy bar wrappers and cola bottles of all colors and brands.

“Made a shitload in the dot com boom. Got out early. That’s how I can afford this.” He was displaying his gaudy watch; its face glowing an extravagant green. “That’s real emerald. Glows in the dark. Cool, huh?”

Arthur sat silently in the front seat, looking around at the palm trees and hillsides with enormous homes and very fancy cars in the driveways. Lotrell had to lean uncomfortably forward in order to speak with Mark, who was driving. Raul and Ramon were seated to his left, and Ralph, the fattest of the three Rs was on his right. Earlier in the drive, Mark had apologized for the cramped seating. He claimed to have assumed that only Arthur would be coming.

“So, Mark. I know very little about what you have planned out here. Seemed like a lot of it was over Arthur’s head. I’m more technological than he is, so I’d like it if you told me a little about the operation.”

“All in due time... All in due time, my friend. Have you guys ever seen the Hollywood sign?” Arthur did not know what this meant, so shook his head. Lotrell and the three Rs all said that they hadn’t. Lotrell did not seem impressed with the chance to view the inane tourist attraction.

“Well, in a few minutes, you’ll be able to check it out over there on that mountain.”

They checked it out as they drove by, but the three Rs seemed interested enough to warrant Mark’s driving the car in reverse after they had passed it in order for them to get a better look. “Let’s get out and stretch our legs,” he suggested.

“Mark pointed at various things in the distance while discussing the history of California with the three Rs while Lotrell took the opportunity to strike up a conversation with Arthur.

“What do you think of this guy? He seems a little phony to me,” Lotrell said.

“You are worrying unnecessarily. He is kind, and he has good intentions for our business. Let’s at least see what he has to offer us. Then we can discuss canceling our plans. For now, this is what I believe we should do.” In truth, Arthur had no idea whether this would pan out or not. He merely felt that by knowing, really *knowing*, that this would work out in his favor, things would go well and the Holy World would take shape. Lotrell doubted, but followed along nonetheless.

*

At the bank of a hill, Mark stopped the car to move aside a rusted metal fence that

blockaded a crude pathway in the forest on the side of the road. Inside the car, all of the men watched carefully as he did this, keeping their fingers crossed that Mark would not murder them in the woods and hide their bodies somewhere between the trees.

After directing the vehicle onto the path, the road led them, eventually, to an enormous parking lot between identically shaped buildings built from grey cement.

“Oh, shit,” Mark said. “I can’t remember which one’s which. You guys are gonna be living in one of those and working in the other. Um, Let’s drive a little closer. I’ll remember.” Lotrell looked at the three Rs with a sense great distaste and skepticism for the man in the front seat.

“Oh, Christ, that’s right! I gotta remember: Left is living, Right is working. Ok. Here we are.” They approached the building to their left, which had no discernable difference from the building on the right except for it being the exact symmetrical opposite. Inside, they were rapidly shown a reception area, a cafeteria, and a lounge. Arthur was shown his elaborately decorated office, complete with leather chairs, a bookshelf, and an enormous globe.

“I can set you guys up with offices, too. I didn’t know anyone else was in charge besides you, Arthur. Sorry.” The enormous work area sat behind strong double doors. At least triple the size of the rest of the building, the work area took up an incredible amount of space within the cement structure. There were rows upon rows of desks, each with a phone and a computer. In

the center was an enormous black box with its own door carved into its front.

“This is where everybody’ll sit, and *here* is where the real work will be done,” Mark said. He opened the door and allowed each of them to take a turn looking inside. There was space for only one human at a time, and when they each had inspected the interior, Mark shut the door and placed a padlock over its latch.

“What’s that supposed to be?” Ramon asked after a few moments of silence with Mark smiling at them knowingly.

“*That*, my friends, is what I like to call the giant brain. It’s a supercomputer!”

*

A supercomputer is a computer that does the work of a lot of regular computers. Upon hearing of one for the first time, you may think, “Gee! What can a supercomputer do if computers can already do an impressive amount of things?” Well, a supercomputer can do the same things, but much faster and many more things at the same time. This comes in handy when working out highly complex math problems, running intense simulations of anything you can imagine, and sorting out nearly infinite bits of information.

To Arthur, Lotrell, and the Three Rs, however, this machine took on a spiritual quality. They believed it to be “super” in the sense of “supernatural” or “Superman,” the hero. They came to see Mark as a sort of prophet. Any doubt in Lotrell’s mind that Arthur had made a bizarrely spontaneous decision in moving their organization to California dissipated at the feet of

the supercomputer.

*

“Here, let me get you some water,” Mark offered Ralph, who had dropped to a cross-legged position on the floor in front of the black cube holding the machine.

As soon as he left, Arthur turned to Lotrell and rebuked him.

“I told you to trust me!”

“I know, I know, I’m sorry, Arthur!” He helped Ralph to his feet while Raul began to pace around the desks.

“Can this one be mine?” he asked. “I want to be close to it!”

“Relax, Raul,” Arthur stated calmly. “There will be time for things like that. I want to know from Mark what we can do with the... *supercomputer*.” He said the word as if that by invoking its name, the machine would become animate; its enormous strength and the wires spun within it towering above them and crushing their small bodies.

Mark came back with an armful of bottled water for each of them. “Sorry it’s not cold. The power isn’t on here yet.”

The men sighed, now knowing that there was no danger of the machine turning on and taking offense to their uttering its name.

“Mark. What can be done with this machine?”

“Anything, Arthur. Anything you wish.”

*

Since Mark had not qualified this statement to refer specifically to computable tasks, Arthur assumed his work would be done instantly upon enacting his wishes upon the device. Things turned out to not be so cut and dry.

I want you to draw a comparison here between the supercomputer and the gold light from the first part of the story. I was the golden light, moving Arthur around and letting him read his own story. A supercomputer holds the key to similar greatness for society. It holds information and can create information. It is the source of power for Arthur, as he and his colleagues create the Holy World. While that gold light performed tasks to change the fictional world inside which Arthur found himself as the main character, so the supercomputer performs tasks in the real world; tasks that will solve every problem known to man. For that is the Holy World: a world without problems. All is positive in the Holy World.

*

Mark took them to the lounge, where the only light poured in from a bank of windows as the day was brought to a close.

“So, let’s get down to brass tacks...”

“Excuse me?”

“Business. Let’s discuss things. First, I want to hear what kind of problems you guys have solved so far.”

“So far?”

“Yeah. You guys are gonna solve every problem, right? Well, let me know what you guys have done so far.”

The five of them squirmed.

*

Arthur and the others built their crew and following upon the spouting of ideas; well-intentioned ones, yes, but nonetheless resulting in absolutely no actions performed in order to solve the problems of the world. Raul had been given the holy burrito, or course, but that had merely been a means for Arthur to usurp an appearance on the David Letterman program. Thankfully, this had succeeded, and a “problem” had been solved. However, this problem had entirely zip shit to do with the rest of the globe!

*

Would it surprise you that a woman typed that phrase? “Zip shit.” It’s something my father used to say. He would always blush after using it in a phrase. “That rabbi has *zip shit* to do with feeding those poor suckers!” Then he would look around to see if I or my brother had overheard.

But you didn’t even know it was me, did you?

Who can write this?

It’s me, Abby Edway. Future wife of Lotrell. The tragic death occurring at book’s end.

Arthur's golden vision of the previous text. Daughter of Samuel and Gretta Edway. Sister of Charles Edway, the decorated and dedicated soldier in the War of 2008.

Abby can!

*

When I revealed the text to Arthur in the sky, it was as if he suddenly grew entire ideologies. He understood American thoughts, Middle-Eastern thoughts, Asian thoughts, European thoughts. Not that he could read the minds of individuals, but in a way those of societies. He could undermine the conscious reality of life in the world, and see the truth; that all we hold as true is NOT true, but merely subconscious recognitions of adapted ideologies. He welcomed the knowledge of these ideologies, but made it his mission to dissolve them. Slowly, and with his eyes, he dissolved ideologies. Instead of eventually creating a multi-cultural world, he created a singular culture; that of the Holy World. I was mostly guessing at Lotrell's involvement. The end result is the same. He ended up coming back to New York with Arthur feeling somewhat inferior. Deporn had grand schemes for the group: grand, benevolent plans that would use the supercomputer to eventually bring about the Holy World. Arthur had relied exclusively on his vision, believing his part to end at the death of Richard Tenberg.

When Lotrell came back to New York, he came to me. He told me about scientists who would use the supercomputer to end global warming by bringing affordable, clean energy to all

and terminate the dependency on individual powered locomotion. At the time, he had no idea what this really meant, how it would be accomplished, or even why it was all that important. I had a vague idea, so I agreed to go with him and Arthur to California. It would be a chance for me to get away from my passively racist and overprotective parents. Thank God for that.

*

The three Rs stayed in California after that initial visit. They were set up with apartments in the identical complex across the parking lot from the supercomputer. It somehow enriched their souls to be so close to the machine.

Leaving behind barely one whole closet-worth of possessions, they convinced Arthur to ship their things when he returned to the city. All they needed was each other.

Arthur only returned to New York City for Apple laptop computer he had been given by Steve Jobs, CEO of Apple. I am writing this on one of those computers myself, and was immaturely jealous to find that Steve Jobs himself had mailed the machine to Arthur after receiving one of many photocopied mission statements and pleas for aid from Lotrell's busywork at the post office. My schoolgirl crush on the computer pioneer flared up a bit when I realized I would be living in the same state as the man.

*

As a girl, my father used Windows machines. Of course to you reading this in the future, this may mean absolutely nothing. When computers first became accessible to the American

public, there were generally three types of machines: Windows, Linux, and Apple, which was also known as Mac, which was short for Macintosh, which was an alternate spelling of McIntosh, short for McIntosh Red apple, which was a certain cultivation of the red fruit, which was discovered by John McIntosh in 1811 on his farm, which was in Dundela, which was a small town in Ontario, Canada.

The primary difference between these sorts of machines was in what is known as a graphical user interface. Aside from that complicated term, the difference generally represented the computer's "personality" to its owner. When I was growing up, Windows looked adult, while Apple appealed to my teen angst for some reason. I knew nothing of the machine's internal architecture. I rebelled against my father's use of Windows machines for purely aesthetic reasons.

For a Christian Scientist, he was surprisingly adept at learning new technologies and finding ways to afford practical implementations of them in his family home. Perhaps the brief flame of sexual heat in my body at learning of the upcoming proximity to the Apple CEO was partially the rebellion of my body against my father's repressive religious attitude.

*

I fear I am already making too much of this. My father never hit me. He let me go on dates. He didn't even force me to go to Church after I moved out of his house. Something much

more subtle about his religion was acting in my life; something cultural, yet, I fear, genetic.

His family had a history of cancer, but I feel like that is not what killed me. The force of spiritual belief, the faith that he required in our maturation, that was what did me in. Charles did so well, singing hymns at mass, providing alter-boy service at the last minute if the scheduled participant did not show.

The principle quality of our faith is that we doubt the reality of sickness, sin, and anything material in the world. The reality of Christ supersedes all, and to place our faith in that which does not root in his word is to deny Christ himself. This meant I could not take medicine, could not get a physical examination (which kept me off of the high school volleyball team that I so desperately wanted to be a part of), and relied on an increased focus on the healings of the natural world. Doctors were false; the whole idea of health was separate from that of the average Christian. However, to deny a reality is also to impose a new one. The faith that one holds in prescription or over-the-counter drugs relies on the faith that one places in that treatment. If, for your whole life, you are told that Tylenol does a great job of curing a headache, you will be cured of cranial aches if you administer the pill. This is known as the placebo effect.

The opposite is also true. Once, after moving out of my parents' home, I had a particularly rough menstrual cycle. I purchased Midol, thinking, "Hey, this will work. I have been told my whole life that it will not, but it works for so many others." When I still suffered

cramps and irritability much later on in the week after taking the directed dosage, I realized that my cultural growth into the faith of Christian Science had disabled the medicine's efficacy. It was as if I had been told that the color of the sky was something called "red" for my entire life. Upon finding out that the color was actually named "blue," the entire system of pigmentation shifted.

Suddenly, all that existed in my life was removed of meaning and actuality. Nothing was real. It was around this time that I began vomiting in the mornings; after I had married Lotrell, but before he had devoted himself completely to the supercomputer in California.

*

Our official title was the Church of Christ, Scientist. The modifier, “Scientist” had nothing to do with Christ himself, but instead ended up giving the impression that Christ himself was a lab researcher. Going through school, if they even bothered to ask, they would assume my conception of Christ was a man in a white coat performing experiments on mice and monkeys; the rats of their mocking verse: “Abby, Abby, has those scabbies / tortures mice in her bright white labbies!” This was alongside their inane chant of “Michael, Michael, motorcycle / Turn the key and watch him pee!” which had absolutely no intelligent reasoning behind it.

Apart from the rudeness of childhood and early adulthood, I grew up normally. My family had a computer, and I quickly became adjusted to the digital technologies of “tomorrow,” as my father so enthusiastically called the off-white machine in the space behind the couch in our living room. I would spend hours every day chatting on messenger programs, updating my personal profiles on social networking sites, and downloading mp3s of the latest independent rock bands.

I do not for one instance think that computers caused the growth of tumors in my breasts. My mother is convinced that sitting at a monitor, with the radioactive transmissions of the screen being blasted at my chest, I was given cancer by the machine. I agree that new technologies may cause harm. For example, I have considered opting out of my cellular telephone contract because of research showing that the devices cause malevolent cell growth. However, I feel that the personal computer is not to blame for the condition that shall soon end my existence. That cause is related to the difference between myself and my brother, Charles: how he survived in the postmodern trenches of the near East while I laid in a hospital bed, begging the Christ in whom I did not trust for enough time to tell Lotrell that I loved him.

*

Thankfully, Lotrell was with me through the end. My brother would not even be able to attend my funeral. He would be spending another six weeks in an Iraqi hospital being treated for wounds. I would never know what sort of wounds, because the government was very secretive about his injuries. He would write us letters and emails, but we suspected that they were often censored by his commanding officers. He could tell us he was injured, but not how badly or where and how he was being treated. My father remained certain that Charles was rejecting medicines and surgery. This was the way our community functioned. Relief can only come through faith in Christ.

*

I, on the other hand, did not give a shit about Christ. *He* was all around me. Grade school, high school, even afterschool activities, all were surrounded by photocopied portraits of the sacred heart and a pattern of crosses bordering a notice about ladies soccer in the gymnasium rented under the youth ministry budget, school libraries filled with biographies of the saints and theological works praising the Christian faith, and the one hour per week lecture on the Divine Mind. None of it was very intrusive, just omnipresent.

All over the culture of wealthy and faithful Christians in America, many were subdued by the constant and convincing marketing of the faith, but to most it seemed merely an object of the life that it itself attempted to break apart: the idea of the Divine Mind, health as a malleable state of the body, the Key to the Scriptures, all had become representations of the beliefs it meant to convey. This was not only occurring within the denomination of Christian Science. Christians of all sorts, those who had made a well-enough living, had made enough money to donate to their local parish or community leader. Meanwhile, they held their true spiritual opinion to themselves: only spilling it to a close friend after a night of heavy mutual drinking, with empty promises to really pay attention at church, or at an expensive week-long retreat with demographically similar male or female peers in emotional crisis.

My parents were incredibly loving, and I feel like I could write an entire book about

them. The rest of this story is acceptably expressed for the importance it truly holds, but to speak in so few pages about the great love that that have given me is a grand failure on my part. I do not deserve the entirety of the blame, however. Language itself is not capable of telling you how much my parents loved me, and how much I cared for them as well. I could be a little bitch in high school, but no matter how pissed off I might have seemed, I really loved them and they knew it. Love: that concept seems so far removed from the act of writing this story. In creating Arthur's story and giving it to him, I am the golden light for him; in writing this book for you, I give you all that here exists. Love, though, I cannot give you.

*

So, as I was just getting over my fears of adulthood, reacting peacefully to the act of leaving one's family of orientation, I gave up attending any church-sponsored activities, graduated from high school, and attended two years of community college studying to be a nurse. I dated men for brief periods of time, and eventually began to work once more in a context of my family's faith. It was while employed to help at my father's office that I met Lotrell and began following him to the meetings of Arthur.

Of course I was much more deeply involved in the enacting of this story at this time, I acted as if Lotrell's absorption into Arthur's operation of the Holy World was merely his opposing religious faith. The media was beginning to carry stories about the group at this time,

and it was shortly before we moved to California.

It had slowly become clear to Arthur, Lotrell, and eventually the three Rs what exactly would be done with the supercomputer. They still believed the machine to be somewhat god-like, so hearing all of this translated through Lotrell's anxious excitement made it slightly difficult to comprehend exactly what was going on. True, I didn't ask much. I didn't need to. I was fully cognizant of the entire present situation; I knew all. Perhaps I should say, I *know* all, for I am telling this story to you. What storyteller is not aware of every element of the narrative. Each of these details, the amount of sunlight on the Statue of Liberty, the name of Arthur's first lay, each, like the 83 cents exchanged long ago, has been observed, counted, and spilt out onto the page with clarity. Again, the *only* part too big to speak fully is *love*.

*

I apologize for trailing off about love once more. The details, precise and arranged, *dispuesto, controlado, y arreglado*, now come forth in our old apartment in New York City. Lotrell speaks with rapid bursts of gasp in the inches of hallway between our bathroom and the front door, next to the bright green coat I was wearing back then and the narrow little where we kept our extra keys.

"I *think* they have pizza in California. I guess we could look it up. But then again they sell pepperoni rolls down south, I think. If we don't have those, and we're on the same coast,

think how different it'll be over there! I hope they have some cool new foods we haven't tried.

Like sushi..."

"They sell sushi in New York, baby." I was stirring something in the kitchen.

"But we've never eaten it! Maybe they've got some kind of turkey thing. Like a hot dog, or a hamburger that's kind of like a taco. A pita! Oh man, I can't even guess. Baby, this is gonna be such a trip! Not only are we flying off to a whole new fucking state, we're going to where famous people live.

"Honey, there are famous people in the city, too. Remember just last week we saw Kanye West and Troy Aikman share a taxi?"

"Yeah, but I see that dude all the time." Lotrell had been regularly hanging out with Alberto, who had become somewhat of an underground celebrity in New York's hip-hop scene.

"And Troy Whatever-the-fuck... I don't watch football or whatever. Baby, in New York it gets cold. It doesn't get cold in California! They got the beach over there, we can hang out in sand and shit. How great would that be!"

"I know, I know, I'm trying to talk us out of it. I just think you're blowing out of proportion. You know, things won't just be perfect in California." I had visions of myself standing over the toilet puking blood on the morning Lotrell had a minor car crash. No one would be hurt, but it really scared him at the time. I knew what California would be like, and I

was even looking forward to it. There might not be as much to do, we might not be as close to as many cool bars and shops, but the weather and the people and the better apartment all looked so good to me.

“You’re right. Things won’t be perfect *just* in California.” Lotrell paused to finally hang up his coat. As soon as he had walked in the door, he had not stopped talking about California. How beautiful the road to the future site of Holy World Developing and Consulting, Inc. had been, how grandiose the airport, how warm the California sun. “Things will be perfect all over.”

“What?” He had lost me in what seemed a blind, Utopian ramble.

“Mr. Deporn has a supercomputer.”

“Oh, cool. Are you guys going to get to use it for your... uh, *Incorporation?*”

“Don’t laugh. This thing can change our lives. *Everyone’s* lives.”

*

Suffice it to say that he explained their short term plans to me. Short term, yes, but certainly grand in scope and overwhelmingly fit to the cause of the Holy World.

First, scientists would be commissioned at universities in nanotechnology and solar energy. These groups would be given the funding to research potential connections in a certain kind of adhesive spray that would function to replicate carbon nanotubes and the application of these tubes to absorbing and outputting solar-generated energy. Eventually this would lead to Photosynthesis-All[®], a commonly sold spray adhesive, most often gray, but available in any

number of colors as a form of house paint. The cleverly named aerosol was an incredible means of allowing individual homes to provide their own energy. By spraying even a single square foot of Photosynthesiz-All[®] on one's roof and applying the kit of wires sold at any hardware store, Wal-Mart, or Radio Shack around the globe. It was now possible for the world to submit half of its dependency on fossil fuels such as oil, natural gas, and coal. The companies surprisingly did not put up much of a fight. It was pessimistically expected that their global influence stretched far enough into the conspiratorial realm of controlling the world's economic powers. Perhaps this was Marx's predicted rise of the proletariat, because the rich had now succumbed to this reality of human existence: when so many are shat upon, there can be little to support the shitters. Arthur had a nice term for this: *El romperse del asiento*, with *romperse* meaning a reflexive "breaking" and *asiento* meaning either "agreement" or "lid," as in *asiento del tocador*, or "toilet lid."

There were many individual projects that utilized the supercomputer. Solar-energy researchers were calculating things like the ordered rate of seasonal sunspot patterns since the beginning of time, biological statistics concerning the adaptation and efficiency of photosynthetic cell matter, and so much pertaining to nanotechnology's development itself that the supercomputer schedule was highly considered. In fact, after only a week or two of programming, the sequences were input to the machine. They had to wait six months for this

entire project to be complete. In that time, I would begin to notice a small lump beneath the nipple of my right breast and the exact center of my chest. By the time the second leg of the plan came into full swing, I will have lost thirty-five pounds and the nail of my pinky toe.

*

The toenail came off around the same I lost pound 19. My sister saw a photo of me that Lotrell took at the airport in California in an email I sent about the move.

“You’re looking so thin!” she said in the reply.

I immediately went to the bathroom to weigh myself, but the goddamn bathroom carpet had come up off the ground a little bit. The nail slipped right off on the edge of the door, and I spent the rest of that month feeling raw skin against the inside of my socks. When the toenail grew back, it was black. Not black in the sense that there was a bruise beneath it; but black in the sense that its composition was entirely dark. It was as if a bit of coal had lodged itself in the fleshy skin of my pinky toe.

*

As a teenager I painted my toes. “Vomit Green” (pale brownish-yellow with a hint of green), “Ranch Dressing Blue” (white with blue sparkles), and “Turtletit Yellow” (somewhat greenish yellow) were my favorites. I liked them because they had silly names, and I could wear something called “Dick Purple” in front of my more Christian friends and have them never know my crude secret.

An entirely passive rebellion. I never did much to betray my parents' trust. Even when Lotrell caught me with blood on the tip of my nose, I would not go to the doctor as he so wanted.

It took him a very long time to catch on to the reality of my weightloss. He liked my curves, but did not complain when the bones of my hip stabbed him at night. Seeing me everyday, I assume it was hard for him to notice the change. I'd like to think it wasn't just because he was so busy overseeing the research.

*

Across the parking lot, at what the three Rs had taken to calling "Naciones Unidas," a diverse collection of the world's most brilliant scientists began releasing information to the press about Arthur's mission. They were proud of their work, and soon Asian, Indian, Middle-eastern, South American, European, Australian, and Scandinavian tourists were flooding the parking lot simply taking photographs of the bland exterior of the organization's headquarters. They were never to be allowed into the building, but the global appeal was so strong that they were content to ride taxis, buses, and sometimes even their own rental car onto company property and take a posed photograph.

I wasn't watching the news much at this point, and all Lotrell reads is Vibe and old sci-fi novels, so I never really caught on to the significantly popular global demographic of Arthur's followers. My left arm had grown incredibly swollen over the period of a week, and my stool

now included more blood than actual diarrhea.

Lotrell begged me to see the doctor, he really did. I feel like if he had just said the right thing at the right time, maybe I would have. On a Sunday evening in mid-2007, I passed on in my sleep beside my loving partner, Lotrell Wallace, who stayed crying next to my body for two whole days after realizing I had stopped breathing.

THE END

Again, this *cannot* be the end of this book. Life is temporary, but existence is everlasting! Some say that life flashes before your eyes when you die. To let you know, that's complete bullshit. Your brain lives 15 minutes longer than your body, so imagine what kind of insane dreams you will have. That was my hell: every nightmare amplified by the finality of the experience.

But that hell was not eternal. Eventually I ended up reincarnated with much greater spiritual vision. I feel almost as powerfully divine as in the previous life, but this time more Holy. Perhaps this is what happened to the world. It died its death in 2012, but has been

reincarnated unto itself. The Holy World is upon us.

*

When I died, someone showed me a story. Like the one I gave to Arthur, this golden light appeared above me at the end of my hellish dream. I sang its praises just like the bible had said, blah blah blah, and the text appeared above me. It was the tale of creation according to Hindu beliefs. I had heard it before, perhaps on television, and I recognized it as such. The creator, whose name is not important, kills itself. From its body, the earth, the cosmos, and all of their inhabitants were incarnated from its dying flesh.

Arthur's was not a valid religion. In fact, most of them were entirely ridiculous. Turns out the one that got it closest was Hinduism. No difference, everyone is welcome here. Don't get me wrong: cherish your life! Just relax about all of that religion nonsense.

*

The Holy World died a death on July 4th, 2012 when two Israeli and Palestine nuclear facilities exploded themselves in the deserts of Libya. The supercomputer exploded that day too, but in a what was presumed to be an unrelated incident. One could not help but think that the destruction of the god-like computer in Arthur's headquarters also had something to do with the reincarnation of the Holy World: bringing a new globe with a more enlightened mass consciousness and far fewer problems.

In fact, the computer blew up on its own. No one ever found out why. Merely a wire or

two, crossed in the wrong position or let decay over the years of constant research.

Unfortunately, the situation in Libya was not so randomly caused.

Turns out that years before, in the late 1990's, Palestinian forces and Israeli forces were duped (in part by the United States) into buying specific property for military research. Two of the many vast wastelands in the nation of Libya were separated by a tall, craggy peak and thirteen miles of thick forest on either side of the mountain. Unfortunately, the two never spied the opposing presence. If they had, this whole mess may have been prevented by premature deployment of the initial responders.

An official on the Palestinian side even once obtained a satellite photograph of their Libyan base. But since the peak of the mountain separating the two bases was symmetrically divided, mirrored in the division of tectonic plates, the roofs of the two bases identical black squares with scattered splotches of equipment gave an illusion of photographic mimicry. That official deemed the photographs defective, believing the indication of two identical but opposing bases to be a result of duplicative error.

“Who needs pictures of your own home?” could be a rough translation of the official's blasé shrug at the folder handed to him containing the images.

So, on July 4th, 2012, long after the U.S had implemented Arthur's plan to provide surprisingly efficient public transportation, long after oil had become less of an international

necessity than an element of an ethnoecomony, the Middle East finally exploded. Two tests, scheduled by two armies, each attempting to apply such an act to the other, ran simultaneously in the Libyan desert. The Hydrogen bomb would primarily fall into the category of science fiction in my generation. It was what our parents may have been afraid of, but they never seemed to care about anymore. In the Middle East, our American Independence holiday coincided with the dual blasts of nuclear fusion reactions, turning much of the sand surrounding Mount Al-'Uwaynat into glass. The displaced Libyans of the 1990's who had begged asylum south enough to survive the blast returned to the mountain's surrounding area to find great seas of glass replacing the deserts. The mountain itself appeared to float above the glass: a spiritual view of that which separated the two warring forces of Israel and Palestine.

*

I died back in 2008, after solar energy was completely in use, saving the economy, and preventing further global warming. The governments who most of the world had been buying or manipulating oil away from were in deep trouble. Without the scarcity of that resource, their nations resorted to a sort of cannibalism; selling oil exclusively to "proud and loyal" supporters of the government. This was similar to how many Americans used to purchase American-made cars due to consumer patriotics.

What eventually occurred was that the countries devolved into military factions fighting

over the nicest palaces and destroying the weak members of the other parties. Our war on Iraq was still technically going on, but it was limited to maintaining an American presence by the oil reserves that we still were tying money to. Charles, my brother, was still there.

Four years later, nine years since the beginning of George W. Bush's war on terror, the year scientists had predicted to be the year we would run out of fossil fuel oil (eventually retracted once all practical dependency on oil ran out, and the cost of a barrel fell back down to \$0.25), in 2012, the majority of people living in what we would have then called the "Middle East" were destroyed in the blast. It was a global tragedy. Not so much a surprise to anyone, but a tragedy for certain.

*

In the great flows of emotion that spawned after these events, for example Brian Williams speaking in falsetto tones as he asked, "Jesus, why? Jesus, Mary? Why?" on primetime news coverage that interrupted an important televised sports game, Arthur Venada was given somehow the responsibility of taking care of this sadness. It was his duty to solve a problem the world shared: that so many lives were lost, and that the emotional pain was incredibly hard to deal with. Arthur gave some wonderful advice that would end the suffering; this suffering, that suffering, all sufferings.

He spoke upon a massive pedestal erected at the foot of Mount Al-'Uwaynat. He spoke

softly into a expensive and powerful amplification system consisting of 57 individual power units, each giving 600W of juice to his voice. It was also being televised and broadcasting on at least three television channels in every nation receiving at least three television channels. Those without, listened on public radio.

I, on the other hand, listened in the roots of a tree on which speakers had been attached. For I have been reincarnated as an ant. Yes, a knowing ant, but why do you assume the ant does not know?

*

“Your loss is only loss.”

Alright, I get that.

“What you feel is pain, and pain alone. Pain. Only that.”

I feel other things, but I guess I see your point. That pain is only pain, but there’s another dumb obvious thing. Give me something real to latch onto! I know most of these people who traveled here came to see you, give them something more than just some dimestore new age crap.

“With knowledge comes closure. With intent, that knowledge overcomes. Knowledge and intent are the keys to it all!” At this, the crowd started going nuts. Everyone cheered. The ground rang with their blissfully leaping feet. Hugs and shouts of joy rang across the globe. All knowing his truth became enraptured in its glory: that learning and purpose are what can solve

every problem.

Thus was the rebirth of the Holy World. It shook the globe. All diseases were suddenly overcome by the power of the mind. All suffering was realized to merely be that product of a situation, and thus resolved to unimportance in the realm of human thought. Without representation it became meaningless.

I don't really buy into this. As an ant, though, its hard to tell how I would have reacted as a human. Of course, if this had overtaken consciousness as it did in such a real way while I still lived, say, perhaps in the summer of 2007, I might still be alive as the being Abby Edway today. Her body, my body, would not be in some shitty mausoleum off the same highway exit as LAX.

As a "dying woman," which is what I thought of myself in those last months, I never gave rise to the idea that a simple statement could have that sort of healing power. But that the statement was understood by nearly all surviving people of earth, I believe it really had that impact. In fact, I believe now that the power of the Divine Mind becomes a similar concept. That with our faith, with our trust in a power, in the case of my family that power had been a person called Jesus Christ, all reality if but a mere function of the spiritually divine, thus malleable in our faith and trust.

*

Some physicists think time will end. It has been speeding up constantly, and oh, is that

ever more true in the afterlife than in the world of the living. We are not even beings, but we perceive time and space similarly to those of the actual world.

A secret is that there really is no actual world, merely thoughts and perceptions of those who agree. Think of schizophrenics who have entirely different understandings of a loaf of bread, the car you are driving perhaps while listening to an audio book of this novel, the sky, Africa, the concept of truth, an inflated balloon. How inflated must a balloon be before one considers it to have reach the state of inflation? Is not every balloon to some degree inflated? There will always be space within the balloon.

Please, for a moment, think of time like a balloon. I have gather this metaphor from the spirits surrounding me. I think of them as spirits because I learned about spirits in my living experience. You can think of them as hamburgers if you like; or balloons. I choose to explain time to you like a balloon. Think of the ones who teach as spirits and time as a balloon.

The balloon has constantly been losing air. Air consistently moves form the balloon, shrinking the limits of time. Air, in this analogy, is the space between any points of time. As the balloon shrinks, there are fewer minutes of perceived time in every selection of minutes that pass according to a measure such as a watch or the atomic clock in Brazil. Shortly, time is speeding up.

This is often seen in retrospect. An old man watches his grandchildren play and feels that

only the day before, his baby teeth were crunching through a tart apple. A mother feeds a baby who came from her, pondering the recursive nature of life. Tedious. Fodder for so much art; good and bad.

These images are not only common, but increasingly apt. As every mother births a fetus, and every old man sits in his comfortable chair, the process is more demanding. Sadness becomes a part of life. Children are diagnosed with depression at younger and younger ages. They are sad because their memories come so much quicker. Time speeds up for all, over generations, for the cat, for the bear. For the man, whose understanding may reach across ancestries, we may recognize the rapid change in age-old writing, and convince ourselves that the future will begin to slow.

But the balloon shrinks to no end. It will never truly be empty. There will never be a vacuum inside the balloon. Though time may accelerate to the point where a geologic period may exist within the span of a second in human thought, it will always progress. The physicists were wrong. Time will not end.

You may think that the book you hold shall end. You may feel it end. You may feel time spend its breath on the death of Arthur. You may have lost your place long before and given up. You have to forget.

Cornering himself on the bricklined patio in front of Sanchita's brothel, a young Arthur Venada springs the toothpick from his mouth and begins to dance. His face a muddied tan, the rough denim coat he had worn for years becoming a muddle of dust in the raucous movements of their fast tango, he smacks the ass of Sanchita and laughs heartily into her upturned neck. The beer she wrangles carefully behind her back without spilling a single drop becomes an object of hunt in Arthur's mind.

He wants her. He wants the beer. He wants both her and the beer. He wants to drink the beer and then screw Sanchita upstairs. He wants to spend the night sleeping naked beside her young skin and light brown features.

She asks for the economic equivalent of three fancy meals and a fine comb. Arthur's fingers are soon wriggling across her belly, and the bed she rents on the second floor is sweaty with their sport.

"You're wonderful," Sanchita says to him.

"And you, as well," he says to her.

She begins conversation with Arthur as he is falling asleep.

"Do you see many white men in your work?"

"Oh....," he blinks. "I am a cowboy." The word he used was *vaquero*. I see white cows, brown cows, black cows, all these much more than men." He lights two cigarettes and gives one to her.

“I just ask because... There have been so many in town recently. They’re rude. I do not like white men.”

“Not so different than you or me.”

“I know... It’s just... One last night said he would be buying our town.”

Arthur sighed. “How long I been coming here to see you?”

She turned her face to his. “Since you were a boy,” she smiled and placed her palm on Arthur’s testicles.

“They’ve been coming around since then and they haven’t taken anything. Why worry?”

She thought for a moment and then turned to face the wall on her side of the bed.

Slapping her ass once more, Arthur immediately regretted his mistaken advice. Hundreds of years before, his ancestors had come to take this land from hers. Of course, the two of them had ethnic relations in their familial pasts to one another, but it was clear who existed in which class. Arthur was Spanish. Sanchita’s family was native to Tijuana. She existed in Arthur’s memory as the sum of all his past.

Arthur finds himself at the end of a crossroads. He has heard the metaphor, but does not connect the term “crossroads” to real roads because he rarely comes in contact with a perpendicular intersection that at which point was verbally referred to as a “crossroads.” He uses the term to describe exactly what one would describe as being “at a crossroads.” However, he considers an incorrect usage “at the *end* of a crossroads” because the word itself is removed from its archaic namesake: the actual meeting of two roads, presenting a number of potential outcomes.

He values mainly the part about many options being metaphorically presented, and when he considers himself to be at the *end* of a crossroads, he is implying also the reflection of having been presented a number of options, choosing one, and residing along that lifedecision.

As soon as he got off of the airplane in Libya, he knew something was different. He could remember viewing the explosion of the supercomputer in his dreams the night before. He had a sick feeling in his gut.

As he approaches the stage now and its incredible quantity of microphones, he feels a tight grip around his waist. Abby Edway's ghost slips her hand into his world: the Holy World! She braces his back. She kisses him on the cheek. She spells "A-N-T" in the air above his chest with a fingertip. She steps away slightly and presses her thumbs against the lenses of his open eyes. The great glass sea beneath them developed a crack that will not show significant growth until the next geological era.

The sweet coats of sunning fruits in the nearby forest have their juice dipped into as she swings her many legs across into his dimension; that of human perception in four dimensions; that of my birth; that in which the Holy World was born; that in which the binary code of human pain and pleasure became one and *only* 1; that in which all problems were solved by the forerunner of Sanchita Karma, Nirvana, *not* Arthur, but the Confluence Age, the Technological Singularity. The Holy World is born, and Arthur blinks rapidly before realizing he is in front of the many microphones and expected to speak, perhaps at length, about overcoming loss.

"Shit," he thinks. "What the *fuck* am I going to say?"

This time Arthur does not see a golden light. He sees absolute nothingness. Transported once more into an unknown location, his fingers tremble, but his hands cannot. He is tied to the back of a chair. He moves his legs, but finds it to be worthless without the movement of his upper body. Scooting, making a great deal of noise, Arthur draws the attention of a skinny man wearing a neon green ski mask, a black turtleneck, and tight blue jeans. Arthur quickly studies his surroundings. In the bits of sunlight filtering through a moth-eaten crackerboard door reinforced by a reinforced chain link fence, he could make out crude drawings on the wall. Seemingly committed to canvas by crayon, hundreds of cartoonish animals smile and frown, wink and yawn. Some hold objects like flowers or a carton of milk. Most just sit in the relaxed position known as Indian style.

The man, like a bone-thin spectre, applies ointment to Arthur's forehead.

"You awake?" he asks.

"...the fuck?"

"I have you now." The man's voice is deeper than Arthur had assumed it would be.

The last that Arthur can imagine is the face of Sanchita. The woman to whom he gave his virginity. The spine of her back as she slept the last night he was with her. She is the sum of his past.

In the months following his disappearance, it seemed like the world was silent. The media did not cover stories of suffering, while the world itself overcame suffering. The Holy World.

Then came the spur of a bloody change. Abby Edway's brother, Charles Edway, was discovered stuck in the surface of the glass sea surrounding Mount Al-'Uwaynat. The thermal force of the two weapons' simultaneous explosion had annihilated the majority of Middle Eastern nations and vaporized countless living human beings, creatures, and memories in its circular path, as well as forming huge, miles-across platforms of glass atop the dry land.

In a previously unexplored portion of the ice, Charles Edway was heard from afar, screaming "Help!" and waving his arms. His left leg was apparently "frozen" into the glass, while he remained unharmed. The news broke with photos of the leg that had to be amputated in order to free him from the glass. The news anchors kept slipping up and saying "ice," because the footage looked so much like he had been frozen into a glacier. Even his skin was a pale; a snowy white from the dust gathering over the months of his isolated position.

There were doctors who tried to reattach the leg, but immediately after the limb had become unattached to his body, it became black and withered. Scientists scanned his body with a laser before they let him come home. When he spoke to interviewers, he would claim more and more near death instances during battle. He had spent so long in Iraq, so long in the Middle

East that by the time he was claiming 67 individual life threatening events, most Americans were still lauding him in the papers and on the internet.

It was true. Have faith that it was. His devout belief in Christian Science and the concept of the Divine Mind had rung true for him all along. The idea of overcoming a negative part of reality, in his case death, by pure faithful knowledge and intent, was one known in Charles since birth. His prayer was never sarcastic, and the only times he sinned involved cheating on tests in high school and getting a blowjob during the movie *Titanic*. The blast of two nuclear bombs could not take Abby's brother.

It was around the time Charles was speaking on college campuses that the video first surfaced. Nobody really understood where it came from. It wasn't hosted on the web, it wasn't shared on any peer to peer network. It simply navigated into being across the interfaces of those connected to the internet. Appearing as if in the flash video format used on streaming video sites, the clip appeared on the monitors of anyone connected to the internet at four o'clock p.m. every day. Usually in the center, often in the top right or left corners, the series of still images making up what appears to be a transfer from a handheld digital video camera appear. And until three minutes and a half minutes past four, anyone behind the screen of a computer witnessed the scalping of Arthur Venada.

Someone had apparently developed an invasive software program carrying the video across all operating systems like a virus. Every day at exactly four p.m., in every time zone, the internet blew forth a gust of horrible stink.

The video itself was filmed in a nearly professional manner. The lighting of its single shot, the composition of the frame, and clarity of audio lent the video a highly respectable sense of being authentic; not digitally altered in any way; no camera tricks.

At first not everyone had seen the clip, but even four hours later, Americans had prepared to view the disturbing clip. Once advance warning came, it became a ritual. Everyone near a computer turned it on and watched it in total silence. Reverence for the brutal display on the

computer's screen. It was recorded and aired on television at four o'clock too every day.

Billions watch, as they do every day. They scream out, unable to stop the knife from clipping below Arthur's hairline, coming up around the sides of his head, and lifting the edge of what is now Arthur's scalp. It takes three minutes in all. Then, the man in the ski mask slowly places the hairy flesh on a table out of frame and shuts off the camera. Meanwhile, as all of this is happening, Arthur has been screaming in pain. Even before the film begins, we can assume Arthur has been screaming for a very long time. Though no sound accompanies the video clip, many imagine that their speakers are merely not capable of translating such pain anymore. Some believe that their ears are not capable of processing painful speech; that this is a function of a new evolved trait in the human species. Some scientists believe all fear will soon be relieved. Through desensitization, through increased use of virtual simulations immersive enough to cause biological states of dread, anger, and extreme emotion, our bodies will adapt to handle all, *all*, with the experience and knowledge to overcome the negative, *any* negative.

The ideology has been ruined. Western culture, Eastern culture, African, Middle-eastern, aboriginals of all sorts, combined to form the global collective consciousness. So different now. No longer based on fears of anxieties. All thought, a collection of experiences: all positive. Humankind has reached peace.

The body of the scalped cowboy is carried on cloth through the main street of a town.

Rain wets the street as six bald women, three on each side, wearing yellow robes, weep and writhe between two police cars, their lights blinking red and blue silently. Children in the crowd scream and hold tightly onto the legs of their fathers from the sidewalks in front of businesses, all closed for the event.

Finally, they reach a black volkswagon beetle parked in the middle of the road. Its doors are opened, and they slide the corpse of the red-headed man into its backseat.