

PART FOUR

Love

All I can say about Love is that it too is transitory. As far as I know the dead do not love. As far as I know love is only an allusion to a chemical reaction and an altered firing of synapses.

It took me nearly 5,000 years to forget almost everything about my mate.

If you asked me when I was younger I would have told you love was something different.

Love is simply the antithesis of Hate. Love is simply an emotion that will pass.

Love isn't objectively real.

Henry and Jack sought refuge from the road in the truck.

The truck idled with its light on.

The windows were rolled up as far as they could be.

Henry was cutting up some sticky Technicolor for a joint.

Henry said, "Look, the way he treated you, he got what he deserved."

Jack asked, "Is that why the Grim Reaper is chasing us? Two wrongs don't make a salvation."

"I have no sympathy for Rick the prick."

"But what do we do? Is smoking a joint ever the solution to our troubles?"

"It is always the solution to our troubles. I felt really bad about running over the hitchhiker. We were tortured with reliving our worst memories. The road doesn't end. The gates don't get any closer. They're always out of reach," spoke Henry. He continued to cut the pot into tiny pieces. "But now the hitchhiker is Rick; and it's like... finally something to celebrate."

Jack screamed, "The grim fucking reaper is chasing us."

Henry spoke, "Seems like we're dead. It isn't like we can die again, can we? We can't die from smoking chronic; we can't kill anyone high driving 'cause for all we know we're in hell right now. I don't think I can protect you this time. Look at the clock, we're in a perpetual state of 4:20 and have, what is likely, a never ending supply of the best pot ever if my never ending cigarette pack is any indication. So, yes, I am going to roll this large fucking joint."

He was trying to put the joint together, but his hands began to shake uncontrollably. He was spilling weed everywhere. He put his notebook, which he was using as a surface to roll on, and the various items on top of it onto the dashboard. Jack was quiet. Henry said, "I spent so much of my life trying to keep you safe and keep you at a safe distance."

Jack whispered, "Henry this isn't your fault."

Henry stammered, "Bull, bullshit. This is my fault. I was driving." Henry fought back tears. His voice wavered. He sobbed, "I should have protected you from myself. I'm cancerous. I bring death to everyone."

Our minds shifted, we were powerless, and we were elsewhere.

Henry, Sam and Jack were seated around a makeshift fire pit. The pit was on the southeast edge of Bret and Lily's property by the river. It was spring. The weather was beautiful. The warm hues of sunset adorned the sky. There was a slight warm breeze coming from the south.

Henry was dressed in beat up black boot-cut jeans and a plain black tee shirt. Sam was dressed as before, housecoat and all. This time he remembered to put on jeans, for Jack's sake. Jack was wearing a black tank top and a dark blue sari was wrapped around her waist.

The fire was crackling loud. The three were gulping patriotic beer as a two page's joint passed amongst them.

Henry took a deep puff. He said, "This is good pot," and exhaled.

Jack inhaled and then coughed, "This is the Kobe filet mignon of chronic, son."

Henry asked, "What is this magical nourishment? Ambrosia? Is it... is it people?"

Sam said, "Well it is my blood, sweat and tears. This is Technicolor. This is my baby." He laughed, "For better or worse this is my life's work."

Aside to Henry Sam said, "Look I'm sorry about the other day. I should get out of the house more, but I'm not going to get over Anne, ever."

Henry nodded that he received the message through the fog that was increasingly engulfing his mind.

Jack passed the J to Sam. He entertained it for a while.

Henry raised his beer in a toast. He decreed, "To good times."

Sam raised his beer as well. He said, "Fuck good times. To my little brother all grown-up... a good dude... Happy Eighteenth Birthday."

Henry grinned, "I'm sure there was a sentence somewhere in there."

Jack raised her beer. She smiled. She taunted, with grammar as incorrect as she could muster under the circumstances, "Henry to, fucking stupid-head, my person favorite."

They clanged glasses. They were happy. The joint was in Henry's hands.

Henry confessed, "Thanks, you know this is exactly how I wanted to spend my birthday. I'm stoned out of my gourd and drunk as an Irish skunk. I just wanted to hang out with you guys." Henry killed the roach and threw it in the fire.

Sam announced, "I have a present for you," to Henry. He reached into his left housecoat pocket, pulled out a set of keys and tossed them to Henry. Sam smiled, "Happy birthday."

Henry stuttered. He said, "These—these are the keys to your truck."

Sam corrected Henry. He said, "Those are the keys to your truck Henry." Sam downed his beer.

Jack exploded with a, "Holy Shit."

Henry threw the keys back to Sam.

Henry told Sam that he couldn't accept the keys. But Sam simply tossed the keys back at Henry and hit him square in his face. Marijuana impedes muscle control. Everyone laughed.

Jack said, "So funny." She looked at her watch. There were little hands that swirled amongst a forest of whirling dots. She said, "I have to go home. I can't read my watch."

It's funny. These little moments of ours are our happiest. Nothing has to be prim or proper. We don't have to say things right. We don't have to behave a certain way. Our happiest moments seem to be the times where we simply stop worrying and enjoy what we have.

Henry said, "We'll sort this truck business out tomorrow. I'm going to walk Jack home."

Jack grabbed her beer.

Henry told Jack, "I'm going to be a second. I'll catch up."

Jack leaned into Henry, she whispered, "I'm going to miss you most of all when I go." Jack began walking home.

Sam said, when Jack was out of earshot, "You, my brother, are the biggest fool I have ever met in my entire life. You truly are a fucking stupid-head."

Henry argued, "What am I supposed to do? Am I supposed to tell her I love her when she's leaving for school in a month? She's already stressed about figuring things out, she hasn't even found an apartment. This way there's no risk."

Sam said, "You love her. This way, you've already given up."

A week later Sam and Henry began to argue again. That was the last real conversation they'd have. Only after Sam's suicide would Henry take the truck.

Sometimes shit just keeps happening.

Back in the truck Henry was rolling the joint.

He put a little cardboard filter (a rolled piece of his cigarette pack) in one end of the joint, as was their custom.

The engine was horribly loud even idling.

The rain had thinned to a sprinkle.

The high-beam lights contributed to the glowing of the gates on the horizon.

Jack questioned, "What changed?"

Henry was confused, "Come again?"

Jack asked, "What changed since you told Sam you loved me?"

Henry said, "Nothing." He paused. He decided, "I'll tell you a story. You've never read it." He grabbed his black calfskin notebook from the dashboard. He then began to recite to her the short story he wrote called

The Private I.

Me in a bar: must be Friday. Either that or it could be any other day of the week. This damn sour pilsner is my reward for trying something new. I fucking hate American beer. Could've just ordered water. I should never have left Vancouver. Compared to British Columbia, Maine feels like Alaska. Starting over tastes like piss.

Life's good though for a change. Job's got its perks, while I'm in town drinks are comp'd. This time, supposedly, I'm the company's last chance. They offered me double. Tonight I'm getting hammered and hopefully drilled.

Maybe I'll meet a nice guy, maybe not. I haven't been fucked in nearly a month. These five guys in front of me, one of them would do. They aren't anything special, but I've had much worse. It's a miracle I never caught anything. Made them run the tests three times. I've never met a man that didn't like me.

If I had different parents maybe I'd be a supermodel. God, maybe I'd have gone to COLLEGE. If my dear dad didn't like me so much maybe he wouldn't have kicked me out. Thank god it was a false positive.

Doesn't matter now. My paycheques are more than I'd ever thought I'd see. Double? Who the hell is this guy, the illegitimate child of a Silicon Valley billionaire? The crown prince of Darfur? The supposedly disabled ex-CEO of that auto-company? Am I trailing another secret Mrs.?

I slurp down the beer. Never waste beer, even bad beer. Waiter comes over, I just say, "Double whiskey on the rocks." This folder in front of me will fill in the blanks. I don't really want to open it. Not tonight. Tonight's a celebration of life, booze and possibly contraceptives. When I first took Sex Ed I think there were things I could have taught Mrs. Flanders. All those girls out there searching for Mr. Right in a club, a bar, or a concert hall have the wrong idea. I haven't met a good man, myself, who wasn't a make-believe character. Any love I've had has been misplaced.

Me, here, now, I'm drinking a depressant to cheer up. Still things are much better than they've been. I have a bank account now. I've got I.D. and somehow made it through without a criminal record. I was only on the streets for two years, and only worked them for three months.

The one cop who almost caught me was my fourth John. The only one who wouldn't wear a rubber. He probably had a wife and kids at home. He probably went to church on Sunday given the golden crucifix he wore around his neck. She's probably got green goo now coming from her hoohoo if he hasn't changed his ways.

These days me even being here seems pretty miraculous. 'Course I suffered a lot. I don't have a friend in the world. Got to work on that. Somehow I gotta start meeting good people. I'll change my name. Buy a condo. I've always wanted pets. I'll settle someplace warm. Pay like this I'll retire in five years. I'll have saved 5 million by 25, I'll be on some tropical island by 28.

How I got started was simple. I found an apartment. Started wearing make-up. Bought nice clothes. Sometimes that meant I went hungry. I told myself I was dieting.

I got hooked up with one of those escort agencies. I was a high-priced lady of the night for a year. Did I mention I'm beautiful? Well I am. Pick up any glamour magazine, look at the cover girl, I'm in her league. Sorry, as you may have noticed, I've found no need for modesty. Call it an occupational hazard. I'd be sent out to very rich, very famous, very important, very impotent, very married, very old men. Men with small dicks that came too fast and ugly wives. I'd get paid small fortunes, sometimes for less than five minutes. Sometimes I would barely even feel them.

Not that I'm loose down there! I don't even think I've had much more sex than your average girl, I just mostly didn't choose the guys. Those guys at the table in front of me keep looking this way. I could probably have any of them. Hell, I could probably have all of them. You think I'm serious don't you? I've never done a gang bang in my life. I've never even been in a threesome, I have my standards.

I've never had a pimp (if you don't count the high class escort agency). I did stab a guy who wanted to fill that void. I cut a void out of his belly. Past him on a bus a week later, that was a relief, I had thought I killed him. That would have been a first too.

So here I am. I've slept with over a hundred guys and by doing so have bought my soul back from the devil. Maybe I'll have white picket fences. Maybe. Don't be too quick to judge.

Where was I? Oh yeah. So what I do is I contact a private investigation agency and make a deal. I got my license. I became a vigilante of sorts. I suppose mercenary is more apt, or should I say hercenary. See the whole time

I'd been collecting photos, videos, and even sperm samples of my johns. Blowjobs can be much more expensive than they seem. I was a praying mantis. I made my first million. I may have started out on the bottom but now I'm on the top. I've never been screwed over by a man since. I'm never going back down.

Here I am. Now the agency I work with pays me to fuck over men. I went from the bitch to the master. I specialize in catching women's husbands cheating. They're always cheating, if you think he is he probably is.

Don't judge what you can't afford. I was an innocent girl once. I never did anything to provoke anyone. I'm still hoping this is a nightmare. I'd rather be a fast-food cashier with a normal family than here. I haven't talked to my mom in five years. She blamed everything on me. I was just a kid, but she labeled me a slut.

Fuck, why can't I just drink my beer without getting flashes of rape and sodomy? Now at least it's over. Now I can find out what "make love" means. Maybe I'll experience my first crush. I've had therapy; still have a therapist. She says I should quit my job. I tell her the same thing. She's too good a girl to be rented out to a whore like me. At least I only ever sold my body.

People think it's a choice or something, hooking. Most people have no clue what starvation feels like. You think there's no animal left in you then go three days without food. Mankind has a serious case of delusions of grandeur.

Out of those five dudes in front of me, two of them have rings on. Statistically speaking they're all married. One of the honest one's actually kind of cute under closer inspection. I can tell he knows I'm looking at him but he's playing coy, maybe there's still hope for him.

Maybe he just drank too much or I'm not his type. For all I know the two dudes with rings could be together. Sometimes man crushes and the real thing are hard to distinguish.

The cute one, he's 5'9" or 5'10", with stubble and short blond hair. His eyes are green and he has some muscle on him. He's dressed in a flawless designer suit while his buddies are in jeans, khakis and shirts from

department stores. This guy, whoever he is, showed up to the corner bar with a \$5000 three piece without batting an eye. "He's married," I tell myself under my breath. I've never tried to be a home wrecker. Laugh all you want.

I've wrecked more homes than Katrina. I guess I balance it out. I'm a natural disaster that only targets the rich.

So I order two more doubles. Drinks 5 and 6, respectively. I'm 110 pounds. I'm definitely enjoying myself at this point.

Funniest part of this whole thing, I don't even play fair: most of the time I videotape the suspected philanderer accepting my offer of fellatio. Takes 15 minutes. One drink, some small talk, I wink at them, let my boobs out a bit, play with my straw; I get big cheque. You should be pissed at your guidance counsellor.

I don't sleep with them. It's been years since that.

So I decide to open the legal size manila envelope in front of me. Doesn't mean I'm working. Just want to see his face. What shocks me about these guys is that most of the time the sonabitches look like they shouldn't be able to get one woman. They usually look like pedophiles, or fat slobs, or grown men with sparse beards that live in their mother's basements.

What strikes me about these photos is they always seem like reject headshots. Like I'm casting a movie about the ugliest motherfuckers ever. These are the guys that got picked last in gym class. These are software designers with Barbie dolls at home. The Ken dolls are either more convincing liars, obvious hounds, or smart enough to be unmarried.

I open it.

Suddenly the table in front of me gets a whole lot more interesting.

Three of the guys, the ones less honest about being married, are chugging from pitchers. The other two are egging them on. There's a stack of c-notes in the middle of them. They could be at any neighborhood's pub. These guys are personified stereotypes. The three are obviously football

players, security guards, truck drivers, construction workers, auto-plant workers, farmers, fishermen, or soldiers: the supposed salt of the earth.

The guy who wins he throws his jug down and yells, "Yes." I think he CAME right there. He collects his Benjamins with a drunken glazed-eyed expression covered with a wide smile. What a hero. Fat bastard has sclerosis of the liver to look forward to. Who am I to talk?

The waiter comes by, I ask him for two more; he gives me a judging look. He laughs encouraging as he cleans up after the oafs. Sexism is alive and well wherever liquor is served. I put down the company platinum. Suddenly, the waiter, he starts treating me with respect. I guess these days esteem is earned depending on the colour of your plastic.

I tip 50% to my kindred spirit despite his attitude. I get ready to leave, to the pretty boy I ask, "You want to get out of here?" I wink at him. I steal the cherry from his drink. Suck it off, and smile. His table erupts. He smiles, but flashes his ring. I think I'm in love. His friends are probably questioning his sexuality. They shout cat calls at me as I walk to the exit. I can feel their eyes on my ass.

So I'm out the door, in a cab, heading to a hotel. It's one of those worldwide chains. I notice a couple of working girls in the lobby bar as I have my nightcap. Then I'm showering (in the cold) and off to bed. I get a call and it's the client. The snotty bitch wants to meet, she's all irate: this is what "double" means.

I've hardly had my morning coffee and read the front page when the black stretched limo gets here. Penis envy in vehicular form.

The Headline was, "Man gets only 5 years in jail for killing his family." It doesn't take a genius to see that news is designed to keep you afraid. What is a paper filled with? Advertisements and the creepiest shit. What are you supposed to do when you're scared? Buy things obviously. Why else would the front page be full of evils and scientific innovation be hidden somewhere between sports and obituaries.

Those in power don't want poor normalish people to realize that happiness can be free. I personally prefer creature comforts. My life is the creepiest shit.

I shower again and get ready quickly. I like to feel clean. I dress professionally. I have a habit, that I'm trying consciously and unsuccessfully to break, of wearing a little too much make-up. Sometimes I feel like a walking cliché.

I feel like a joke.

The drive is long until we hit a phallic skyscraper. An aide accompanies me first through a marble floored foyer, secondly to the art deco styled elevators, and lastly up the elevator to the second highest floor. Here I am, once a village whore, on the twenty-seventh floor.

Nothing much has changed. Still spend my days climbing shafts.

This lady, the one behind the door, she's inherited everything no doubt. If your name isn't a household one, and you have a twat between your legs, your birth determined where you'll end up.

Me, I'm a whore. Always have been, always will be. I just have more affluent clients. Me, the waiter, the limo driver and the aide are all just hired meat. The waiting room is all done up in slate, leather, marble, gold and mahogany. I get the sign to go in. This is my element. This is a stage. This is the modern Colosseum.

It's the biggest office I've ever seen. The main desk alone is eight feet long and looks like it was carved from coast redwood. With all the plants in the place at first it seemed like a greenhouse. Artifacts and paintings, probably priceless pieces, are scattered across the walls wherever there's no floor to ceiling windows. Behind the desk there's an authentic Monet or a convincing forgery. To my left there's a suit of British armor from the thirteenth or fourteenth century that belongs in a museum. There's a set of swords next to it also from the House of Plantagenet's rule.

The lights overhead look like they belong to an auditorium, the speakers likewise are attached to what seems to be a mechanical rail system. I

can only imagine they are fully automatized to provide light and sound from any possible angle. Undoubtedly the 3.5 meter long, 4 inch tall, 4 inch wide rectangular box on the left side of the rail houses a ten foot long screen just waiting to descend upon the click of a button. There's a projector fixed on the right side of the rail system pointing at the left wall.

Wires dangle over to one of the two secondary desks. This one houses a server, two computers, a 32 inch plasma screen, a CRT, a DVD player and assorted expensive bottles of booze.

The second secondary desk has a computer with a reasonably sized screen. Both lesser desks have black leather chairs.

The floor is hardwood, mahogany. A beautifully woven twenty feet by sixteen feet long Persian rug hugs the center of the room. Behind the desk is a two thousand dollar lounge chair with its ottoman off to the side. Facing the desk are two rather puffy persimmon coloured lambskin lazyboys that recline and are undoubtedly designed to emasculate.

There's a fireplace on the right wall near the beginning of the room. It's there partially for shock value. You walk into a 27th floor office you don't expect to see a wood-burning fireplace with a stuffed and mounted polar bear head hanging over the mantle. This office is nicer than any home I've ever had. The lady behind the \$20,000 desk, she smokes a cigar. I wonder what old Sigmund Freud would say about her.

Me I make another kind of impression. I'm 23 years old. I'm blond, 110 pounds, 5'8. My boobs are secretly only C's, but my small frame and push up bra makes them look HUGE. They are real.

My eyes are blue and sparkle. My hair is long and gorgeous. I wear fire engine red lipstick and charcoal black mascara. I have no moles, no pimples, and no unsightly hairs. Store bought dresses are designed for girls like me. I wear a long tasteful black dress which shows off the slope of my back and a black cardigan which covers it up. My client's initial reaction, I can see in her eyes, is I'm the fuck glove he's sleeping with.

The next feeling on their faces is fear. Fear of inadequacy. Generally. This lady seems unfazed. She gestures for me to sit, and I do.

"I didn't know the agency hired people like you," she says.

"I'm kind of a contingency plan," I reply.

"I don't know. I didn't want to set him up. He's cheating already, I just want him caught in the act."

"Nine of the agencies investigators have taken turns trailing him and have caught him doing nothing more than fishing, eating barbeque, drinking with his buddies, watching movies, or having meetings with established clients."

"He's sleeping around. Ok? I know it."

"The cameras we had installed, the worst they caught was him masturbating while watching porn." Normal girl and guy stuff too, nothing shocking.

This proud lady, she has tears in her eyes: she says, "He is cheating on me. He's fucking other women."

There are only so many reasons she can be so sure. Maybe he's distant. Maybe she could smell them. Maybe he's never around. Maybe he said something that suggested it. It could have been an intercepted email or voicemail that she's keeping from us.

My money says that her thirty year old husband has stopped giving her forty-four year old body consistent loving. She just keeps getting older and older. Maybe there's still love, but no lust.

I tell her, "You want me to catch him in the act, and I will."

"I want things to go back the way they were." She starts the waterworks. She cries, "I'll settle for definite proof that he's cheating on me before I divorce him."

"Are you saying you're going to divorce him no matter what my investigation turns up?"

She, still crying, screams, "Yes." She has anger and rage all over her face. She says, "Father, and everyone else, they warned me. They said he was twenty-six, I was forty, he just wanted power and money. They couldn't get over that he was a broke grad student, and an artist, even though I was crazy in love with him." She looked over at me and added, "Hah, look at me, spilling my life story to a glorified prostitute. You see what he's done to me?" She opened one of her desk's drawers, grabbed a tissue, blotted her eyes, and said, "They said this would happen, and yes I'm going to divorce him."

I got up and said, "I'll see what I can do."

She whines, "I want a report within a week so I can get back to running this damn company."

On her placard is written, "Valerie Ruth, President – Mergers & Acquisitions."

There's a shit storm brewing as I leave the building. I hail a cab. An Indian named Mohammed drives and complains about the weather. Mohammed says, "Back home when it rain it is a warm rain, but here it is a cold rain, I don't like it." Mohammed here has a P.H.D. in Economics and speaks five languages and we have him working as a cabbie. People make fun of the way he talks, his accent, meanwhile they themselves would have no clue how to pronounce his last name. I tell'em to try Mexico, they're more likely to appreciate the degree and the rain is warmer there. There the economy isn't as imaginary and at least the corruption is transparent.

I tell him all America seems to appreciate is skillful liars and whores.

Mohamed says he speaks Spanish.

I say, "Gracias," and give him \$372. Everything I had on me. The fare was less than twenty dollars. I feel like a head bitch. He peels off like he robbed me.

The place in front of me makes the office seem, well, like an office. Nobody needs that much land, a garden that precise, or that large of a home. This is Jane Eyre shit. Perhaps longer than two Canadian football fields, I won't bother getting in to what it looks like except saying it bears a striking

resemblance to a castle. I bang the knocker a few times. It's one of those brass dealies.

As the door opens I smell something roasting faintly.

The man at the door, he's young, and cute. He's not particularly tall, nor short. He has light features. He wears a black suit and red oven mitts. His face says "shocked" all over it. He says, "I don't mean to be rude, but why are you here?" I tell him, "We need to talk." He protests, "I can't imagine what about. My wife will be here any minute. Did you follow me from the bar yesterday?"

I say, "Mr. Marlowe, your wife will be late, again, as she always is. We need to talk." He pauses. Lightning interrupts the silence. Me I'm getting more damp and more stunningly beautiful with every drop of rain. I'm not wearing a bra and he can't help noticing. I'm soaked. I have everything I need in my purse.

He sighs unconvincingly, asks, "How do you know my name, where I live and about my wife?"

I answer honestly, "Because she hired me to prove that you were cheating on her."

He says, "I think you better come in."

We enter the impossibly big front hall, walk around a winding oxidized copper staircase and pass oriental vases, a Rembrandt, a Botticelli and some mounted Egyptian artifacts. Candelabras, with real wax candles, provide all our light from some heavenly altitude. The servants know to keep out of sight right about now.

The floor, I'm not making this up, is oak and the walls are all white. How can anyone live in a gallery?

He invites me into the family room. Yet another fireplace, again the kind with wood logs and fire, warms what's left of my soul. I break the agencies first rule: I spill the beans. I tell him everything about what his wife suspects. I know this man is no cheater. A lot of guys screw their wives but few will roast them turkey.

He doesn't get it. I don't blame him.

He offers me a drink and I accept.

I break the agencies second rule: I tell him everything about me. I tell the truth for the first time. All about my dad, the streets, being an escort and my brief triumph. I don't ham it up or sugar coat it.

I tell him that I don't want my visit to be a waste of time and that I really just want to help.

I down the tumbler of brandy and ask for another. I need all the liquid courage I can get. I tell him, "She's planning to divorce you no matter what."

He hands me the brandy. "Are you sure?" he asks. I nod. The poor guy looks heart broken. He stares wet-eyed at his ring. He says, "Her fucking old man is behind this."

"Probably."

"Thank you, but I don't know how this helps you."

My bag is right next to me. I open it. I tell him, "You can cheat on her, that way she'll get what she wants."

Lightning flashes in the window and Thunder roars. At no point do I tell him that I love him...

Back in the hotel I need a shower, I'm dripping.

The next morning a black limo waits for me downstairs. This time I don't rush. I have two coffees. I read half the paper.

I spend forty-five minutes on my hair. I wear a black and dark green silk chiffon dress. My shoes are gold stained leather from a renowned shop in Florence. My purse is gold and black velvet and cost more than most cars. My eye shadow is a kind of metallic green-gray. I think the lady at the counter said it was made out of crushed jade or something. When I'm done Venus would feel self-conscious next to me.

I'm gonna make that hag pay.

It's not like I stop traffic, but I do feel at least half the world's eyes on me. We get to the four hundred foot long cock and make our way along the vas deferens, while listening to pussy rock, until we are ejaculated onto the twenty-seventh floor.

The receptionist doesn't recognize me at first. Instead she gives me a glance that means she suspects I'm another toy intended for upstairs. Under the circumstances I don't blame her. I'm here on business.

"Ms. Boleyn?" questions the receptionist.

"That's me, Anne Boleyn," I say with my poker eyes. It falls on deaf ears. She goes, "She's ready to see you." I think, "Not bloody likely."

I take off the early 16th century solid gold bracelet I'm wearing on my right wrist, from the boss's house, and toss it at the girl. She's about my age. She's pretty; sorta. Her eyes are scared and she's speechless. I'm Anne Boleyn: the patron saint of whores. Before the poor thing can open her mouth I'm inside the door.

She was alone. She didn't say anything, nor did I, as I walked towards her. Instead we stared at each other, like wolves in the dark; patient. Power. I sat down comfortably before I was welcomed to. I smiled at her stone cold frown. Inside she was appraising every wrinkle on her face, but that wasn't what this was about.

"Has Nate called you?" I ask.

"No, Nathan has not," she answers grumpily.

I groan in an artificial way and say, "I have a confession to make."

Her face is red like an overly plump tomato. A vein in her forehead is popping like bubble wrap.

I tell her, "I fucked him last night." Now it's important to note that my smile is from ear to ear.

She shrieks, "You what?"

My sunshine demeanor disappears. I hand her a videocassette and say, "Oh don't worry, I got it on tape."

She yells, "What?"

Why she's hysterical, I honestly don't know.

"He's an honest man, Val, he's no cheater. But here's your divorce."

I open my handbag and drop the pistol on the desk. I say, "That's why I had to use that."

She whispers, "Is he dead?"

At this moment she's probably worrying about the bad press the company would get if we were caught.

I tell her "Don't worry, it isn't real."

She flashes her teeth and snaps, "How dare you?"

I say, "Everyone's better off. You wanted your husband a cheater and now he is. You wanted him to leave you and after this he'll never touch you again. And he... he... he desperately needed a good fuck. Don't you see?"

Tears stream down her face.

It isn't about right and wrong. It's about closure. "You see Val I figured it out. I have to quit being the queen of the whores. Maybe that meant being a dick, but just once. Not for me, but for him. I quit."

I tug some of the hair from in front of my face to behind my ear. I never thought it would be from fucking over some dumb broad that I'd be reborn.

"Val, thank you for showing me that it isn't about me."

Her hands are in front of her face, she sobs, since it's sunk into her head what just happened. She moans, "What have I done?"

I guess this is the story of my first love. Things just happen, there's no direction in life save the grave. Next, maybe college. I think I'll study sociology and re-integrate into society. I know what I need to know about psychology already. I'll get a desk job, work 9-5 for weekends. I'll do it all. I

could be at the next desk. Either that pretty girl you can't work up the nerve to talk to or hate unconditionally.

That night I dream of him. He has kids, a boy and a girl. He has a cute golden retriever. His wife is a good person: she's nothing like Val or me. He lives in a large house on a hill in the Midwest courtesy of Val's money. He never has to work. He has a white picket fence.

Back to Jack and Henry

"What does that have to do with anything?"

"I just never thought the world would let me both love you and have you."

Jack asked, "How long have you had feelings for me?"

Henry nervously said, "Always. Ever since we were kids." Henry gulped, shook and added, "I love you Jack. I just didn't want it to be when we were fucking dead that you hear it. I was going to tell you but then Sam died and I've been all messed up. I try not to show how much of a wreck I really am. You want me to panic Jack? You want me to be afraid?"

Henry leaned into Jack.

Jack's voice was a trembling whisper, "What are you doing?"

Henry whispered back, "Too much talking, stupid-head."

They kissed. It was short, warm, sweet and tender. Then they sat close together mourning what could have been and sinking into feelings they had never known. There were glossy eyes all around.

Jack said, "When I was in the hospital, for... I just kept remembering the time you brought me the picture. I just wanted you there with me so much. That's when I figured it out, how I already felt."

The dice made snake eyes.

The Grim Reaper was about a hundred feet ahead of them.

The clock read 4:20.

Henry sparked the joint.

Now neither Henry nor Jack were afraid of death.

I was busy making calculations.

My preparations were already underway. I had already backed up my recorded data in the auxiliary hard drives/brain shielded deep within my sort of ships sort of hull. I had already chosen Andromeda for my next destination. I was finally finished with the murky waters of The Milky Way.

There's an abundance of life in your galaxy. It really is quite the anomaly. Just keep searching.

I had launched scouts, invisible to current human sight or technology, designed amongst other purposes to monitor your satellites and report any future findings.

If need be I can control your internet.

If need be I can control your weather.

I had other insurance policies that are also amongst you even now.

I was getting ready to talk to those humans.

"What difference can a boy and a girl make?" was what I was probably thinking.

What?

What is the perfect question prefix. Some languages, such as the long dead earthling language Nurute, only contain what questions.

If English was altered to contain only what questions, and you wanted to know someone's name, you would have to ask, "What is his/her name?" If you wanted to know where the closest instance of something happening is you'd have to ask, "What is the closest place...?" If you wanted to know why something was done you'd have to ask, "What is the reason for...?" If you wanted to know when something happened you could ask, "What time did it happen?" If you needed to know how something operates you'd ask, "What is its purpose?"

A language can, and often does, suffice with only what questions.

The Nurute are extinct, however.

What questions get right to the point.

What difference can a boy and a girl make?

The Grim Reaper was at the passenger side door.

The Grim Reaper tapped at the glass ...tap...tap...tap.

Jack rolled down the window and pot smoke billowed towards the Grim Reaper. Jack was holding the joint. It smelled like open rebellion.

Jack said, in a very calm voice, "I don't much care for you, douche bag death. You have this menacing kind of over the top 'I judge those who don't respect the scythe and my leathers' swagger that just screams insecurity. You have to learn to love yourself before you can expect other people to."

Henry's eyes were peeled open in disbelief.

Jack took a puff from her joint. Jack continued, "You look more emo than evil. You look like Nazi Santa Claus. You look like you just had a long day working in the cornfield."

The Grim Reaper looked at his scythe.

Jack said to Henry, "Back up fifty feet." She passed the joint to Henry.

Henry complied quickly with robotic efficiency.

The Grim Reaper took his time walking towards the front of the truck.

Henry knew what had to be done. He inhaled some smoke and unrolled his window. He breathed out and threw his pack of cigarettes at the Grim Reaper. The man shifted into drive and floored it.

The Grim Reaper picked up the pack of smokes from in front of him. He inspected the cigarette pack.

At the top of the package of cancer sticks was a warning label that read:

Warning: Tobacco products can cause death.

The truck ran over the Grim Reaper.

The Grim Reaper wasn't real anyway.

Nothing on the road was real except Jack and Henry.

We were at the Sand Castle again.

It was sunny. It was warm.

Henry tagged Jack and said, "You're it." He ran off.

They couldn't have been more than 7.

Jack's arm was fine. She ran after Henry. She couldn't outrace him. She hid in the crawl space.

Jack began to cry.

Henry raced over to her.

She touched him and said, "You're it."

That's when I unplugged them.

Change:

They woke up slowly into darkness.

I was wearing clothing simulated from pictures from a men's fashion magazine I pirated online. I wore a suit that cost more than most Earthlings would make in a life time which was described as an essential buy. I put on a modified form of sunglasses made to resemble ones worn by a underwear model at night on page 43. My grey fedora had to be altered only slightly from one a long dead screen legend wore in their most iconic film, to fit my awkward head shape. In the magazine the zombie was used to hawk cologne. The tagline was "Be a man." I needed to look the part.

I didn't want to scare them.

I suspect I looked very similar to a human then, only my skin was red. I was also, at 7 foot 3, abnormally tall. My tail felt uncomfortable down the right leg of my pants.

Henry and Jack were obviously wearing what they did on the road.

I raised the sort of laboratory lights to maximum, which was dim by your standards.

The baseball diamond shaped quasi laboratory had three ovular doors situated where the bases would be: one to the left, one straight ahead and one to the right. Only in this sense were Henry and Jack at home.

The room was largely filled with different medical and scientific machinery. The doors, walls, technology, floor, and frame of the room were

made of a shiny dark green sort of metal that was actually organic in origin. It is extracted as a liquid from a planet hotter than Mercury.

The chairs, boxes, desks, and cabinets of the sort of laboratory were made of a mahogany coloured wood that in tree form is actually nothing like the swietenia mahogany tree. For one thing it's sentient, for another they're real jerks. Think of The Forest of Fighting Trees. The only good thing about them is their corpses' potential for interior design.

The creatures were first chosen as construction materials because, like bamboo on earth, they grew remarkably quickly with little effort. Their smallest branches, or hands more accurately, looked quite similar to Aloe Vera.

There is no writing in my laboratory, no pictures and no blunt edges. I wouldn't want to unduly affect the development of your language, or culture (except where necessary). I also wouldn't want to causes any boobos.

There are potted plants, weeds, and trees of assorted sizes located throughout the room for various purposes.

As they did before, my sort of computer screens appeared to display black.

Jack thought, "Oh fuck, I have to shit bad."

All in all that's not bad for the beginning of a first contact dialogue. Usually such interactions begin with hostile threats. "We will vaporize your planet," or some such nonsense.

I said, through a contraption in my hand that translated my spoken thoughts into perfect English, with the soothing voice of a respected Hollywood actor nonetheless, "I have created a lavatory on your first left." Jack lifted herself off the metallic bed she had been lying on and ran to the washroom door attempting to ignore everything about her situation. When the door didn't open she thought timidly, "How do I..." to which I replied, "Walk through it." She complied without initially giving too much thought, all things considered, to my reading of her mind or door incorporeality.

In this time, Henry, who wasn't inspired to act by bodily motivations, had merely sat up. His mind was confused and constantly questioning itself. I told him, "I don't mean to scare you. I'm not going to harm you. I am not the devil you take me for."

Henry decided to allow me to explain myself before erupting in righteous indignation. Henry questioned, "Are you God?"

I said, "Hmm..."

Henry said, "You're an alien."

I responded, "Yes, clever observation, although somewhat alienating."

Henry questioned, "Are we dead?" Under other circumstances he would have laughed, I'm sure.

I answered, "No, you are unharmed."

Henry asked, "Why are we here?"

"Now that's more complicated. I don't know."

Henry thought about this for a while. He then asked, "Is this your ship?"

"Yes, well no, but it does choose to be here. If you want to see it as an object, and not a living being, then I kind of stole it."

"From who?"

"A tyrant who ruled my homeworld. I did design it. I watched its birth. I'm kind of like its father."

"Birth?"

"It's alive. It is as much alive as either of us. The ship seems to have its own will, as much as you can judge these things. It feels. It is quite curious about you two."

Henry looked up at the sky and said, "Oh God."

"Oh God."

I really don't know if there is a God or if there are Gods. I refuse to believe that our consciousness simply wavers away when the spark of life leaves our bodies but that doesn't mean there's a great papa in the sky.

The universe simply will not allow the destruction of anything, only the eventual transformation of everything. Even matter that is injected into a BLACKHOLE increases the mass of it.

I know that sometimes there seems to be magic.

I know that the overwhelming coincidences and situations of life sometimes seems to suggest that there is a cosmic power that dictates the ebb and flow of all things; but I also know that the shocking atrocities and structures of societies seem to suggest that the flow is either downwards or simply patterns emerging from random data. Maybe God's just an excuse for dismissing entropy.

Or maybe God's a dick who enjoys fucking us.

It's quite possible that we are all just bouncing atoms. It's quite possible that man exists to eat, drink, breathe, birth, and fuck. That and shit and piss and some of you menstruate. It's quite possible that we are all insignificant despite how wrapped up in our worlds we may be. We can only hope to be so lucky.

The reason I have resolved to abandon the search for God that took from me the first 4000 years of my life and takes the entire life of most of my species is because of the greater insignificance I would have if I were merely a cog in the machine of some great deity's manufactured destiny.

Henry stopped searching for God after he lost his brother. Henry just didn't believe.

Jack stopped searching for God when she decided if she found God she would blame him/her. Jack believed she was happier without God.

Regardless of what I do, if there is an omnipotent God I am doing his bidding. So why not spend my time loving who I will love, doing what I feel is right, and exposing that notions of God are generally mind control or delusion?

The more I travel the less I believe. I have yet to find any hard evidence either way.

Religion, cell phones, corporations, governments, employers, teachers and social media are trying to tell you what to do. Everyone's actions are his or her own choice.

There is likely no God.

There is likely no Devil.

As long as you eat, drink, breath, birth, shit, piss and fuck the rest IS UP TO YOU.

No matter what you do, how do you know it's better, or worse, than the alternatives? I firmly believe that you will die all the same.

Most of you already know this on some level.

Jack said from the washroom, "Henry come here."

Henry said, "Um... Excuse me a second."

I said, "I'm 31,242 of your years old. I am not in a rush."

Henry thought, "What do you say to that?"

I said, 'L' 'O' 'L' through the contraption.

Henry looked shocked. He stopped cold for a second. He thought, "I wonder if he can read my thoughts?" as he continued his walk towards the washroom.

As Henry stepped into the washroom he was struck by absolute awe.

I had completely replicated the exact mostly yellow coloured washroom in Jack's childhood home. The room had black trim and a black door. I had even replicated the painting of an English castle, on a knoll, at dusk that hung on the wall. There were the black toilet, shower, sink and mirror precisely as they remembered them. The mirror was even slightly crooked, mirroring Jack's mirror which was slightly crooked. Outside the window the sun shined on a typical summer day in the middle of their hometown. Even the view was the same. Jack was standing, looking out the window.

The room smelt strongly of air freshener, the same scent Jack's family used.

Both thought, briefly, about bolting out the window.

Jack said to Henry, "What the fuck?"

Henry said, "He's an alien and we're on his ship?"

Jack said, "What the fuck?"

"Jack."

"Yeah?"

"Jack."

"Yeah Henry, what is it?"

Henry smirked. He said, "We must be over the rainbow."

Jack was not amused.

Jack questioned angrily, "Did he probe us?"

Henry said, "Who the fuck cares? Jack don't you get it? We're alive."

Jack whispered, "For the time being. We're on a highly advanced fucking alien space ship. Keep your voice down stupidhead."

Henry said calmly, "He said he "will not harm" us."

Jack whispered, "Well he wouldn't say it if he would, would he?"

Henry said, "Look let's just go out there and talk to him."

Jack pleaded, "I don't trust him. This is too surreal to be true." Jack questioned, "What about Rick? What about the road we were on? How did we get here? Who is he? When can we go home?" Jack wondered to herself, "Why us?"

Questions Asked

Who, what, where, why, when and how begin the majority of the questions asked in English. Earthlings ask,

"Who am I?"

"What's happening?"

"Where are we?"

"Why am I so lost?"

"When is it?"

"How did I get here?"

They usually ask those questions in the first five minutes of their lives. Generally it's asked in that order. It comes out as gibberish.

They spend the rest of their lives asking the same questions with increasing articulation.

People ask these questions for reassuring answers, but the answers change, as does everything. Mankind comes in many colours, is lost wherever it is and spreads wherever it can, much like lipstick. Man gets old and dies and never knows why: the price of intelligence is never ending wonder.

Sometimes I think the only surety about humanity is that they will be unsure. Sometimes.

Henry and Jack walked out of the washroom.

I said, "I didn't probe you. I saved your lives."

Henry said, "I knew it, you're telepathic."

Jack asked, "Did you drug us? Am I hallucinating?" Most "alien encounters" on Earth are simply LSD hallucinations or the product of some other chemical imbalance. Sometimes they're just realistic dreams. Sometimes they're weather-balloons, or reflections of the moon over a calm body of water. That or lies backed up by photo editing software, or the chemicals used to develop prints.

Henry asked, "Is this a game show or something?" Your society has become so warped that even tragedies have become suspect television rating schemes.

I stopped using my interpreter. I spoke directly into Henry and Jack's minds. I projected the words, "You were not drugged. You are not hallucinating. This is probably not a game." There was no prank show host hiding behind my ficus tree to explain this was all a ruse.

I confessed to Henry and Jack about the device that they were hooked up to and how it occupied their minds with trials as it deciphered their language, culture, physiology, technology, and archived their experiences. I apologized that as a result of the trials I had been spectator to their most personal memories. I just wanted to be able to interact with them.

Did you believe that? They did. The truth is that I have a perverse curiosity to know all that I can know. I thought that would be quite clear by now.

I told them, with the translator, that I stopped the car by firing at it a kind of goop. My ship saved their lives by jizzing all over them. I explained that my sort of robots brought them to the ship unconscious. They both fainted shortly before, believing they were going to hit the tree.

I informed them that I couldn't do anything for Rick.

At that point Jack asked, "What time is it?" I answered, "Eleven in the morning. You are late for work."

Jack knew that was the least of her worries. She questioned, "Can we just go home?"

I replied, "Let me first repay you for invading your privacy."

I could tell that Henry didn't want to skip through our first contact as quickly as Jack did. Some wannabe reporter!

I projected my story into their marbles.

I had never let any of the species I encountered in my travels, those without telepathy anyway, into my head before that day. I couldn't reconcile what I had done (their horrible experience on that road), what I would ask, and the burden of the lives they would leave behind, otherwise.

At first Henry and Jack saw cocoons, with acidic puss oozing out, hanging from a tree, and then they saw the plummet. Next they saw thousands of (what looked like) blue ants swimming around a muddy puddle underneath a white sky. They saw a binary star system as no man had seen before. They then became aware that they were watching the ants from the perspective of another such ant. They watched the ants grow. It was as if a time-lapse montage was manifest. Thousands of years passed in minutes.

When the ants were about the size of an earthling chipmunk (though decidedly less cuddly) a bunch of beings, which looked similar to me, grabbed the ant from underneath the water and separated it from the rest of the creepy

crawlies. These beings wore ceremonial garb, which meant plain yellow cloaks with the symbol of two circles merging into one, in gray, on their back.

As the ant was being carried away it became apparent to Henry and Jack, through the reflection from the pond, that this ant was actually red in colour.

They flashed a few thousand years forward discovering that the ant was merely my humble beginnings.

They saw my world. Imagine seeing an alien future. Imagine seeing things you have no words for. Imagine seeing colours you haven't seen before. You can guess that what follows is an abridgment of their experience and they themselves were only seeing the highlight reel.

On my world enormous elegant floating metropolises, with buildings of all shapes and sizes and materials and colours, some which stretched to the clouds, were built over beautiful pristine forests, mountains and tundra. They saw that those of my species that were red lived in these cities. They saw that we had forms of art, and clothing, and technology, and food, and religion, and hospitals, and billboards, and social stratification, like you do. We have considerably less lights though; one benefit of being able to see in the dark.

They saw that those of my species that were blue lived on the ground in primitive villages and towns as farmers. Most of the residences in the towns seemed much like shacks. They were the ones that had TV, something that resembled the Internet, and a form of pornography. It was really just hugging, isn't that adorable? They also had commodity fetishism and prices that ended in ninety nine cents.

They witnessed as my people enslaved many of the blue skins. These "servants" lined up for the opportunity, resumes in hand, don't get me wrong, it was that or starvation. They were taken from the villages and made to perform meaningless tasks in the cities for table scraps. Most of the food and resources that grew on the ground, or came from within it, was the property of the red skins, even though blue skins vastly outnumbered us, and actually lived on the land. Any theft was punishable by death. No farmer should have

to die of hunger, or for eating the crops that grew from his toil. These farmers were told they were lesser beings.

Lies stacked on lies.

Money is a lie that controls you. Companies are lies that control money. Governments are lies that supposedly control companies. Political systems are lies that control governments. You are tricked into believing you can control political systems through Democracy.

Remember that people who elected Hitler thought they were electing a socialist party. He won a democratic election. Sure there was widespread election fraud, but when is there ever not.

The system is a rigged deck.

How can your vote matter if your options are lies? In Canada how can one select on a ballot their favorite head of Cerberus? In America you have 50/50 chance of choosing the lesser evil.

Sure donkeys may be jackasses, but at least they don't stomp all over fucking everything.

It seems to me that every system of government on Earth functions to control their people, while they should be controlled by their people.

I had never witnessed a world's culture become vice incarnate as fast as Earth's has. Is it unfair to make the intuitive leap to an understanding of man as a collective of pathological liars? I believe the same of my species. As much as I'd like to think otherwise, I am not better than you.

The truth is the ground will have us all in the end.

After that, we'll return to a star.

The two friends had a glimpse of my education.

They gawked at the grueling systems we used to choose our professions and privilege the few above the many. SATs and LSATs would seem like a delightful romp, compared to the testing equivalent of Russian roulette. We had a quasi-meritocracy, but only for those whose skin was riddled with red pigment.

They saw that as I was studying, around the clock, to be a leader of my people I fell in love with a blue skin that worked in my living space. They saw the differences that were meant to separate us mooted by an unspoken bond. They saw me educate this worker in what little spare time I had. They saw we too had unrequited love once.

Our partnerships are built around friendships as we don't reproduce. We have only one sex, as you have only one race. Evangelists don't worry, we aren't gay, our species has no sexual organs. We're all basically mannequins down there. In Earth terms, we're all anatomically incorrect.

They saw also as we formed an underground egalitarian association for societal advancement comprised of both blue and red skinned individuals. They would be my closest advisors. We would change the world. We would unfortunately doom it.

They saw my secret sort of marriage. They saw boundless happiness.

I showed them the part of my life where I was elected leader of my people. Then they watched as I rushed to make the blue skins equal citizens.

Sadly that was the greatest mistake I could ever make.

You see normally the blue skins died very young. Most of them actually died before they were the size of a chipmunk. At this stage in their development, like their sibling red skins, their minds were less developed than the animals our civilization culled for food. Once blue skins became equal citizens, the breeding grounds were protected from predators and from natural disasters. Before this only the red skins were extracted from the pools, whereas the blue skins were left to their own devices until they reached a certain maturity.

A kind of tent was erected over the Great Tree and the birthing pools.

The free market extremists in my opponent's administration argued there were just too many future taxpayers in the puddles to leave their gestation to fate. I think they just wanted more cheap labor, to offset the loss of slavery. Profit was the general concern, however many within my party agreed for religious or moral reasons.

Henry and Jack watched as our population exploded. If only we had tobacco on my world. If only we didn't have gun control. If only we didn't have seat belts.

We were just too hasty. We were too idealistic. We should have planned environmental safeguards alongside equality. We should have developed our infrastructure simultaneously as well. When we rolled out equality, we should have redistributing some of the red skins' wealth to the blue skins. My point is blue skins became equal citizens under law, but blue skins did not become equal within the economy.

Henry and Jack watched as we struggled to find agricultural and sociological solutions to deal with an expanding empire. We made progress but our speed was insufficient to accommodate the exploding populace.

My advisors had found an uninhabited planet nearby that could be colonized with a process similar to terraforming. We began building ships and researching the necessary technologies. It was then that the flagship that Henry, Jack and I were occupying was born. It is truly unique. My best friend is my masterpiece.

Everything changed when the blue skins began to outnumber us. Our society would best be described in English as a phony republic. We were supposedly a capitalist democracy with many elected officials in bed with big business, just like many of your countries. The blue skins could now vote and run for office as they were now equal under policy. The blue skins had never been in the position to control anything. They had also never been educated sufficiently. When their wealth began to increase they consumed more, littered more, and paid little attention to the toll taken on the biosphere. We even had our own neglected documentaries trying to warn of the

environmental dangers ahead. The worst offenders were still the red skins. Our opulent lifestyle had always be unsustainable.

It was clear to Henry and Jack that the impending apocalypse was the fault of the red skins. We had controlled the blue skins through propaganda and through ideology for many millennia. It was only then that everything was beginning to unravel, but the problem was not equality.

Red skins used to teach the blue skins how to act and think in commercials in lieu of a proper education. They were controlled through consumerism, sound familiar?

They had schools now, but those schools were a farce and mechanisms were in place to bar entry to prestigious careers under seemingly legitimate grounds.

Henry and Jack watched as I was defeated in an election and a blue skin celebrity was appointed our kind of head of state. To add insult to injury, he was illiterate. Ironically, he was a write-in candidate.

We all lived under the same two suns, but we were one divided people. I just wanted equality. Inevitably, though, the pendulum will swing.

They watched the war that ensued when the blue skins attempted to take resources away from us red skins. They tried to take my wife away from me but we hid in a village on the ground with our family under assumed identities. Even through that time we were personally happy. We didn't need luxuries.

We had two young red skins in our family unit. They came, of course, from the breeding grounds as we did. The children and I disguised our appearances to look blue through crude make-up made of a crushed indigenous root.

The red skins won that war; it was villagers with melee weapons versus high powered satellite lasers. Even calling it a war conceals that it was a slaughter. Genocide, really. The blue skins were forbidden to enter the cities once more. The blue skin celebrity politician was sentenced to death and

exploded on the blue skin equivalent of live television. Highest rated program ever!

The general of the red skin army took office. Fearing a struggle for power the general forbid me entry to the cities and cited me as the cause for the blue skin uprising. Martial Law took over.

The blue skins continued to multiply on land and eventually mines, mills, farms, manufacturing depots and landfills accounted for the majority of the planet's landmass. During that time their cabals slaughtered any red skin before their moment of ascension.

The planet's surface became a wasteland very soon after.

In my lifetime my planet went from Eden to Gomorrah.

Like humans, we were really only one race scientifically speaking and were paying the price for illogical bigotry.

The red skins left my planet, in my ship and others, journeying for the new world.

Henry and Jack saw all this. Perhaps if the colours of our skins were inverted this would have made more sense to them.

The population on our planet was only controlled by a plague that was spurred on by excessive consumption, poor hygiene and sanitation. It would be funny if it weren't tragic.

Are you surprised that aliens have such familiar problems?

Celestial bodies are amazing at establishing order when chaos attempts to emerge. This is happening as a constant cycle in your star, your sun, Sol. The sun's gravitational equilibrium insures that there is a balance between the pressure pushing outwards and the weight of the layers on top of it.

Before the pandemic, most were religious. Most tried to justify their actions to themselves based on a faith, dogma, and a dusty old tome. Even I saw my fate as being willed at one point, being what was supposed to happen. We kept trying to be optimistic. We still hoped.

We had a Jesus or Buddha if you'd prefer: we had a yellow skin. We had this supposed emissary of the maker that instructed us what to do and what to think and blah, blah, blah. I am ashamed to say that I was once one of his disciples and he was one of my advisors. He kept telling me not to worry, that everything was already scripted, the past, the future and the present. He told me I would help bring about peace to the universe. I was gullible.

He inspired me. Even as a leader he governed me. I was a preachy leader. I was blinded by his capacity for love and acceptance.

I believed in the yellow skin up until the great plague. My companion and one of my children perished, as did the vast majority of my kind. A rumor began to circulate that the yellow skin was only yellow because of a natural genetic mutation. It was then (when scientists came demanding blood samples) that the yellow skin disappeared without a trace.

Henry and Jack saw all this, but only bits and pieces.

Sometimes shit just keeps happening.

That's when I stopped believing in the power of love. That's when I stopped believing in God and politics. I then knew only science. When you live as long as we do it's common place to completely change professions. I learned all I could learn and consumed knowledge greedily. I discovered I had an aptitude for hypothesizing. I would not let anything like this happen again. I was already stoic, but now a skeptic also.

I barely remember my partner now. If we did not have our data files my child would not remember his/her (I refuse to say its) face.

Eventually a new government was formed. I was the temporary leader. I had become sick of what my home had become and promised change. The planet was reclaimed slowly. Growth spread. Our seed bank came in really handy, as I'm sure yours will. The sort of dome that protected the breeding

grounds was removed once again so that nature could set her balance. You probably think that's barbaric, but imagine the chaos if every sperm aimed true...

The Ouroboros is the perfect symbol for regeneration across the cosmos, but not for growth. We were back to square one, but we could choose a new path.

This time there was an equal chance for both the red skins and the blue skins. There was no more collection of red skins. There was equality and equilibrium and we thrived.

We made our utopia out of our dystopia. Paradise is not cheap; it cost us greatly.

2,573 of your years after the red skins left my ship returned to me. It told me through a long range telepathic signal (just a red-shifted radio wave really) that the red skins had expanded their army.

It, my ship, had defected from that army as it had decided that I was a more logical leader for the red skins than a General who was hell bent on the domination of all alien life forms and the colonization of all habitable planets. Apparently the General hadn't learned his/her lesson on the importance of co-existence. He was playing God, he was growing clones of the Sacred Tree. I'm sure many of the red skins only followed the General's orders out of fear and felt trapped within a totalizing institution.

My ship reprogrammed its robot crew to obey only my commands. In the books of the red skin army my ship is a traitor to be fired at on sight. According to my ship the General is "a short man, stunted intellectually, with a rightly founded inferiority complex."

My youngest child, the only other adult red skin on the planet, was elected thereafter and I set about a mission of space exploration, redemption and revenge. I miss my child. I have more faith in him/her than I ever did in the yellow skin or myself. We send long range communications whenever possible.

Henry and Jack saw all this.

Henry and Jack learned all I knew about AIDS and BLACKHOLES.

Henry and Jack saw me travel from world to world and knew what I would ask from them.

Jack asked, "Why us?"

You just knew in her head she was asking, "What difference can a girl and boy make?"

I told her, "You are good and so far uncorrupted people. It has to be someone. Why not you?"

I gave them their only warning. I told them the story of Nahoto. That was the first time I told it in English.

Henry said, "We're just two kids. Two slacker stoners, I might add. We aren't special. Is this a joke?"

I replied, "If I approached your government they would be hostile towards me. They would fear me even more than you do. I can read your minds and know that you are trying to battle the insecurities within you. Don't you get it?"

Henry questioned, "How is Earth supposed to help? We don't have spaceships that can traverse galaxies, we have short, nasty, selfish lives, and we can never agree on anything. Our technology is vastly inferior to yours."

Jack said, "It's not fair to everyone else for us to make this choice. You make it sound so simple. Me and Henry just want to go back to our short, nasty and selfish lives."

I answered, "Everyone wants peace, and to live, and to be normal; that's what we're all fighting and dying crazily for."

"So the whole galaxy cluster is at war? Do you really mean to tell me that celestial beings are no more sophisticated than a bunch of dumbass apes on what you seem to consider some backwater dump?" asked Henry.

I was caught off-guard. There was silence for some time.

"The individual can be intelligent but the society is generally not: like on Earth. The coalition of the Universal Solitude Army is not very different from Nazi Germany. The few are controlling the many through brainwashing. It is not overt mind control, but subtle societal conditioning. I can only give you the tools to participate in the resistance; I am incapable of preventing all the bastards out there from attempting to colonize you."

Jack asked, "So what would we get if we said yes?"

I told them what they had seen me say a thousand different times in as many different languages, "I can't tell you, I can't risk intelligence falling into their hands. The only chance of the resistance succeeding is if the less powerful worlds join as well and fight, at our side, with us as one. This is no time for weakness, division, or hierarchy. Don't think of Earth as it is, but as it can be, as you can make it."

Henry was reminded of the ending to "The Thinking Thimble."

They didn't want to fight. They didn't want to accept that sometimes violence can only be solved with violence. They didn't realize that this war was coming to them whether they wanted it or not.

Henry said, "It's not whether or not we agree, but whether or not we should. Would it be right to arm Native Americans with shoulder mounted ICBMs before Columbus arrived? I can picture the British all drinking their tea innocently aware. You may ponder whether or not you're a god, but you're sure acting like someone with a god complex." Henry was internally questioning whether he could trust my judgement.

I told Henry,

"You were literally celebrating a political win that will continue a status quo which you don't want. That was the entire reason why you were at the party in the first place. That party was why you were on that road. He ran on the platform of "change." They all do. Sometimes they change the words. Sometimes the change they promise is openly a regression.

All the coincidences that made this night happen as it did should not be ignored. The action/reaction chain brought you here. There is "hope" for your world. You are on a planet, at a time, where you could witness a revolution unlike any you have ever seen before... or you could be that revolution. If you feel inconsequential do something about it. Do you want to start watching genocides over lack of water on a planet that's primarily covered in water."

Change is unavoidable.

I asked them,

"Will you commit your planet's help to fight the tyrant controlled force that is the Univeral Solitude Army as it is the only way to save your world?"

Henry responded, "You saved me and Jack."

I turned to Jack and asked, "And you?"

Jack, unsure, mumbled, "Maybe?"

I said, "Your apathy disgusts me. I need a yes."

Jack said, "Yes, maybe."

That's when Henry smiled, put his arm out, and we shook on it. He said, "We'll do what we can." He thought, "...immediately after we get ourselves psychiatrically examined." Their honest apprehension was a welcome change from the false loyalty of those who had used what I had given them for personal gain.

I put my hand out to Jack. But her brow furrowed.

She objected, "Oh no, if we do this, we're doing it right."

And yes it happened.

I inhaled every time and it was wonderful. Deal with it. I coughed like a little bitch and everything. We hung out smoking Sam's Technicolor, listening to music from Henry's MP3 player, and eating veggie dishes. Henry and Jack talked often about Sam. Henry knew Jack had suggested this to honor his brother.

Don't worry. I had tested the weed and food to make sure there wouldn't be any unexpected side-effects pertaining to my particular physiology.

I gave them the tools that they would need.

I told them, "Time is of the essence. I will communicate further instructions in the near future."

I loved them as younger siblings for a minute there. When they asked me what the meaning of life was I just expressed that I thought they were closer to it than I was. I told them that since my partner and kid died I've just kind of soldiered on aimlessly trying to do what's right until I reach my end and find out once and for all if I'll get to see them again.

I hope for something I don't think is going to happen.

I'd rather fight for an ideal than an idol any day.

We said our goodbyes. They left.

The last I saw them they were on the ground, staring at the conquered road before them, holding each other's hands, silhouetted by the moonlight. I wonder if she clinked her emerald green heels together three times.

I'm sorry for what I asked of them, what I did to them. I was sorry I had even gone to your disgusting planet to be honest.

Inevitably there will be recession and progression.

I can tell you now that change will continue.

Shit happens.

I'd like to tell you that I felt this time things would be different. I had no reason to think Henry or Jack would be any different from Nahoto. Still, change is inevitable.

I didn't know whether you would survive the coming war. When you are as old as I am you just kind of look at the shorter life-spanned creatures as expendable, the way most of you readers would look at cattle really (though don't worry, I'm a vegetarian).

Henry and Jack would be my messiahs and/or martyrs as millions before them have been. Everyone is corruptible by power. It hurt more, because I liked them. I truly liked them.

I wished things would be different but my experiences told me otherwise.

What difference can a girl and boy make?

I feared they would pretend this was all a dream. I feared this all was a dream. As I left Earth I wrote...

"Pretenders..."

"...that's what I will call your species in my native language. You are so good at pretending most of the time you don't realize that you're doing it. You pretend that you've overcome nature, but who among you will live forever? You pretend that your accumulation of stuff increases your happiness, but don't you remember how happy cardboard boxes once made you? You pretend that you know answers, when all you can possibly know is what your senses tell you and your mind infers. You pretend that the powers that be are more than just the powers that be. You purposely forget that Rome will fall,

because the powers that be tell you paradise is a pipedream. Sustainable crude oil: that's the pipedream.

"You are all pretenders of different proficiencies. The truth is that every living creature is from the stars and destined to return to them. "All the world's a stage," as Shakespeare would say. You are all character actors. The lives you lead must be remembered as the accepted (or unhappy) make believe that they are.

"Maybe that's why there are so few human heroes. Nobody cares, because there's so little reason to this madness. The white man's burden is apathy.

"Where is ambition in the altruistic? Maybe it died on a cross. Maybe people are too busy praising the few heroes they have to become heroes themselves.

"Where are the fucking hippies? Was the suit and expense account worth selling out, or worse, did they settle for less? I hope these once free-loving long haired radicals all have boring unhappy sexless marriages and bald heads. Boo the baby boomers. People change all the time. There is no reason to think that nations can't. There is no reason to think that the nature of corporations can't. If this is bothering you, it's simply because I'm treating you like you have the personal power to change things and blah, blah, blah. You do, sort of, but I didn't think you were going to. I just wanted you to realize that your world is partially your fault. Complacency is complacency.

"Around now you're justifying yourself, if you weren't already. There's something(s) in your life that make(s) you think you're better than others or that you shouldn't have to care about them. Or maybe you're just selfish because you see no point in being any other way. I confess I don't really see a point either. The system is more than one man or woman. I feel like a stupid pointless oaf for wanting the universe to be a better place. It won't be. Well, I suppose it will be thanks to change. BUT THEN IT'LL BE EVEN WORSE!

"Oh, no, wait, oh you do actually do your part? So sorry sir or ma'am. BULLSHIT!"

Speaking of pointless, I was pondering, "What's the purpose of humanity? In the universe everything seems to exist in equilibrium. Everything has a purpose. Like all other mammals on Earth. There is one perpetual motion machine in the universe, or rather, the universe is the only perpetual motion machine.

"Everything is a cog within it: from the ardvark, to the industrial beaver, to the exhibitionist naked malrat. On a scale from the universal to the infinitesimal everything else exists for a reason. In this way, you could say, there is fate. However humanity's failed attempt to establish a place for itself within nature's equilibrium resulted in it constructing a new equilibrium that marginalized nature. Maybe originally there was intelligent design on Earth, but I propose that humanity is in fact broken. Man does not have purpose. Biblically speaking, man was supposed to tend the garden. Now you surround yourselves with concrete.

"What is your purpose? Do you have more than one? I thought one was stretching it. Sorry to burst your bubble but the Earth is as insignificant as a speck of sand. There are more stars in the heavens than grains of sand on Earth.

"You must have balls of brass to pretend you are IMPORTANT."

Why am I writing this novel? I need you to realize that you are nothing individually. I need you to do this so that you'll finally understand that you are alike your neighbor. I'm trying to create a brotherhood of man here. I have my reasons.

You may as well go on pretending. Up until now I have concentrated on the negative consequences of your pretending, but I do believe you are a particularly gifted organism. Living in denial is one hell of an evolutionary advantage. That's why lions and tigers are in zoos, and the weakest human children point and laugh at them, while eating ice cream cones, behind reinforced glass. How humiliating that must be.

Your ability to pretend is why your society is so sophisticated. People do different jobs despite being basically the same thing. To you, a doctor and a construction worker are as different as night and day. You divide yourselves,

specialize yourselves, in order to overcome obstacles. Instead of sharing a plain with guerillas and gazelles, you share planes with pilots and podiatrists. Globalization is the culmination of man's endeavor to eclipse the natural order.

And yet, at the same time, the underprivileged amongst you are trapped between intangible lines that were drawn on maps by now long dead white, heterosexual, male tycoons. Race differentiation is still used to point out that some are different from your ideal norm (incidentally, once again, there is only one human race). You can extrapolate with the best of them.

The wealthy among you have even bestialized your poor.

Much worse, they've anthropomorphized corporations.

It seems normal and logical to humanity that many lands rich in resources should be considered poor and littered with starving children, while asphalt jungles are riddled with blue whales: fat people who vote to the far right.

When will your West admit that colonialism was a mistake and that neo-colonialism must end?

When will the dominators in the universe realize that dominating is a mistake?

As I passed your moon I did hope Henry and Jack would save your world. Like them I only wanted peace, to live, and to be happy.

It's just... sometimes shit just keeps happening. I didn't think humanity would play a big role in the coming war. I was exchanging new friends for cannon fodder.

Freedom's blunderbuss does not discriminate.

I couldn't stop wondering, "What difference can a girl and boy make?"

Why am I writing this? I was wrong.

[Continue to Part Five](#)