

# The Sacred Sickness

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## Beyond An Introduction

In this book I attempt what readers most appreciate: a message within a message, as clear and obscure as it needs to be, precisely where it needs to be.

"At its core, this is a book of profound union—a unity forged through discovery, born from the raw conflict between heart and mind." (From "Beyond An Introduction")

This book is a crucible where the fiery passion of the heart clashes with the cool, sharp logic of the mind. From this intense friction, a new form is forged, a profound union of disparate parts, a truth hammered out in the heat of internal war."

A story with fiction, just as compelling as facts riddled within. what I was familiar with, something much more, and even more from what I've endured. The cardiocentric wisdom of Aristotle, the mysticism of Egypt, the austere metaphysics of the Greeks—all pass through suffering's crucible and return as living matter. Herodotus, Plato—these minds breathe through the work, their presence felt in its marrow.

Poetic thought opposed to the sharp nose that has reached too far into truth.

Religion receives full attention. Christianity, Islam, Judaism, atheism, and all expressions of orthodoxy. with a spirit that seeks understanding rather than peace. The questions burn; the inquiry continues. These pages hold criticism—of gods, of prophets, of humanity—shaped by reverence and sharpened by the agony of thought pushed too far.

This work seeks understanding above all—beginning with the self, reaching toward the other. It offers instruction wrapped in myth, borne through ritual, and marked by the trace of blood.

Within it lie truths: historical, philosophical, and theological.

To me, the books worth reading are those best suited anywhere the human spirit lies subdued waiting impatiently to end their suffocation. Few places strip us bare more than the tight

compartments of life: the pigeon boxes of our homes, pressed cramped buses, overcrowded cities, breathless rooms. In such spaces, where thirst, hunger, and fatigue blur into one oppressive hum, we see ourselves more clearly than in simple solitude.

I do see a hint of sacrilege, though. For some among you, it may be perceived as a desecration of values you hold dear, but that is exactly what many need. A sacrilege to overthrow the tyrannical gods of our minds.

We need a Perseus to settle into the unholy temples of our thoughts, therein lies corruption.

I include modern thought because it surrounds me—inescapable, shaping the air I breathe. Ideas about behavior, consciousness, and society appear constantly, claiming to define what we are. I examine them carefully. A few I accept. Most I do not. Still, each enters my mind like a mourner, solemn and temporary.

Invention was required to link myth to reality—to make what is ancient speak in a tongue the present can endure. But even this invention is not arbitrary. It is compelled by the need to show what is otherwise lost in abstraction: that the human being is not an argument, but a suffering creature.

At bottom, this is a book of union. A unity emerging through discovery—born in the conflict between heart and mind. That tension, that friction, gives rise to the thing you hold in your hands.

A warning! These notes are not for those who seek the balm of tranquil reading before sleep. There is no cradling lullaby here. They may agitate the spirit, sour the silence, and summon voices that hiss in the dark. But do not tremble—I am both creator and destroyer, the knight pledged to behead the very monster I spawn. However, the creature dies only when you reach the final page. So reach the final page.

Although grim and melancholy, most of the story

evolves. It may be full of memories that make you laugh with or without intention, but if you read closely, you will catch a rare nascent coo, a galloping juvenescence, and the sibilating virtues of a mumbling elder.

This is my attempt. My story, my philosophy, my offering to the reader willing to venture into the depths of my first book.

## Prologue: A Grave Goodbye and a New Beginning.

I came to ask you, Father.

Did you know?

Did you know of my damnation  
before I did.

Part of me thinks,  
With all your years and wisdom,  
You must have known that I was  
doomed.

That I was wasting my time.

In search of human dreams.

I remember one time,  
I came to you broken and bloodied.

You said peace would come—  
if not in this life, then in the next.

But tell me father

How can I reach the afterlife if I  
can't die?

I should have died on the cliffs by the  
river.

Or on those frozen staircases.

Each fucking step is a step closer to  
death, and yet I live.

I have a secret.

Maybe you sensed it,

Or maybe not.

Deep within I am a non-believer.

I have always been a non-believer  
against my own wishes.

To see jubilation spawned by power  
of God,

What a miraculous gift.

Who would forgo the joys of spiritual  
bliss

Once blessed with the gift?

And how I've tried  
to climb the sacred steps,

but always trip  
where one must say:

I believe.

To say I believe would be an evil lie,  
and all juice spilling from that fruit

would be the rotten dew of  
hypocrisy.  
And what greater crime exists  
in every holy book,  
in the essence of every faith,  
than to be a hypocrite believer.  
At least there I hold my honor.  
A choice of suffering,  
If you were alive, you'd say  
If you really try with all your heart,  
But if it were a choice, and not a  
destiny,  
I'd fall to my knees like the orthodox  
do.  
But I was born a non-believer.  
Doomed from the moment of  
conception.  
And so it is. My body belongs to  
suffering,  
bound to a note in my pocket—  
No, my body does not belong to me.  
But it does not belong to God either,  
as you insisted it must.

No. It belongs to suffering,  
the purpose of my life I often sought  
to escape.  
The one you told me to escape.  
With a formula with nothing but  
skies above.  
Skies which you pointed and smiled  
But when I looked above, I saw nb  
nothing.

The God You told me to believe, I  
don't believe. I never did.

## The Apparition

A soft, tremulous voice seeps into the corridors Hamil's blood-clogged ears. An ancient canto begs he rise from his gruesome catatonia.

*"Expergiscere...corpus et anima...subluna vetusta"*

The ancient words rouse Hamil to a violent spasm. The air floods into his nose, a violent spasm snaps Hamil awake—his lungs, starved and panicked, draw a starving breath, hoarding air deep into the gut. But as long as the pit of his bowels, until at last erupts a bile-laced gorge of blood. A convulsion of grotesque sludge.

And then—

Stillness. His vision steadies. Eyes still foggy but light now fills the air. A tender sepia light, brightens the foggy world around him softly. A warm luminescence from darkness, dancing stars, that laugh as they spin and laugh as they dance.

Hamil cries, feeling a thumping wave of pain, pulsating in unison with the beat of his heart. It crawls through him like hot wax

bubbling from his skin to his thoughts.

His eyes snap awake.

"Hooray!" greets a worn, raspy voice vacillating in as far and so little as he can see.

Hamil groans in pain as a slippery red bubble of drool slowly spills out of his mouth.

"Ick," he spits.

"What the hell happened this time? Said Hamil.

"This time? I'd like to know too," says a blurry apparition wiping Hamil's mouth with the sleeve of its robe.

"As of now you are nestled safely in my arms not far from the mountains."

Hamil takes hold of his chest.

"It hurts." Said Hamil.

"I do not doubt."

Hamil stretches out drunkenly flailing his hands around, looking to touch the apparition sitting before him. His bloodied hands land the apparition's white



beard, he fingers, squeezes, scrunches, and pets the long white beard as though he was petting an animal.

“Puffy fur.”

“Thick. White.

“Yes.” replies Hamil.

“Something like sheep's fur, ay? ” Says The Apparition.

“Yes.”

“And have you ever heard of a woolly ghost?” asks the apparition, with a soft tone.

Hamil lay at its feet, eyes narrowed and weary in disbelief, tangling his fingers into the beard of the apparition.

Hamil lets out a sigh.

“Goodness gracious.”

A faint voice hisses into his ear.

“Cmon, Conjure a lie quickly now.”

The deep voice hisses at Hamil. The Apparition tries to read a whisper under his breath.

“Why?” Hamil mumbles.

“To hide the truth of course.”

“Oh, right. The truth.” Says Hamil, mumbling to himself as indiscreetly as his weakened mouth allows.

The apparition looks into Hamil's tired blood red dilated eyes

“Are you mumbling to me?” Says Alil.

Hamil interrupts.

“Hunger. It's hunger.” Hamil interrupts.

“Hunger? What about hunger?” asks Alil.

“Yes. That's it. Precisely it. Hunger.”

Hamil winces in pain while rubbing his gut.

“Blood Sugar, you know, I can't remember eating anything for days.

They say it can knock a man out quicker than a powerful hook to the chin.” Hamil chuckles lightly, careful to make sudden movements

that might make him wince too suspiciously.

"Or is it weeks?" The bearded blur replies, pointing to Hamil's protruding ribs and sunken gut.

Hamil lowers his gaze to his frail, thinning frame, he gently traces the faded highways of old scars and bruises on his chest and stomach. The touch lingers over fresh cuts and gashes, each a painful addition to a new trauma settled into his body.

Tragic, isn't it. "Hamil's voice fades into a lethargic tone of detachment sprinkled with exhaustion.

His eyes trace the jagged trails of scars that snake down toward his belly, a silent lamentation of the battles he continues to endure.

Hamil presses down on his ribs checking for broken bones, flinching with each touch.

"What are you doing there?" The Apparition says.

Hamil lets out a sigh of relief.

"Just making sure nothing is broken."

"If something were broken, there would be more of a howling cry than a slight grunt."

"Are you sure?" Says The Apparition raising.

"Trust me. I'm no stranger to pain."

Hamil lets out a sigh of relief, nothing seems broken up here.

"Now, down there."

Hamil drunkenly scrambles to his feet, he pauses to stare out the window.

"Glowing stars shine brighter than usual tonight." Says Hamil. "Best to go now," Hamil mumbles while dusting his white blouse and black dress pants."

The room turns clearer to him now, the apparition slowly trickles together forming of an elderly man wearing a fall-themed orange and red rose-patterned robe.

"And who are you?" Asks Hamil, squinting to focus on the elderly man.

"My name is Analilos Roma, but everyone calls me Alil."

"Mr. Roma, thank you for your help, but time is in the essence of, um..."

Hamil pauses, forgetting the motto.

"Damn it, it was something catchy too."

Hamil clears his raw throat and tries to rise, at first he fails, dropping and shattering as he sways and collapses directly to the floor. On his second attempt, he manages to stand but drunkenly hobbles as he stumbles over blankets and pillows scattered across the floor.

Desperate to steady himself, he lurches forward, clutching a small wooden table. He slides over trying not to fall over, and stops when he finds himself face to face with a mirror hanging above.

"Holy shit," Hamil laughs.

"This time." He softly taps the jagged bruises on his face across with his fingers. A large, crudely stitched laceration sits above his left eye.

The landscapes of his face look like hills and valleys of cuts and bruises.

"Yes. This time, a grand Picasso of gruesome deformity." Hamil mumbles to himself.

"A real beauty."

He pulls himself closer to the mirror, a droplet of blood slips from a poorly tied keffiyeh wrapping his head meant to stop the gush of blood pouring out some hole in his head.

The droplet streams down his forehead, tracing the arc of his thick black brow. A blink carries the blood down his eye, a bloody curving around his eye slowly vanishing into the thicket of his scraggly black beard.

"I haven't seen myself this butchered since..." Hamil gasps. He silences himself by quickly covering his mouth with his hand.

"Since what?" Says Alil, interrupting Hamil. He holds his tongue then turns to inspect Alil closer.

The red rose pattern robe is really a plain white sheep's wool

thawb, soaked with blood and all the horrors that sprayed from Hamil's guts.

"God Damn." Hamil shouts louder after being hit with a deeper realization of his damages.

He curls his fist. His heart pounds. His face turns red with fury. Hamil's eyes dart back to mirror, then back to Alil, and back to mirror once more.

Alil lifts his hands and spreads his palms with a gesture of innocence.

"I know this looks suspicious, but I took no devilish pleasure here if that's what you're thinking." Alil holds his hands up.

Hamil at Alil.

"No. Please. I know why we're both here, and I apologize with the depth of my soul. The deepest of the deep. This anger you see boiling in my broken face is meant for me."

"Sorry for the mess. I promise to pay the damages. All of it. Just please don't call the police or ambulance."

"Breathe peacefully. in through the nose and out the

mouth." Says Alil in a gentle tone, as though he were trying to pacify a startled infant.

"And don't worry I will not contact any outside authority." Said Alil."

"Not that it matters. You are somewhere between mountains and desert slightly past twilight."

Hamil squints through the window.

"What mountains and what desert is this?"

"We are near the Anti-Lebanon mountains." Says Alil.

Hamil feels a stinging deja vu whirl inside his gut. His legs weaken and he falls to the floor. A goopy acrid bile erupts out from his gut, the sludge creeps into his throat, flushing back out onto the bed, the floor, and splattering Alil again.

Alil finds himself covered in more of Hamil's gooey gut juice. Hamil crawls over to his travelers satchel,

"You know, I can pay you for this horrible mess, Alil. There is no need for police or litigation, etcetera, etcetera"

Alil shakes his head.

“You already said that, and for god's sake. I refuse your help. I prefer you rest, and once healed, you can help me clean this mess. That's the best you can offer now, and the only remuneration I'll accept for the trouble”

Hamil's eyelids heavy as Alil's soft assuring voice calms him.

"Is that a deal?" Asks Alil.

“Deal.” says Hamil, dragging himself back across the bloodied floor, inching closer towards the vomit-covered bed made of blankets, sheets, pillows and clothing.

“Thank You Mr. Roma, or Alil.”

Alil watches carefully as Hamil slips off to sleep. He whispers to himself.

"Something truly dangerous possesses you."

Alil continues dabbing Hamil with a hand towel and a gauze with alcohol.

## Tea of Truth

Morning breaks.

The clatter of utensils and the whistle of a small kettle wake Hamil from deep sleep.

A white cat's tongue, soft and prickly, licks his nose.

He stirs, squirming up into a sitting position.

Hamil reaches to pet it—half way he pauses.

His fingers are smeared with mud, and crusty dried blood.

"Sorry, Beautiful" he says quietly. "I can't help it."

Hamil frowns and then runs his finger over the cat's soft white fur.

Alil turns to Hamil as he wakes up.

"*Bom-baba-bom!* He rises from the dead again and again." Alil cheers while nibbling on a slice of pita bread.

Hamil turns his aching neck with care, intending to offer a smile—but his gaze drifts instead, a

trail of blood that stretches from the door to the edge of his makeshift bed.

"My-Oh-My. Look what the cat dragged in." Says Hamil.

"No. Not even a mountain lion could drag you so far." Says Alil.

"So far? What do you mean so far," Hamil wonders.

Hamil looks out the window, the mountain stands miles away. He scratches his head and finds another deep wound scabbing.

"How?" Hamil pleads.

Tell me, please. Hamil asks, his gut bubbling with fear.

"You don't remember?"

Alil nods to the window and clears his throat.

"You sang,

*On the cliffs of the Mountain:*

*La da dee dum...*

"I can't remember the rest, but can you blame me? I have white fuzzy hairs growing out of my ears.

"You also said something like  
On the cliffs of the Mountain..." like  
a song.

Hamil looks into the distance  
with a grimace of confusion.

"You really don't remember."

"Well, one thing for sure, I  
am not as fragile as the voices of  
terror demand of us.

Alil pulls his sleeves up,  
curls his arm and slaps his thin  
bicep.

"From the rubbles of the  
mountains I dragged you here."

"Look there." Alil points to  
the mountain miles away. "From all  
the way over there. To get way over  
here?"

Hamil laughs.

"You alone?"

"That's right." Says Alil.

"Unless it might be, with the  
might of Ol' Samson whose blood  
runs through these old veins. Surely  
that's how. If you wanna call that  
alone."

"And look outside, no roads,  
no cars, no donkeys. Remind me  
never to cut my hair or beard  
again." Alil, snickers.

"I wish I had a camera  
following me."

"Are you sure you don't have  
anything other than a song?"

"I am just as hazy as you are  
on the event. Maybe it's best we  
wait and talk later, once things are  
clearer for both of us. Hamil scans  
the room. The sight—blood, bile,  
broken objects—draws a quiet  
whimper of guilt.

"I promise. I'll fix this," he  
says, "an oozing disappointment  
marrs his conscience."

"All of it. I swear I will."

"Here we go again. Young  
man, none of this is your fault."

Hamil cuts in, urgent.

"But—"

"...But none of it." Alil  
interrupts.

"You don't even know what  
happened."

"Why keep blaming yourself?"

"Why do I ever blame myself—hah! If you only knew me."

"Wherever there is a catastrophe I am the cause—a cyclone, a quiet demolition surrounding. Yes. always me, and not without reason."

Hamil circles the room with his eyes again. The room is littered with damages from his presence.

"And I'm quite sure you had a hand in saving my life— to which I'm grateful."

Hamil stands, wincing, and limps toward his backpack—slow and weary.

"Where are you hobbling off to?"

"Sit back down for your safety." Says Alil.

Hamil pulls out a small tin metal box. As he opens it, the sun beams and reflects a rainbow onto the wall. Hamil turns to Alil, handing him a large diamond.

"For you, sparkling remuneration. For all the damage and more."

Alil shakes his head.

"Boy I still don't know your name, and I refuse a diamond for my troubles."

"But please give me your name."

"My name is Hamil Elsy."

Alil takes a sip of tea.

"Doctor Hamil Elsy." Says Alil.

"Doctor. Yes."

"How'd you know?" Asks Hamil.

"You carry professional medical equipment in your satchel."

Alil lifts a stitching kit.

"Rare to carry these medical trinkets by a common traveler."

"My hands aren't as sturdy as they were half a century ago."

Hamil glances at the stitch kit, then towards a small round mirror on the wall.



"I've seen worse," says Hamil half smiling.

Alil walks over and stares

"But all should heal, including those fractures. Luckily only fractures," says Alil.

"Unfortunately." Hamil says under his breath.

"Come now, have some tea and pita bread and hummus. I know you'll love it," says Alil, dunking the pita into his mug of tea.

Hamil grumbles as a new pain inches up his leg. He limps over to a crooked little stool and rests his arm on the wobbling, creaking table.

He sniffs the tea then takes a sip.

"What kind of tea you got here Mr. Roma?" Says Hamil.

"It's a rare mystical tea made from an extinct plant called Silphium. Luckily a small amount was stolen from Emperor Nero's garden, preserved in the hands of a few." says Alil.

Hamil pauses to examine the tea.

"All nonchalant. I was expecting black or green, but when in Rome ...Mr. Roma. I guess."

Alil smirks and pours some tea from a small porcelain kettle into Hamil's cup.

Hamil's eyes dilate as he sips.

"Oof, bitter." Hamil cringes.

"It's more like a spicy coffee than a soothing tea.

"Blegh."

Hamil pushes the cup away.

"Only the first sip. The second sip you'll taste something akin to chamomile mint.

Hamil shakes his head, takes a suspicious glance at Alil who sips and smiles with him.

Hamil hasn't trusted anyone recently, alone for so long, losing touch with the world. Alil's a wholesome face, the wrinkles around his eyes seem molded by a lifelong's tender kindness.

"So go ahead, drink again. Let the steam pour into your lungs too." Alil gestures to follow his lead.

Hamil circles the tea around his face like he's tasting wine with his nose.

Hamil sips again and licks his lips.

"Earthy, Sweet, Magnif..."  
Hamil cuts himself before finishing the word.

A shock to his gut strikes, Hamil gets a flash of a young girl, contorted bloodied, and lying on the floor.

Hamil frowns, his eyes fold.

Alil notices.

"Please, have some pita." Alil passes the bread over.

"Thank you Alil."

Hamil grabs a slice of pita, dips it into the tea then nibbles lightly, careful not to irritate the cut on his lips.

Hamil shakes his head.

"Oof, The most potent caffeine rush I've ever felt."

"That's not caffeine."

Alil, sits back, looks into Hamil's eyes.

"Now let's dig as deep as we can. Tell me, what brings you to this side of the world?"

"Alil takes a small bite of the bread."

"I'm looking for..."

Hamil sticks a finger in his mouth and winces in pain .

Alil scratches his beard and watches Hamil's reactions closely. The quiet.

"Looks like I bit my tongue too."

Hamil holds his gut.

I'm... looking for...

"Ah. Oh God. Hamil feels a buzz."

"Ugh!"

"Let me help you spit it out." says Alil.

"You are seeking gold and jewels to add to your marvelous collection? Right?"

"No," says Hamil.

Alil scratches his beard.

"You are a secret medical staff agent, serving the Americans in wars in the Levant?"

"No." Says Hamil.

"Something personal."

Hamil stares at the window and feels his gut churn.

"How personal?" Alil presses.

"Private personal." Says Hamil.

"Interesting." Alil continues to watch the cup rise to his mouth. He nervously taps the table with his fingers.

"Oh, come now. I saved your life and still have your blood and bile sprinkled all over me."

Alil folds his sleeves up, showing Hamil the scratches and bruises sustained while dragging Hamil from the mountains."

"You should consider us blood brothers." Says Alil.

"I don't know." Says Hamil. He feels dagger-like pain strike his gut.

Hamil takes a deep breath.

"To be precise, I'm looking for a cure."

Alil scratches his beard.

"A cure. A cure on the Mountain?" says Alil.

Hamil pauses for a second.

"Maybe," says Hamil.

"Fascinating. Maybe I can help you find it?" Says Alil.

Hamil chuckles.

"Doubtful."

"And why not?"

Hamil scans Alil.

"Is it my age?"

"No. Only I can stomach the journey and to bring someone else could be fatal."

"Hamil, I am old and wise. My nose has smelled all. Ears have heard all. Eyes have seen all too. In a way, I seek a cure. How easy will it be to consult someone holding the entire map of the world in his head?"

Alil turns to the window as though a reflex. His voice drops to a somber tone.

"I too search for something, an answer that might lead to an answer and thenceforth a cure."

"A question, begotten at such an old age."

He turns to Hamil, his eyes drooping.

"It's unfortunate, only now the question was unraveled at my age." Imagine now, finding the answer."

Alil turns back to the mountains.

"No. No. Not a question. A riddle. A great riddle. Once solved will be the answer to everything."

Alil continues to stare at the mountain.

"I carry great dreams and little time, either I fulfill them—or I perish in the attempt. Truth be told, in my case dying is simpler than most things."

Alil turns to Hamil, takes a sip of tea.

"It's unfortunate that it was only at this late stage in life that I was able to add the sum of all existence together and unlock the question—but just the question."

Hamil looks puzzled at Alil who seems to have drifted into a rant. Years he would have ignored the depth of his ramblings, treating it as a symptom of mental illness, but he is listening like a student does his professor.

"The saying is, one must walk the path to find the solution, but the truth is, one must sprint down the path. At old age no matter how fast my scrawny withered legs dash, the chase feels hopeless. Impossible to solve but impossible to ignore."

Alil takes a sip of tea and stares at Misha as she jumps onto the table caressing her bony wet snout against Alil's hand.

"You say it's impossible, then why try." Hamil says.

"Why not enjoy the world for your remaining... Hamil cuts himself off.

"Oh. I mean for retirement's sake."

Alil shakes his head.

"I try for many reasons. For one, I was born with an overabundance of hope. Not just in myself but in others. I realize that it might not be up to me to fulfill the task, but for someone who takes part in my quest."

Alil looks into Hamil's eyes as he stares at Misha.

"I know Misha is part of my quest. It's why she follows me, but also why I follow her. Animals who are attracted to you see their destiny in you too. They are pure instinct. Unlike us they can smell their destiny. We can only sniff through our skulls. Imagine getting past that."

Alil squints to the mountain again.

"A roadblock."

"A mountain not a road. It is a reminder of the height and breadth of what must be overcome. How great the heights, how sharp the path, how deep the fall if you walk the wrong path."

Hamil scratches his beard, takes a sip of the tea.

Alil notices Hamil's eyes widening.

Hamil starts whispering to himself.

"What are you saying?" says Alil.

"Oh sorry, just thinking. When stuck in an obscure thought, I whisper to the voice in my head to shut up. Quietly it keeps my thoughts stored in a place where my madness doesn't offend anyone."

"Why not have that conversation with me," says Alil.

"I guess, I never had obscure conversations with anyone."

"Why not have someone try to speak to you?"

"Does this all make sense to you?" Asks Hamil.

"Usually when I start talking like a mystic, people lose interest and question my sanity, it becomes something crude. Even I question my own sanity. I run as far away from the thought as possible"

"Alil sips tea."

"I feel your words are obscure, but true," says Hamil.

"It's the same for you, isn't it? I think we are at a crossroads of seemingly nothing and everything. One step forward is the answer, one step backwards and we might be lost forever. Thus is the dilemma"

"Two medical doctors digging for a cure on a mountain. Do they plan to use scalpels? It should make more sense to squint through a microscope in a lab—that is our art after all. The only place we should be looking?" Says Hamil.

"We are either stupendously lost, or closer than we think." Alil says Hamil pauses to think.

"Or maybe it could be that we are crazy, " says Hamil.

"Yes, but even if that was the case, helping each other seems like a good idea. Don't you think?"

"Two crazies doesn't make one sane." says Hamil.

"Also, might it be possible that we are looking for the same answer. The same cures?"

Alil turns to Hamil.

Hamil laughs.

"This illness is bound to me like the blood in my veins. Plague most of my life. They say there is no cure or treatment, nothing can control this rabid thing,

Alil's eyes widened with concern.

"Cancer?"

"No. Something much more elusive."

"And what is that?" Says Alil.

Hamil lets out a sigh.

"Maybe it's something someone might be thrown into some dungeon of insanity institution, except this is a little more fatal."

No matter where I go. Painful torment lives in me like an organ. I am lucky to survive with only scars.

"No medicine helps," asks Alil.

"I've tried everything. Many at once. None of them work." Says Hamil.

"I am sorry to hear that." Says Alil.

Hamil grinds his teeth and curls his fist.

Alil grabs Hamil by the hand, "Calm Now" He says softly.

Hamil starts sweating nervously, he feels a rush of blood burst into his head.

"I've been here too long. I need to go."

Hamil jumps up, still slightly dazed.

Alil snatches him by the wrist again and holds him to the table.

"Listen, you are not alone in attempting to connect invisible dots. I have my own mania, you might say, and it seems tied to a world beyond this one, and not. You may not understand, but to me, it is a key of sorts."

"There is a small temple in the city of Hama, in Syria—it speaks to me in dreams," Alil says, his voice low, almost reverent. "It was once a shrine to Jupiter, then a Christian church beneath Byzantine domes, and now, a mosque once held under the command of Abu Ubayda ibn

al-Jarrah, companion to the Prophet Muhammad.

In this layered sanctity, I feel a mystical substance stirring beneath it all—a convergence of centuries. All centuries. Compressed into something as small as a tear, or perhaps a tear compared to the grand breadth of my ambition. I believe your cure is born of the same impossible element."

"A tear. As small as that."

Hamil takes a deep breath attempting to slowly return to his seat and takes another sip of tea, his legs growing more and more restless.

"You are so anxious to run away. Why?" Says Alil

"I just need to follow my heart. Stop overthinking. This I promised myself. Even if it kills me."

Hamil jumps up again, Alil pulls him back down.

"Look at yourself Hamil. Your heart is dragging you to the top of the mountains and hurling you to the bottom. Do you think you'll eventually come down with the

answers like Zarathustra? Or will the Angel Gabriel whisper into your ear like he did to the Prophets.”

Maybe it just feels like I’m wasting time if I linger. Like, the longer I think about it, the more time I lose—thinking and not doing. Whatever it is I’m supposed to do.

Hamil jumps back up again but Alil continues to hold Hamil with a vice grip, stronger than his own, confirming his strength claims.

“It’s perfectly normal,” says Alil.

“But listen to me, I am slightly over 100 years old and stopped counting long before then, so to say slightly might even be an underestimation. Trust me, you will have plenty of time.”

Hamil lets out a sigh then sits back down.

“Let that voice no longer be the sole friend of your thoughts. Express the voice, do not repress. Share him. I too have a friend that speaks outside the province of the world, but mine is much more experienced, much more mature. If you let me speak to you, I can help.”

“Do you have experience as a psychologist?”

“I’m not a psychologist. I am a retired doctor of old age ordained only to unravel the truth.”

“Fine.” Hamil sits back down.



## Nightmares

Tea streams from Alil's hand in a calm, unbroken thread, the soft clink of brass cups echoing faintly over the low thrum in Hamil's skull. The moment bends and blurs.

A sudden jolt shoots up his neck as he turns toward the window. Hamil winces, clutches the pain with a hand pressed tightly to the side of his head. A pain that lives in him that throbs at every hour.

"So, why did you become a doctor?" asks Alil. Was it to heal yourself?"

Hamil winces in pain as he massages his neck.

"A slight pain seems to be impairing your thoughts." Says Alil.

"One moment please. Let me just... uh."

Hamil looks on at Alil with confusion. As he sees Alil scanning his head.

Alil walks up next to Hamil.

"Look at Misha in the window."

Hamil slowly turns his head, careful not to turn too quickly lest he hurt himself.

Misha sits licking its paw by the window.

Hamil turns to the cat wincing.

"Look at Misha."

"Why?" asks Hamil.

"She has something to say."

"Oh really?"

"Trust me." Alil nods.

Hamil turns twitching.

"You know, I do feel guilty dirtying her beautiful white coat. Did you know..."

Alil lunges without warning, arms snapping around Hamil's head and neck in a jarring, narrow grip. His body presses in, crushing against Alil's stomach.

Hamil thrashes beneath him, hands clawing at Alil's arms—but the hold is relentless.

"Pop!"

Startled by the sudden chaos .  
She bolts from the windowsill in a  
blur of fur and claws, vanishing into  
the small room a few feet away.

“Oh fucking hell.” Hamil yells  
out then pushes Alil back.

“What the fuck, Alil.” Hamil  
falls back into his chair.

As Hamil winces, he feels as  
though a great strain was relieved.  
He massages his neck.

“Better now, right.” says Alil.

Hamil twists and turns his  
neck.

The neck pain.

“I’ve had that pain for years  
now.”

“And you’ve done nothing to  
heal yourself.”

Hamil touches the spot on  
his neck where pain once pulsed  
like an untreated toothache. Hamil  
turns his head over to Alil.

“Thanks. I guess,” says Hamil.

“You could have just offered  
to help.” Said Hamil.

“Would you really let me put  
these crooked old hands on you?”

Hamil looks at Alil from head  
to toe.

“Good point.” He said.

“Without further trouble, I  
beg, please continue your story.”

“I guess, at a young age, it's  
all impulse, absence of clarity,  
absence of direction. A shrug of the  
shoulder. Something along those  
lines.”

Hamil feels a shock in his gut,  
he quickly holds onto his stomach.

“It sounds like you're trying  
to convince us of something false.  
Why not simply the truth?” Alil  
nods.

Hamil feels a spasm of nausea  
churn in his gut. He takes a sip of  
the tea and lets out a weary sigh.

“Because.” Hamil rubs his  
eyes.

Hamil lets out another sigh.

“Come now. Because what,”  
asks Alil.

"Because my memories are dangerous."

"Alil takes another sip and reflects in Hamil's words.

"Memories can be painful. Yes I agree," says Alil.

"But not like mine. To remember is to cut a wound open and let the blood drain out."

"Memories carry a truth—and every truth is a key to some hidden treasure. To unlock the truth buried in memory is to step toward answers that precede even the questions themselves. Questions so intricate, so tangled in the roots of being, that no language can unravel them. Words fail, as does music. Only metaphor dares approach—but even that is difficult too. Understanding these dreams is an art I perfected.

"And you know the right questions."

"Yes. Because I've asked more than you have. Just by the matter of age."

Hamil lets out a sigh

"Well then most of my life is steered by nightmares, arguably for the better."

Hamil stares at his tea cup, that seems to be turning a blacker and blacker as he reimagines his history.

"Yes, nightmares compel me every step."

Hamil starts gasping, his chest and heart pound deeper.

Alil, scratches his beard.

"Certainly a dangerous way to begin a journey in life." Says Alil.

Hamil slowly stares into Alil's eyes.

"Do you spook easy Alil?"

"No. Nothing scares me."

"Hamil closes his eyes.

"I fell asleep on a small cliff close to my childhood home overlooking the Manhattan skyline by the Hudson River in New Jersey."

"Do you know where New Jersey is?"

Alil laughs.

"Of course, of course. I am a traveler. I have slipped in and out of every crack and crevice on this planet."

"Well then, you know it is mostly city, soot, and exhaust. The song that comes with the breeze is blaring truck horns and screeching tires followed by the ricochet of cars as they drunkenly smash into each other, killing innocents and guilty alike.

"Difficult to thrive under those conditions—a nightmare." Says Alil.

"I agree—but that's not the nightmare I lament. The true horror was watching a poisoned wasteland blossom into paradise in the blink of an eye.

It was a seaside paradise.

He pauses, as if the words themselves taste foreign.

"Strange thing is, at that age, I had no memory—and certainly no dream—of anything resembling that beach. After a life framed by the industrial dusk of the Hudson, this... this felt like a hallucination. One of the most vivid moments I've ever experienced."

"There I was. I sat on a small dune watching the crashing of waves on the shore. Serene. All the traffic and pollution was gone. This heavenly beach played a song."

"I would have stayed like that forever, lost in a peaceful delusion, until I noticed it: a faint flicker of candlelight in the window of a small, crumbling hut of muddy walls."

Curious, I stepped toward and looked through the window. Inside was a woman struggling, her body bound to the bed with chains clung, her face twisted in agony.

A small girl covered in tears, likely her daughters stood watching helplessly. The sight struck me into paralysis. I couldn't look away, no matter how much I wanted.

"I slammed my fists against the window, desperate to get their attention. But they couldn't hear me—I couldn't hear me. Yet I could hear them, every whisper in that room. The bedridden woman's pain was so vivid it radiated towards me. Her pain pulsed in her body like it was a second beating heart"

Alil notices Hamil leg and arm shaking nervously with the side

of his eye. A quiet, overcomes him. Alil grabs him by the knee, to stop what seems a restlessness in his leg.

“Is everything ok?” Says Alil, waving at Hamil’s eyes.

Hamil shakes his sweaty head.

“Breathe and drink Hamil.” Says Alil.

“Fuck it.” Hamil starts hyperventilating a tear forms in his eye. He latches on to the table and shakes his head violently as though to clear the cobwebs.”

Alil sits closer to Hamil, wraps his hands over Hamil’s shaking hands.

“It’s a dark thing to remember Alil. Those nightmares are clearer to me than anything. My memory is nothing to brag about, I forget everything about it when I look away, but those nightmare moments I can pull out like a movie playing in my brain. To see women and children suffering. Be it so clear and vivid in my memories too. Who could bear to watch for long. But then I felt the ground rumble and shake. From the sea a towering, grotesque hybrid of man and

beast—part equine, part man—burst into the front door snarling and snorting like a ravenous warthog, its eyes glowing red. It had long sharp straight silver hair, and a twitching tail made it seem as though it was a typical caricature of a demon. With its long powerful arms, the creature cut the chains wrapping her to the bed. He leaned in and whispered into her ear. Whatever its hiss was, it quickly paralyzed her.”

“After staring at her from head to toe, it started sniffing her body. It found something alluring on her chest and neck, because it hungrily paused to drool on her chest. It growled then opened its jaw and bit into the jugular, like a vampire sucking blood. I thought it would feed itself. What else do wolves and vampires do with men other than drink and eat them to death, but there was a dark twist. Instead of swallowing, the monster swooshed and gargled her blood in its mouth. While doing so it used its sharp index finger to unbutton the woman’s shirt.”

Hamil took a deep gulp. Alil’s eyes are wide open, shook by the morbid story unfolding before him.

“As she lay there, bare from the neck down, the demon spat the blood onto her chest. With its fingernail it slit a vertical incision from her clavicle to her pelvis. As he slices her chest a swarm of red maggots bursts out. The monster quickly ran its tongue across the woman's gaping wound, savoring the globules oozing out. When it seemed to have completely shed, the creature sewed her back together with a strand of his long silver wiry hair. Once finished, he turned to the young girl, sniffing her with a feral curiosity before limping out like a dog on its heels, surely to whatever abyss it came from.”

Hamil fans his face with a paper plate on the table.

“After a long moment of silence, the girl in the window met my gaze. Her eyes held the stillness of prayer—reverent, inward, and fixed on me. In her expression, there bloomed a sacred kind of gratitude, as though she were offering it to me alone. It felt as if she were praying to me. Of course, I had done nothing—nothing at all. But she looked at me as though I had saved her.”

Shortly after the bizarre moment all blurred to nothing. Morning came, and I lay encircled by EMTs at the bottom of the cliff. My face and arms were covered in shards of broken glass and pebbles, rocks and wood sticking to my skin like Christmas ornaments.”

The EMT crouched by my side and said, “Are you ok kid,” staring into my eyes.

“Yeah, I must've fallen off the cliff.”

The EMTs looked up at the cliff then back down at me.

They both laughed at each other.

“If you fell from up there kid, you'd be dead.”

“I guess I got lucky. I told the EMTs.”

“Lucky,” they snickered at each other.

“Let's take you to the Hospital. Make sure you're all right.”

“ The crowd watched on.”

“I just said no, and limped away, as quickly as I could.”

"Tired, in pain, and embarrassed I jumped into bed with pieces of glass and stone still stuck to my face. But I felt happy, like I saved them."

Hamil briefly smirks, but as far as his cut lip would allow.

"It was the first time you drank from the wine of heroism," said Alil.

"Yes, absolutely and to the point of intoxication—that's how hard it struck me. From that moment on, I craved some heroism. To help. To heal. money and power, riches one aspires to, like all those around me felt shallow by comparison. Nothing rivaled the quiet, resounding pleasure of knowing I saved a life."

"Yes, It feels like I was moved by the same passion. Medicine seemed the right path. It was a path lauded by those around me too. So I became a surgeon.

And did you like becoming this surgeon? Asks Alil.

"I love what I did. But how grueling it is to heal others while being incapable of healing yourself. Agreeing to abandon hope in

yourself while never abandoning hope in others."

"This curse living inside me always seems like an attempt to make me suffer. Surely, a defect and cruelty of my condition. On this occasion, my mind did the right thing hoping to do the wrong. I chose, at least, the only right path. The path of a good successful citizen, right?"

"Now that I think about it, I find myself bloodied in an old shack with an elderly bloke in the Middle East. So was it truly the right choice?"

Hamil laughs and takes a sip of tea.

"Curious life choices."

Alil sits frozen absorbing his story. He raises his finger.

"*In somnis veritas.*" Says Alil, shifting into his native tongue of Latin.

"What does that mean?" Asks Hamil.

"It's an old Latin saying. It means in dreams there is truth."

"I believe nightmares are a gift reminding us that the world is not as dreadful as we think."

"I beg to differ." Says Hamil.

"Think about it, What's worse, being chained to your nightmares, or to heed both ways before crossing the street. And would you ever leave your bed if all your dreams are of you wandering the rich gardens of Elysium? Think how terminal it is to the health of your body."

"You know what else dreams teach us?" Says Alil.

"What?" Says Hamil.

"Limitations. If the boundaries of the world are also the boundaries of your boundless dreams, it means you are not challenging the boundaries of reality. Dreams are the places the mind visits when it can no longer go further in reality. You should be able to fly in your dreams by now."

Hamil takes a sip of tea.

"Tell me Hamil, Do you feel a longing in your heart?"

Alil's hand starts shaking nervously.

"I know you have a longing to travel. That's why your here and not in States. So tell me, where have you traveled thus far?"

"Besides my homeland, I have recently traveled to Egypt, Hallicarnassus, and now Agbatana..." Hamil says, his voice quivering.

Alil interrupts. Intoxicated from what seems like an overdose of the tea. Alil too, has eyes reddened by slight intoxication.

"One second Alil." Hamil stands up calmly from his seat. Alil reaches for Hamil's wrist to stop him from leaving again.

"Don't worry Alil, I'm just grabbing my bag this time."

Alil lets him go slowly.

"What is it?" Asks Hamil.

Alil rubs on his beard.

"You know, I haven't heard that region be referred to as Hallicarnassus and Agbatana since before Christ."

Hamil's cheeks flush with embarrassment.



"Broken head."

"Yes, but one does not simply wake up with a knowledge of ancient history that goes so far beyond this century."

"I wonder, Is there a reason you are lost in time?" says Alil.

"I did read once about it, long ago."

"Likely because I am transitioning into a doctor fighting plagues with magic." Hamil laughs.

"Bravo! A superman of doctors reborn, ready to conquer the new world and slay demons and disease, like Greek heroes centuries ago." Alil laughs.

"But, truly, what is it in Herodutus's Books that captures you."

Hamil pulls pages from Herodotus's history book.

Hamil takes the book and a tear of blood falls on it.

"Here you go."

"Alil's eyes wander to a highlighted word in the book, The

Sacred Sickness." Alil mumbles to himself.

"Alil's eyes widen, the heart in his chest drops." He falls to his knees.

"How did you come across this work in the first place?" Just some research.

"It was taught to me in school, and it entertains me as I voyage.

"Not this one. I've not seen this one."

Alil's face turns white.

"What?" Hamil says confusedly.

Alil looks at the book, scanning the map.

"Cambyses the Second also known as The King of Kings died here in Hama on his way to defend Persia. He ended up stabbing himself with his sword, and then, gangrene devoured him to the bone. He died in Agbatana, or modern day Hama. He was also known to suffer from the sickness."

Alil stares into his own trance.

"Hama" Alil hisses to himself.  
A frozen silence as Alil stares out  
the window.

Alil gasps.

"That may explain your  
obsession with Agbatana."

"How so," asks Hamil."

Alil now, stares into Hamil's  
eyes and takes a heavy gulp.

"I was wrong. So wrong." Alil's  
eyes widen and he blushes.

"Hama."

"Hamil."

"Hama."

"Hamil."

"Hama."

"Hamil."

"You see there it is"

"There what is."

Alil's eyes widen.

"How didn't I see this  
before?"

Alil stares off to the window.

"And so this is why you're  
here, and maybe why I'm here too."

"Tell me Hamil, how long have  
you had these hallucinations?"

"I believe it's twenty years  
now."

Alil gasps.

"Twenty years?" Alil stares  
into Hamil's eyes. his hand.

"Twenty years and you've  
misdiagnosed your visions as  
nightmares when they are really  
manifestations."

"Manifestations?" Says Hamil  
confusedly.

"What do you mean by  
manifestations?"

"Manifestations of the Spirit,  
of Will, of Destiny. Not just yours.  
The will of the world. When it  
comes to these manifestations are a  
means of guidance cloaked in a  
symbolic gown of things beyond the  
physical realm.

Hamil lets out a laugh.

"A divine curse," Alil murmurs  
to himself, his thick white furry  
eyebrows suddenly bristle up like

the quills of a hedgehog bracing for a savage fight.

Alil shoots up from his seat.

"You were right. We need to leave, as soon as possible."

Alil jumps up, rushes to a small room in his small flat knocking the rest of everything else standing in his besieged room. Misha rushes out in fear again, tail puffed up, she hides under Hamil's chair.

From the corners: the sound of rustling. Shards of breaking glass. Alil, half-dancing, half-fleeing, speaks to himself in an unfamiliar tongue.

## Pilgrimage

Hamil recoils as Alil suddenly bolts from his chair, stumbling toward a small room near the entrance. A box topples in his wake—glass and porcelain explode across the floor. He thrashes inside the narrow, closet space, then emerges clutching a crumpled map, weathered and brittle, as if it had barely withstood the long decades of his life.

Misha darts out from behind, her tail puffed with fear. She cowers behind Hamil, wide-eyed, peeking out as Alil rushes to the table. He slams the map down—parchment crackling beneath his hands. The corners resisted with the obstinacy of ages. His long, yellowed fingernail traces the faded roads, tearing the map without remorse.

He begins to whisper—an old strain of Latin spilling from his lips, soft and urgent. Then, slowly, he nods.

"We will trek by foot until we reach the emerald green Orontes River, from there we float to the Old Osmanli city of Homs, then journey past the sharp caverns of the Anti-Lebanon mountains. Once we reach Tripoli, we will swim to Cyprus

from the nearest beach. The emptiest part of the beach."

Alil's eyes remain frozen as his finger stops between the Mediterranean sea and Island dotted with a pen between Cyprus. He sticks his head outside the window, a cool breeze blows his hair back.

"Delicious, The perfect weather—but only for a week."

Hamil continues to sit in confusion, until Alil's words echo back to him as though he'd only just heard it a few seconds ago, rather than minutes.

"Wait a minute. Did you say swim to Cyprus from a beach in Lebanon?"

Hamil laughs.

"As a joke?"

"No joke"

"Alil you seem just as possessed as I did yesterday. Maybe you should have some of that soothing tea from the emperor's garden." Hamil laughs.

"Or is it that you've had too much?"

Alil shakes his head, talking to himself.

"No, no.

Alil's eyes widen, he starts talking to himself out loud.

We have to take the most scenic route too. In all my travels the scenic route is always the best of them."

"This path." Alil's eyes light up as he stares at the map."

"It's also the most dangerous. Even among reptiles, the most colorful, vibrant snakes are the most poisonous."

Hamil stares at Alil, scratching his beard staring at the window.

"You're being serious, aren't you." Hamil's relaxed face turns.

"Is that supposed to persuade me to do this crazy thing?" Says Hamil.

"Crazy thing. You were the one singing on the edge of a cliff."

"Is that what happened over there? Is that what I was doing?" Hamil says, alarmed.

Hamil looks Alil in the eyes. His hand starts trembling, then his leg starts tapping restlessly on the creaking wooden floor.

Alil stares at Hamil, as he now looks to quite likely rush out in a typical fashion, but his leg calms and his hand stops trembling.

Alil lets out a smile. He talks to himself in what seems a mix of Italian Latin and Greek. Perhaps some French too.

"Aha! I knew it. I knew it. Alil, that feeling that yearning to rush out now seems to have a direction. Not physically towards the mountains anymore, you see. The mountain is only a scope of our journey and nothing else. Your soul knows it and is yearning to venture out."

"I'm amazed." Said Hamil. Truly, Amazed."

"Doesn't change the madness of this voyage though. I'm willing to voyage up until Tripoli, but to swim across the Mediterranean is just madness. Don't you think so?" Hamil's hand starts shaking."

"Are you scared of the water?" Says Alil.

"No, I'm not scared of the water. Water isn't scary. Drowning is scary."

"The sea will only suck you in if you disrespect the rule of the water."

"What is the rule of the water?" Asks Hamil

"The rule is to never fear the water." Says Alil.

"Just like ravenous creatures with sharp teeth and long claws, water has its own fangs and feeds on fear. The principle applies to our own nerves too. They can strangle us if we become floundering prey to the predator within."

"What about sharks, storms, thunder, whirlpools. Something as simple as a muscle cramp can drown us, all are dangers we face."

The probability of dying while swimming over the sea is much higher than taking a boat or a plane. I don't want to die trying to swim across the Mediterranean Sea." Says Hamil.

"Ah, but why fear probabilities when we have absolute certainty."

"Absolute certainty? Why absolute certainty?"

"This is a sacred quest. I assure you, no one ever dies on a sacred quest. To die in such a quest is an injustice most irredeemable to the equilibrium of holy justice."

"Hamil starts laughing in his chair."

"The equilibrium of holy justice? What is the equilibrium of justice?"

"I'll explain, but better to demonstrate." Says Alil.

Alil rushes around snatching up small trinkets, a traveling bag, and a large golden dagger on a harness.

Hamil turns his eyes over to a travel pouch.

"What-a-knife." Hamil says, staring at Alil's knife.

"It's a Jambiya. a traditional Arabian dagger. Some passing visitor gave it to me." Said Alil.

"A passing visitor just gave you."

"It's Beautiful."

"I knew its dashing glimmer would serve a purpose. I knew it."

Alil turns to a lunar calendar counting with his fingers.

"Waning,

"Waning,"

"New,"

"Waxing,"

"Waxing,"

Waxing." Alil pauses and turns to Hamil.

"Full! He lifts his thumb. There will be a full moon in four days. And we have four days to get there."

"Now is the time. We have to go now!"

"Go Where?" Says Hamil.

"All bruised and broken and malnourished. We haven't even washed ourselves of the muck that sprayed everything around. Misha is cleaner than us."

"That's why God gave us the Orontes River," Alil replies.

"What about food?" Hamil asks, voice edged with concern.

"That's why God gave us the Orontes River," Alil repeats with a smile.

Hamil looks at Alil's map, unlike any map he'd ever seen from Tripoli to Cyprus." That's over 300 kilometers across the Mediterranean, Alil. Absolute Madness."

Alil smirks.

"And yet, I can see the same yearning for this quest in your eyes as you see in mine."

Hamil hesitates, The journey ahead seems impossible, but something in Alil's confidence presses him to follow.

"Furthermore, on the way to Cyprus, there is a small island called Isla Varen. We will stop and swim the rest of the way the next morning."

Hamil sits back on the chair, his head spins.

"I've read many swimmers swim from Tripoli to Cyprus without stopping. We'll have no problem."

Hamil laughs.

"Right. Unless you're lying to me. If not those are likely athlete swimmers. Look at us, a pair of gaunt malnourished walking skeletons. We can barely function on land, imagine our journey battling wave after wave."

Hamil laughs.

"Straight to the bottom of the sea we fall."

"What the hell are we doing? Now that I think about it, it's time I should just get going."

"Get going where," Alil says.

Hamil opens his mouth to speak but draws a blank.

"You want to go back to the edge of some mountain again? To be dragged off and eaten by mountain lions."

Hamil stares at the bruises and scars on his fingers.

Alil grabs Hamil's hand and rests it under his own.

"The cure to your illness lies over the Mediterranean, to Isla

Varen, and then to the beautiful princess Lisandra.

"Princess Lisandra? Hamil's curiosity causes him to lift himself upright.

"Who is Princess Lisandra?"

"You will never know unless you swim with me." Says Alil.

Though fear gnaws at Hamil, the curiosity of some princess casts a blanket of wonder over his nerves, calming him. Beckoning him to follow Alil across the sea.

Alil watches on as Hamil is frozen in thought.

"So, will you jump with me into the sea to reach your destiny, or will you hope the currents reach you one day at the foot of this mountain."

"More obscure talk."

"Yes, because you have never had these thoughts before. You only heard the words as babble in a repressed pocket in your mind."

Hamil contemplates the dangers that might arise from swimming beside Alil in open water. One uncertainty laps over another,



but the one that clings most stubbornly is Alil's age. He trusts Alil more than he should, almost like family. He has proven himself in so short a time. Surely, Alil would never let him drown if it came to some rescue. But with Alil's age it might be the other way around. Hamil may have to save Alil if he flounders.

Hamil takes a deep breath and turns to Alil.

"Fine. But both of us should be prepared to drown."

"Are you prepared?" says Hamil

Truly, I sense some destiny here. I believe we are bound to each other." Says Alil.

"Bound by each other's madness." Hamil replies.

As Hamil starts rising from his seat. He looks over to Misha.

"What about Misha?" Asks Hamil.

Alil scratches his beard.

"I think Misha will be fine. She is plumper than both of us combined, and I don't feed her."

Alil lifts the cat, kisses it on the head.

"Goodbye forever my sweet companion."

He kisses Misha on the head and scrambles around.

"But should you get really hungry."

"Alil kicks a carpet covering a wooden chamber beneath.

"In the deep dark, a colony of mice flourishes. I'm sure a buffet of mice to last the ages."

Alil grabs a backpack. Continues to fill a bunch of goods, throws it over his shoulder, and rushes out the door.

Hamil sits, steeped in reflection, contemplating the quiet wreckage his illness left in Alil's home.

He rises and faces the mirror. The bruises, the scars—those once-grotesque signatures of his condition—no longer startle him. To most others this makeup of wounds is surely disgusting. The depth of Alil's humanity is endearing.

Alil sticks his head in from the outside window.

“Well, come on, What are you waiting for? Time is of the essence. Isn’t it.” Alil smirks.

“That was it. That is what I meant.”

Hamil hoists the backpack over his shoulder and limps out of the room, leaving a sigh behind in a home he felt slightly at peace. ”

## The University

Hamil arrives at a newly established University. The rush of crowds overwhelms Hamil who spent.

"I've never seen someone so enchanted with the rush of crowds at the University. He stops to escape the traffic of students, flowing back and forth. Barely arriving, mapping the school seems an exhausting task. He finds a bench resting where there is a girl sipping from a cup, smiling at Hamil. Staring him in the eyes, almost like she was saying hello, so kindly, he walked over to her.

"I think it's the determination that captures my attention most. I don't think I can conjure any word other than miraculous."

"What's your name?"

"My name is Hamil. What's your name?"

"I am Miraya."

You are fresh here.

Yes, a freshman.

Hamil turns to her.

"No doubt."

"I am Hamil Elsy."

"What are you studying?"

"Medicine."

Excellent.

"You must be like me, a lover of humanity."

"I wouldn't go that far." Says Hamil.

"What about you?"

What have you come to learn?"

"I am a third-year student from the school of divinity."

"You plan to be a priest."

"I find a dedication to god living a better job than any other."

"Are you religious, Hamil?"

"No."

"What about your family?"

"My father never taught us to be religious, but I often saw him talking to himself in a way that might be considered something beyond meditation.

I can't be sure about whom or what he prayed."

"There are a ton of classes in this university. Divinity here covers all faiths. A prerequisite is to learn one, but better to learn them all. I'll see you around Hamil."

"What is that chanting?"

"Hamil walks towards the University Cathedral."

"It is the Monks of our Abbey."

"I love hearing them from the top bench—my choice to be a divinity student.

"Do you want to come listen with me."

"Sure."

Come with me, Hamil.

As Hamil stands at the ledge of the auditorium.

"I can't believe so few come to listen.

"In this case, none."

"They begin Verde's *Des Irae* now." Miraya blushes.

"Let's go."

It is at once, haunting and peaceful.

"In every man's heart lies a tragedy. Most flee from sorrow, but when fed the right food it becomes less a tormentor and more a teacher. It may even grant you a life more fulfilling than anyone else in the world who knows joy more than pain.

"Unfortunately, I haven't learned Latin yet, but when I do, I'll gleefully sing along with the brothers."

"I understand Latin, I can translate for you."

"That would be beautiful of you. Thank you Miraya."

Miraya pulls out a pen and paper and hands it to Hamil.

Hamil takes the page from an old bible sitting on the church pew and rests the notebook on his leg for both.

"That day is a day of wrath,  
the world will break in the  
ashes.

Witness David and Sybil."

Hamil stared at the quote and  
felt a stir in his chest.

"How a tremor is to come,  
Oh, when will the judge  
come,

All will be overrun."

Hamil's face grows pale  
as the song continues.

"Are you ok Hamil?"

Miraya waves his hand  
over Hamil's face.

"Death and nature will  
be stun...

Cum resurget creatura,  
iudicanti responsura."

Hamil repeats under his  
breath.

Quantus tremor est futurus.

Hamil drops the pen and  
notebook from his hand. The sound

of the song drowns to the sounds of  
dancing.

A muffled chant rises slowly,  
seeping through the church balcony.

Hamil draws a blank stare at  
all below from the high tower he  
climbed with miraya.

"What are you looking  
at?" Miraya whispers in Hamil's ears,  
but his attention is locked onto the  
university plaza.

Miraya waves his hands  
over Hamil's face.

"Hell. can. you. He... Me."

"Hamil. ca. you. hear ...  
m..." Miraya's voice muffles.

Hamil stands from his seat,  
knocking Miraya away. He opens the  
window, the grand cobblestone  
rotunda surrounding the church  
shows shadows of rushing people.  
Calling on Hamil's name.

He starts sweating and  
panting.

Hamil's lips start slapping, and  
the sound of a gathering grows  
louder.

His ability to translate  
becomes a language.

*Princeps di la sanguis shed*

*Princeps di la putris dead*

*Principes de la fractis head*

*Princeps di la mortis est*

"You were talking some  
nonsense, Hamil."

Hamil wakes up in a hospital  
groaning. Miraya sits by him, holding  
his hand.

Blood covers his shirt.

Monsignor Gael sits by his  
bedside.

"Are you awake?"

Hamil rises to beeping  
hospital monitors. sits by his  
bedside.

What happened? He asks, his  
head, swaying without his control.

It looks like you jumped off  
the cathedral balcony and onto the  
grounds.

Jumped off? Hamil's grimaces  
with incredulity.

"That's what everyone is  
saying."

"I didn't jump off."

"All those who watched you  
standing on the ledge, saw you."

"Our divinity student Miraya.  
Those who sat below said they saw  
you jump from the balcony."

"I saw a mob of people. They  
were calling me."

According to Miraya, you were  
staring out on the balcony. You were  
mumbling something odd. Even on  
the ground, you mumbled more  
before jumping off. He said it's  
almost like we're talking to people.  
When you reached the balcony, you  
looked at the bottom. And you  
continued to speak out.

Miraya told me that she was  
translating the song of the monks  
from Latin to English, but  
somewhere along the line, there was  
a hiccup. While translating you lost  
the words, and there seems to have  
been a fracture and a massive cut  
from a shard.

Perhaps, we should contact  
Monsignor Gael about this.

We have plenty of patients who have similar conditions. They take medication and help them. Maybe we should talk to him about it.

"No. Please. "It's a personal decision for me to avoid taking medications."

"We have plenty of students who suffer conditions similar to yours. Anything can trigger odd behavior.

"I'm sorry, I didn't know you suffered from the disorder. You have yet to learn neurology, it's when the neurons start acting erratically and at any moment your body shakes violently out of control. One can do the craziest things if you leave the brain to do everything it ever wants.

Hamil lay quietly moving down the

This has happened before, but never before.

Did I end up in the hospital?

A doctor enters the emergency room. It appears he has no broken bones or fractures. some punctures, we can stitch, but luckily nothing serious.

## The River Sail to Distant Shores

Alil and Hamil continue on foot until the trees thin and the Orontes River comes into view, the afternoon light sparkles over the ripples over the slowly moving river.

Near the side of the river, a group of boys cluster around a sagging net, dragging it onto the shore. The mesh of crabs, their shells glinting, claws snapping back. They shouted and laughed, thrilled by their catch.

"Alil slowly approached them. Hamil paused beside him, gaze fixed on the water. Neither spoke."

"Alil stepped toward the boys, cleared his throat, and greeted them in Arabic.

"We want to buy this boat from you."

"No no. This belongs to my father."

Alil pulls off a ring from his hand.

"I'll pay you for food for years to come."

The boy's eyes light up.

"Is it real?" The eldest boy stepped forward, pushing the others aside. He examined the ring, taking a bite of the diamond-clad gold. His eyes widened with anticipation."

"You will feed your family forever, we just need your little canoe."

The boys turn to look at each other. Suspicious of the old derelict. Accepting a stone.

"Deal. The boys rush off with the ring, dropping the crabs and fish."

"An emerald diamond ring for a rotting canoe seems a terrible trade, " said Hamil.

"We are not paying for the canoe, we are paying for the journey." Says Alil.

"This is a journey. The final journey."

Alil and Hamil push the small canoe and hop in right before rowing the oars down towards the Orontes River.

The small canoe rushes quickly down. Hamil takes a look at



the map, which makes it seem as though this adventure was planned years before meeting.

"Come now, help me drag this into the river."

Hamil takes a deep breath, and helps Alil pull the small metal canoe into the river.

Alil stops whistling a song, then stares.

"Bless be sublime earth.

"Look how small we are compared to this river. To the mountains. To the plains to the deserts. We are only a follicle on the skin of this planet.

You'd think the act of humility would be an easy task with all of the towering mountains and boundless oceans, but for many it takes the entire universe to dwarf the size of our egos."

Alil turns to Hamil and notices him staring blankly into the water.

"Deep in thought or sick and distraught." Asks Alil.

"You know, more than eighty percent of the ocean floor remains unexplored." Says Hamil.

Alil laughs.

"Is that what sickens you?"

"No." says Hamil.

"It actually makes me hopeful. I hope that there is something out there that I can't see."

"Well then, that's the spirit! Alil laughs.

"But think about it, eighty percent of the ocean. Man has been around for centuries, how many centuries will it take for another one percent."

Tears form in his eyes.

"Hope, and yet not." says Hamil.

Alil settles his hands on the side of the boat.

Pounds on the canoe with his hand like a drum.

"Jump in now." Alil sings.

Hamil clears his throat, sings along with Alil's thumping feels his heart synchronizes with the relaxing beat.

"It's working!" says Hamil.

A sudden burst of sand erupts from beneath the canoe, geysering up in a golden plume. The water trembles—then surges. A deep, guttural rumble rolls through the earth. The canoe lurches violently, spinning as the current thickens and hurls them forward.

"Alil—what the hell did we just do?" Hamil shouts, clutching the canoe's edges.

Alil throws his head back and laughs like thunder.

"It's an earthquake!"

"An earthquake?!" Hamil roars. "We need to get the fuck out of this river—now!"

"No, no, no. We'll be fine. No, better than fine. There is nothing around. Nothing to land on our heads, or smash us like pancakes."

Alil sticks his hand in the bubbling water.

And, look, we are getting downstream quicker now. Earthquakes can cause the riverbed to rise or sink which can affect the flow rate. A blessing really."

Hamil starts trembling again.

"Relax Hamil, come on, sing with me."

"Hamil nervously sings along with Alil. The river calms and the earthquake quickly halts."

Hamil's hyperventilating softens.

"I love earthquakes," says Alil."

"Why? Because they make rivers run faster?" Hamil scoffs.

"An Earthquake is a reminder to man that the earth belongs to no one but itself."

Hamil lets out a sigh the further they float away from Mount Hermon.

"Jesus Christ" Hamil lets out a sigh of relief.

As they drift away. Hamil laments leaving. He sees the mountain that attracted him while trekking as long as he did.

“I feel like we might have left the Holy Land too early, Alil.”

“Nonsense. All these lands are carved with swords and drawn with blood. Millions have died from imaginary lines. The true holy lands are those of peace, abundance, and beauty.”

“And where is that?” asks Hamil”

“It is part of our life’s journey to find out, but we can’t see it unless we’re looking for it using our heart’s compass.

## Into the Mediterranean

Alil and Hamil arrive at the beach, few people rest on the sands., small coughlets of dying summer sprinkles the air.

Hamil's and Alil's long hair both whip against the breeze.

The sea roars with a warning, sending sharp spraying of hot sand that sting his face.

"What if we get lost at sea?" he says, but the words were snatched by the wind.

"I have a compass." Says Alil.

"A compass. I didn't see you pack a compass."

Alil taps the temple of his head twice.

"It's up here." He smiled.

"Of course it is." says Hamil.

Without warning, Alil takes a deep breath and rushes towards the sea with a child-like sprint. The wave

struck his thighs and he dove in with no heed of the water's temperature. .

Right at the edge, where the land gave up.

"Alil!" Hamil cries out.

"I can't do it!" Hamil zips up his satchel. Locked it tight.

"Take your own advice. Don't think!"

"Just do it!"

Hamil turns over to the sea. He remembers the reason he left. To find a cure wherever his body takes him.

Alil, watches him waving his arm,

Hamil gives out a loud roar. He feels like a bubble has burst from him. then dives into a large incoming wave.

As he jumps out from the wave, he takes a deep breath, panting from the cold rush of the water. A surge strikes his stomach, the Mediterranean water turns a deeper blue, and the sun seems to glow much brighter than before.

Hamil dunks his head backwards to clear his hair then strokes towards Alil.

Hamil laughs.

Alil remains afloat waiting for Hamil to approach.

Hamil's heart pounds harder the further he swims.

"This is crazy." Says Hamil.

"But Hamil doesn't look back, and finally reaches Alil."

"How does it feel?" Says Alil smiling at Hamil.

"A little cold. But swimmable."

"Not the water. Your spirit."

"You just baptized yourself." Alil spits water from his mouth.

Hamil pauses to think about the question.

"What do you mean by baptized myself?" Said Hamil.

"You stepped into new waters. Your spirit has a new courage. It has set a new room for dreams. Aspirations are now bolder altitudes, while the nightmares

born of primal fears recede, their burden lightened upon your soul. You are born a man with less nightmares, as you have vanquished a fear your mind has never felt."

Hamil smirks then spits out water at Alil.

"What if a shark swims up from the abyss, and tries to take a nibble out of my foot?"

"Then take a nibble of its fin. All is fair in primal hunger."

Hamil spits seawater and rolls his eyes.

Hamil and Alil slowly swim closer and closer to Isla Varen, spending hours at sea, ducking their heads every once to cool their faces from the hot sunlight.

"We're almost there Hamil."

"You've been saying that for hours. I feel my lungs and my muscles are tiring."

"You think you are tired, therefore you are tired."

"You are bobbing on the way to paradise, not standing in the Sahara."

Alil lays on the water.

“If you feel tired just imagine yourself walking on the desert sands. Desert. See how quickly your body turns lighter, and more graceful.”

## Isla Varen

I believe we're close, Alil murmurs, eyes fixed on the drifting shape of Isla Varen. The island loomed like a smudge on the sea's breath. His face, flushed and stinging, bore the silent welts of the burning waters—no metaphor, just the truth of heat pressing into skin.

"Travelling is much easier in the water than one would think."

"You're right." Says Hamil.

"I expected this to be a war with waves, maybe exhaustion to the point of drowning, but it barely seems to be a problem."

"Just lay on your back and float." Says Alil.

As Hamil and Alil reach the shores of Isla Varen,

A ring of fins circle them.

"Well, here it is Alil. Our time is up."

Alil squints at the circling fins.

"Don't be silly, these are dolphins, not sharks."

"Dolphins." Hamil snickers..

"They don't look like dolphins. They look scarred, ravenous, and hungry."

Alil, interrupts,

"They are called Blunt Headed Rissos. They became famous for guiding boats across Cook Strait." Says Alil, he spits water from his mouth. It's rare to see them here, but they are our friends.

"Why do they have all those scars?" Says Hamil.

A dolphin nudges Hamil on the thigh.

"What are they doing?" Says Hamil,

"They are nudging us towards the island, helping us reach the shore. By their estimation we seem like a bunch of graceless cousins drowning." says Alil.

The dolphins continue to nudge Hamil and Alil until the shore becomes visible.

Hamil and Alil rush towards the shore of Isla Varen from the Mediterranean.

"We're almost there." Hamil laughs and spits water.

Alil's stroke quickens as he sees the sandy white beach. Large palm trees scatter about in great numbers.

"There it is, Alil yells. Allahu Akbar!"

"Come, let's hurry to the shore."

Alil quickens his strokes.

Hamil struggles to catch up.

He tumbles out spinning and twirling, laughing triumphantly,

*"Vendi Vidi Vici!"*

Hamil laughs, finally rushing in to embrace Alil.

"I can't fucking believe we made it."

Alil yells out in victory once more.

*"Vendi Vidi Vici, my boy. Vendi Vidi Vici. I told you we'd make it."*

Hamil laughs.

"What does Vendi Vidi Vici mean?" Says Hamil

"It means, 'I came, I saw, and conquered.'" Said Alil.

"Brilliant," said Hamil.

"So, How do you feel now?"

"Tired."

**"Alil:** "But the spirit, my friend... does it soar amidst this newfound terra firma?" Says Alil.

Hamil takes a deep breath.

"Fantastic. Alil. Fantastic. I feel like a chained Andalusian broke free from his master."

Alil laughs.

"Bravo." Says Alil.

"And guess what."

"What?" Says Hamil.

"We get to do it again tomorrow."

Wait a minute, wait a minute, wait now we're playing with that luck you were talking about before," show his reaction. "Hamil's laughter died in his throat, his face blanching. 'Wait a minute, wait a minute,' he stammered, 'Now we're playing with that luck you were talking about before.'"



Alil shakes his head.

"*Fortuna favet fortibus.*" Says Alil.

"What does that mean?" Asks Hamil.

"It means, fortune favors the brave."

"Also, How else will we get off?" Alil laughs.

Hamil lets out a sigh.

"Trust me, you'll feel better in the morning."

"For now let's get a fire going and then some sleep."

Alil jumps up to get firewood, while Hamil follows to help."

Alil walks to a large palm tree with a hole. He sticks his hand in and pulls out a tin box containing rope, oil, and matches.

Hamil looks on curiously as Alil runs off towards a group of palm trees arranged in such a way as though he'd been here often.

"This Island looks uncharted, but you've obviously been to this

island before. Haven't you." says Hamil.

"Many times." Alil smiles.

"Come, let's start a fire. Grab us some coconuts and dry our bones for tomorrow's swim."

Hamil laughs.

"Sure, why not."

As night falls Hamil and Alil rest by a small fire set by the sea. A pile of coconuts and berries rest by their side.

"I love the crackle of flame, " says Alil.

"I agree. Quite soothing." Says Hamil.

"Hamil, there's a story about this island. I must tell you the tale of Isla Varen—if only because this may be the last time these old, wrinkled toes feel its sands running soft beneath them."

Alil clears his throat, "Isla Varen holds a treasure that will save the world.

Hamil's eyes widened. He sits up from his position.

"That's a bold statement Alil."

Hamil pauses to think.

"What is this treasure?" Asks Hamil.

"I believe you will find out in due time, so long as you stick to songs of your visions."

"Hamil gazes at the crackling flame."

"The song of my visions?"  
Hamil whispers to himself.

Every soul is lulled a divine origin. That's why one must listen closely, always. To be conscious is to catch the echo of truth; to drift, even for a moment, is to lose its words forever."

"Ominous words Alil.  
Ominous words." Said Hamil gazing at the moon.

"You got me a little nervous."

"Do I?"

"Do you feel like running away like you did back at the shack?"

Hamil takes a deep breath.  
Conjuring his emotions for most of

his life. The sound of crickets annoying him for most of his life, a reason he preferred living in the cities—but now no longer. The sound is like a peaceful hum adding to the whistle of the wind.

"No. I guess not."

"But you're too tired to try.  
Your spirit's quota must be met."

"Alil the Wise you should be called."

"Alil the old."

"Everyone thinks they are old at some point. Even children think they are old. I know that much."  
Says Hamil.

You have wisdom to be cherished. I never saw it your way before.

"The moon is beautiful, but out here in nowhere's land, the only thing that is still getting me a little bit nervous is how dark it is out here."

"It's perfect," Alil murmured, pointing upward. "Look. A full moon. Is there any gentler light to shepherd mankind than that silver guardian?"

"I don't know," Hamil said, eyes narrowed. "I might still prefer the day."

Alil smiles, as if hearing a child speak of gods. "You know, the sun and moon—perhaps they were our first mother and father."

Hamil turns to Alil.

"What do you mean?"

"Father Sun illuminates the land, preparing our eyes to see—so that we may lift the heavy stone and glimpse what lies beneath. Yet he burns, as he must. His harshness is the price of revelation.

Mother Moon, by contrast, glows with gentleness. She offers a softer light, enough to tread by, enough to sleep and dream. In her sweet fluorescence, we learn to step with care. Her light does not command—it suggests, it warns. For the dark harbors things that do not wish to be seen.

This is the balance—Sun and Moon, fire and silence—each a lesson in how to move through the world. And beneath them both, the Earth, ancient and enduring, whispers the oldest truths. She teaches us through contrast, through rhythm,

through the quiet accord of opposites: how to see, how to rest, and above all, how to govern the shadowed chambers of our own selves."

But now, with artificial light and no heed of our natures, we adapt to the world in a way that makes us forget the great great great grandfathers and mothers.

Hamil's eyelids begin to droop, sleep dragging him gently into its dark tide—until a sound stirs him. Faint at first. Then clearer. Alil weeping.

He turns, blinking the fog from his vision. "Alil?" he says softly. "Are you alright?"

Alil wipes his face with the back of his trembling hand. "Yes. Yes, I am," he says. "But—I lied."

Hamil sits up straighter, alert now. "Lied about what?"

Alil stares out into the blackness, where only the moonlight dances on the water. "I know this is the last time," he murmurs. soon I will die"

Hamil definitely not if we are.  
I'm not planning on dying anytime  
soon, neither is it possible."

Alil lets out a breath between  
sobs, part laugh, part prayer. "Then  
let's not waste the time we've been  
gifted."

Princess Lisandra  
From Isla Varen

Upon reaching the shores of Cyprus after yet another improbable swimming triumph, Alil and Hamil ache to celebrate—to embrace as they did, wild and unashamed, on the sands of Isla Varen. But this time, their arrival is met with stares. Lifesavers and beach goers watch in horror. As Alil and Hamil float in like driftwood.

Police men too start to gather toward the beach. Confused by the men from the sea.

“Are these men shipwrecked?”

“No, there was no speaking.

“Surely they were wrecked and swimming over.

“Or illegal Turkish or Arabian immigrants.”

“Criminals.”

“The policemen place their hands onto them angrily.”

“This is embarrassing,” says Hamil, as he waddles out onto the shore.

Alil picks seaweed off his clothes.

“Nonsense, you'll be embarrassed tomorrow that you were embarrassed today.”

As Hamil and Alil trudge off the beach, a large crew of police men await. Walkie talkies hanging from their coat pockets. They gesture both to stop. At once.”

“They begin to cuff Alil and Hamil on the shore.”

“Both look at each other with confusion.”

“What’s the problem, officer, Alil asks.

“Two odd looking homeless men, floated in from the Mediterranean. Illegal immigrants drifting in from the eastern shores.”

“In from the Mediterranean, possibly from a boat.”

Hamil starts talking in English, but he is aggressively shushed by the two young policemen.

Alil now, clears his throat, and starts speaking Greek. Hamil understands a broken form.

"I am An-Alilos Roma."

"Roma?" One of the policemen sneered, and the other burst into laughter. Their eyes scan the two men with derision—mud-caked clothes, torn fabric, suspicious rust-colored smears, dry blood, only an officer of the law could distinguish from any other stain. A tall balding heavy-set policeman wearing a pair of aviator sunglasses, slowly approaches two policemen.

"An-Alilo Roma" they mock, but as the supervisor prepares to throw them both in his car, he looks at Alil's necklace, a golden crucifix dangles from his neck gets flashbacks to a moment he met the royalty he was taught living not far before him.

The officer approaches Alil's eyes and stares into them like he'd been struck by lightning.

"Unbelievable," the police said. Quickly, quickly uncuff him."

"Sinceras, Sir Roma."

It's him. It's An-Alilos Roma! An officer laughs.

"What a pity." Said one of the policemen.

"What about the other guy," the police officer points at Hamil.

"This is my associate, Doctor Hamil Elsy."

"Come let us all, get together, I'll bring them with me."

"I left for years, scattering political handbooks and works of philosophy like seeds—hoping this country might one day learn not to blame its people for the failures its government cannot solve."

Hamil looks onto Alil with confusion.

"Once the world starts blaming a group of people for society's problems, there is no other solution but to eradicate the problem. Eradicate people. Over the years it seems, now it's immigration. I sense it came from the other side of the ocean."

"What must be done is resolve—to sit with the problem, to contemplate it as true philosophers once did. But how many philosophers are left who still dare to think? Too many have crowned

themselves on false thrones, thinking in places worse—thinking and worse, using their blessed thoughts on themselves.

This is where the cowardice of the philosopher rears its head. Those most cerebral, those rich in knowledge, often retreat into comfort. They hoard insight and hide from consequence. They write nothing, therefore cannot act on this nothing. They know, but do not risk. And in doing so, they betray the very wisdom they claim to serve.”

“Those who sit in silence will think themselves clever for keeping silent, that it will befit them to deny their conscience, and so, they trick themselves into believing it is prudence, all but the truth, that it is all. To let the world transpire as it is meant.”

“We are left with those who are not cowardly, but lazy. Their cowardice lies in thought. This is what happens when leaders are not philosophically inclined.”

“Intellectuals are worthless without some type of conscience.”

“Even out of fear?”

“There are those who are naturally disinclined to do the right thing and there are those who require deceiving themselves to deny one’s duties and conscience. This is evil.”

“Please, leave us here officer.

The police drop them off at the foot of a long bridge, its stone spine stretching toward a distant castle. Still soaked, they drip their way forward, footsteps echoing faintly in the mist. The bridge leads to a winding road that curls upward like a question, guiding them toward a massive 17th-century fortress—Baroque in design, regal and domineering, its silhouette rising like a judgment from the hills. The stone glistens faintly in the fading light, elegant and unwelcoming all at once

Hamil's eyes widen at the massive castle they slowly approach.

"Jesus Christ, Alil. Is this a castle you were talking about?"

“This is l'chateaux du Roma.”

“Marvelous.”

"You were serious about this princess. And I...

I can't believe it." Says Hamil.

As Alil and Hamil step closer to the entrances of the gates. A soft sweet voice echoes as they approach. "Alil! It's you!

I'll be right there!" a voice cries over a balcony window. She rushes down the grand staircase, and swings open the heavy oak door, her curly mesh of golden and brown curls bounces as she sprints down the long cobblestone path leading to the entrance. In haste she slams into the ornate crest of the steel gate, forgetting to unlock the password-protected lock.

"Ouch. Shoot. Wait here. She pauses for a quick breath. Lisandra enters the pin on the security lock, runs back, and lunges at Alil as soon as the gate falls open."

Lisandra knocks the wind out of Alli's lungs as she takes a vice grip of Alil chest.

"Oopa, Lisandra, these bones." he laughs.

"You stupid, stupid, stubborn, stubborn...melodramatic, elder-child."

Tears stream the young woman's eyes. She pecks his face with kisses over and over. Lipstick staining Alil's cheeks.

"How was so careless, so witless to hear that final farewell in your voice? Oh! and when, at last I realized, that I might never see you again. How I suffered in Cora's arms." Lisandra rests her head on Alil's chest."

"I should be furious, but how, and where to find this vindication?" Lisandra sighs.

Alil kisses Lisandra on the head.

"Deepest apologies to my beautiful girl, but I felt it was the end for me. I felt death deep in the marrow. I had to follow my heart, as you once did. Besides, what more can this dried-up centuries old man bring but trouble? Soon my head will be mush, and a burden to all."

Lisandra snuffles as tears drip down her eyes.

"You will never be a burden Alil."



"Why did you come back?"  
Says Lisandra, still some distress  
heard in her voice.

"Did you return for me?" Says  
Lisandra.

"Yes. I returned for you. I  
returned for us. I returned to the  
world." said Alil.

"On that again? I thought you  
quit that venture." Lisandra sighs."

"I tried until I met him." Alil  
pats Hamil's back and gestures to  
him to get closer to Lisandra.

"Allow me to introduce you  
to Doctor Hamil Elsy."

Lisandra scans Hamil from  
head to toe, noticing the healing  
bruises still on his face, ripped-up  
suit, dirty shirt, and dusty wet  
boots.

"Doctor? Lisandra chuckles.  
He looks more like a patient who  
lost his way on the road to the  
hospital."

Hamil blushes with  
embarrassment and dusts off his  
jacket.

"Pleasure is all mine, Doctor  
Elsy." Lisandra bows her head.

"You can just call me Hamil.  
I'd prefer it, really" Hamil responds.

Lisandra steps closer, her  
eyes fixate onto his, he blushes  
captivated by her sparkling  
aquamarine-colored eyes.

"Well then, it's my pleasure  
again, Hamil."

Lisandra hops over stretches  
her arms out to hug him.

Hamil flinches.

"Oh, I'm sorry, for my poor  
manners."

"No, I'm sorry. I just have  
some bruising on the inside."

"Deeper than you can  
imagine." Alil says.

"Lisandra wipes her teary  
eyes with her sleeve, and her black  
mascara stains her shirt.

"I bet I look like the Joker,  
and you are both a pair of drifters  
from the Eastern docs. Surely Cora  
is inside with the 112 on the tip of  
her fingers."

Lisandra and Alil laugh.

"What's 112?" asks Hamil.

"It is the emergency services number in Cyprus."

"The same as 911 in America."

"I see." Says Hamil.

"Feel free to wash or clean up sirs and we can get better acquainted."

As they walk back to the large castle, Alil whispers to her.

"Lisandra, I'd like to talk to you in private."

"Yes. Yes." says Lisandra.

Cora the housemaid stands at the front door.

"It's good to see you again Sir Alil, she says bowing."

"It's great to see you too, Cora dear."

Lisandra "Cora, this is Hamil, please show him around and make him feel at home."

"Hamil watches Lisandra and Alil walk up a large staircase."

"Is there anything I can help you with sir?"

"I'm quite alright thank you."

"Let me take your jacket."

Hamil pulls off his jacket and hands. She dusts off sand, seaweed, it over to Cora checking its pockets before handing it over.

"Excellent sir, follow me."

Alil and Lisandra I need to.

Cora will take you to a patio overlooking another great palace view of an enormous garden.

"It's stunning."

Alil and Lisandra walk off, towards the library, while Cora shows Hamil an elegant flowery patio with a view of the Mediterranean.

## The Incident on Mount Hermon

### The Divine Curses

"Where did you find him, and why is his suit covered in seaweed, or is the better question is why is he wearing a suit in the first place?"

"It all begins with my farewell to life turned into a farewell to death."

"Oh goodness gracious." Says Lisandra remembering Alil's dramatic speeches.

"I was paying my respect to the mountains in the face of death, when a powerful gust of wind dragged me towards a cliff on Mount in Syria. There I saw Hamil, chanting some prayer or poem—and as I inched towards him, he spread his arms, took one step forward, and leaped off the cliff. I didn't see him land, but I rushed quickly to the bottom and found him lying on his stomach. Overcome with shock, I cried out for help with all the might of my old heaving lungs. Surprisingly, my voice ricocheted off of every crack of the mountain, echoes where I heard myself, but no one came. Limping down towards, I went over to check his pockets for a telephone, but it was broken. I sat

by his tattered body as long as possible, hoping someone might be on a hike before leaving him for the wolves. Still no one passed. Until at last, I prayed that in my frail, old, skin and bones, I'd be able to drag him somewhere safe."

Alil starts eyes start to tear.

"And I did. I dragged him miles, Lisandra! Imagine, someone who could barely walk or lift a cup can sprint and lift like an olympic athlete."

Alil's eyes water as he imagines himself carrying flowers of the dead.

"It was all in my head Lisandra."

A tear forms on the side of his eye.

"He healed me, and I healed him. And we are bound to each other. We both feel it."

"I traveled all the way from Mount Hermon down the Orontes. From Tripoli I swam to Isla Varen, then here."

Lisandra takes a deep breath, "Well, it all makes perfect sense now she says sarcastically.

"Lisandra dear, the number of miracles I've seen and felt this past week is unfathomable. Surely, It must be a sign."

"I thought you abandoned it all."

"At first all I saw was a helpless young soul. A tormented soul, but he is much more. A creature with strength beyond both our understanding."

Lisandra shakes her head. Well I'm glad you realized that all you needed to do was stretch to rest your muscles." Said Lisandra.

"It's not so simple, a simple stretch is not enough. I didn't need to stretch, I needed to sacrifice my body. To become something stronger my body needed a good reason to press. Something about him gave me strength. Being around him."

"What can I say, I'm glad he inspired you with this new found will, but did you think that he might be mentally ill, or even slightly dangerous."

Alil gasps, "No No No. "Never try to estimate someone else's

sanity when we can't even measure our own."

"Oh you most certainly can." Lisandra chuckles.

" I can see crazy things quite easily."

Alil smirks.

"Anyway, what makes this man so special, asks Lisandra."

"Hamil suffers from the Sacrum Languorum."

"The Sacred Sickness."

Lisandra looks back at Hamil through the window.

"One of the divine curses?" She gasps.

"Precisely Lissy. Precisely."

"But, maybe his most dangerous affliction is that he suffers a broken heart. Elderly wisdom can unlock the mind, but not the heart. Not even with Nero's tea of truth can someone." Says Alil.

"I need you to talk to him while I clean up and research his affliction. Please, speak to him.

Unpack his heart like only you know how.”

Lisandra glances over the balcony to Hamil, who glares at the ocean.

“Go on. Now.”

Alil rushes up to the library.

“Wait Alil Please don't leave it a mess like you did before you left. It took Cora and I weeks to organize that crumbling city of books.”

Alil rushes off to the library leaving tracks of sand behind.”

“You'll remain sandy, and covered in seaweed?” Said Lisandra in disgust.

“Who knows how much time I have left?” Alil quickly strides towards the library.

“Here we go. How many times have you used that excuse.” Lisandra sighs.

## Princess Lisandra

Lisandra carefully steps onto the patio holding a porcelain kettle and two cups.

She settles the pot onto the table, uncovers the lid, Hamil instantly remembers the scent from Alil's tea.

"Nero's tea." Says Hamil.

"You already had?"

"It was the same tea Alil offered at breakfast in his flat."

"oh, excellent, then the initial *amargesse* is gone."

Before Lisandra attempts to pour some tea into Hamil's cup, he quickly covers the top with his hand.

"No, no thank you. I'm not thirsty."

"Is everything ok? Lisandra asks.

"I'm sorry. Just not too thirsty." Hamil blushes with embarrassment.

"Poor guestly manners . I'm sorry"

"No worries, you are the guest of honor.

Hamil's left leg starts trembling restlessly. Lisandra notices with the side of her eye."

"She quickly interrupts some nervousness. So, how do you like this place?" Asks Lisandra smiling.

"I think it's absolutely beautiful. Reminds me of those fairytale castles in movies. Never thought I'd ever see one. Never thought I'd meet a real princess either. I feel the need to bow. Hamil smiles.

"Oh goodness gracious, has Alil told you I am a princess?"

"He has." Says Hamil.

Lisandra shakes her head and blushes.

"Oh Alil, how embarrassing."

Lisandra pours herself a cup of tea.

Hamil eyes watches her pour herself some of the tea.

"I am definitely not a princess. Quite the opposite."

"I come from a small shack.

This is a huge difference from my first home." Says Lisandra.

"Oh?" You're not from here?"

"As magical and peaceful as it would have been—No. Alil adopted me from the middle of the sea." Lisandra snickers.

Hamil stops to think, he squints into the sky.

"From the middle of the sea." Hamil scratches his beard, bits of sand trickle over the glass table."

"Did you say you were adopted from the middle of the sea?"

"That's exactly what I said." Lisandra snickers again.

She blushes, holding her laughter. The dimples on her face sink deeper into her cheeks, the more she holds her smile.

"Like on an Island in the Middle of the Sea?"

"No, not an Island."

"From the water?"

"Yes." Lisandra snickers again.

"As if you were a mermaid?" Hamil, asks confusedly.

"Yes." She covers her mouth, as her cheeks flush redder."

"I don't get it, but if you say so."

"Do you believe me?"

Hamil snickers, her smile radiates an infection .

Hamil lets a deep laugh out from his belly. As does Lisandra.

"I don't believe you, but please explain"

"Here's how it happened." Says Lisandra,

"Twenty years ago I was born in Gaza, barely nine at the start of that horrible war. I don't know if you recall, over fifty thousand people were killed. My own family was among those first to perish."

Hamil's heart drops.

"That's horrendous, I'm so sorry."

"I remember standing outside of my home waiting for my brother and mother to finish packing for a picnic on the beach."

"I was furious because they were taking too long. I mean, how long does it take to slip on a swimsuit? We'll all just get dirty and wet. And the toilet--that's what the sea is for."

Hamil laughs.

"Gross. I know." Lisandra chuckles.

"No, no it just sounds like a familiar joke."

"Alil used the joke too"  
Lisandra laughs,

Hamil laughs back, "He did."

Lisandra sighs, her smile quickly turns a frown, and she takes a deep gulp.

"In that war, my mother and brother were killed instantly. The explosion destroying my home hurled me into the street like a ragdoll. Then I heard more bombs fall. They dropped like hail. We didn't have any type of access to news or radio. Many of us didn't know what was happening. The

neighborhood erupted in panic. Crowds started rushing out like a frenzied herd, fleeing southward toward Rafa, as they said it would be safe."

"As I rose up from the dirt road, I looked on in horror at all the bruises, cuts and scrapes. I limped back into my home desperate to find my mother and brother. So that we could also follow the herd, but as I dug around, I saw blood, skin, and bone splattered about the walls, it was the sum of my mother's remains, a million pieces. My brother too."

Lisandra pauses, her eyes staring blankly at the tea kettle.

"Exile where? Where to go? It seemed to me either face another explosion or be trampled in the chaos. I kissed my mother and brother then rushed to find a way out. To avoid the crowd, I decided to head toward the beach, as originally planned. Upon arrival, I settled by the shore, letting the waves lap over my scraped feet and ankles. Worn and tender from bruises and cuts, I hesitated to wade into the salty water. Even the smallest abrasions stung sharply, but my heart urged me forward. I



swam further out in agonizing pain as the salt seared my fresh cuts. The pain burned me, but it numbed a deeper pain bubbling within me.

At some point, my muscles failed. Leaving me bobbing like an apple. I believe it was only my fluttering toes keeping me above water. I kept hearing the voice of my brother telling me to flutter on. Hallucination from the salt water kept seeping into my mouth and bloodstream. Surely I was doomed.

Alil told me there is a huge difference between hallucination and manifestation. manifestation, he says, is the mind's way of telling you that you've not met your purpose yet. Maybe he was right, because this manifestation kept me afloat longer than my reptilian reflex would ever dare. Even the body at some point decides it's not worth it, but then the spirit kicks in to override our weakening muscles and the exhaustion."

"And then." Lisandra rubs her hands together and falls back. Her eyes widen, she stands up and makes the sign of a triangle with her arms above her head.

"And then in the distance, a Great White approaches."

She pauses,

"A great white shark now?" Hamil's heart begins pounding as he imagines her splashing around to escape the shark.

"Oh. No sir, it was a great white yacht." Lisandra laughs."

"Oh goodness, gracious." Hamil lets out a sigh of relief.

"It was Alil's yacht. He'd somehow spotted me bobbing in the water. Alil dove in and scooped me up seconds before drowning."

"Jesus Christ, do you both play these cryptic games when telling tales?"

"As much as we can." Lisandra laughs.

Hamil shakes his head.

"Alil says I swam halfway to Cyprus."

"Alil said I had broken the equilibrium between fortune and misfortune. Such that the waves of his boat dragged me to him in an impossible feat."

Since being adopted by Alil he's been my mentor. A father.

Professor. He taught me English,  
Latin, Spanish, Greek, Arabic,  
Italian, medicine, psychology, art,  
philosophy, religion, and his  
favorite mythology. Now I sit by  
you, whom he says is something  
magical.

“Magical?” Hamil snickers,

“Yes.” Says Lisandra.

“Maniacal fits a better  
description.” Says Hamil.

## The Tragedy of Adeline Of Annabelle

"Has Alil mentioned anything about my illness?"

"He has mentioned that you suffer from The Sacred Sickness."

"Have you heard of it?"

"Likely only as much as you know. And from what I understand, it is a hereditary illness, with Greco- Persian origins."

"I sorta have an idea of biology. I'm more interested in Alil's diagnosis."

"Are you sure?" Says Lisandra.

"Yes."

"To Alil, all is mysticism and magic."

"I've been down the path of science in finding a solution for this god forsaken illness. What interests me instead is Alil's vision."

Lisandra shrugs her shoulders.

"Well then, if you wish to know, according to the myth, The Sacred Sickness is a divine curse."

Hamil's heart starts pounding,

"A divine curse?"

"As opposed to a regular curse by a witch?"

"According to the ancients, it's one of the curses sent directly by gods. Punishment for what. I'm not sure. I don't think Alil knows much about it either. He's digging around like a mad man for an answer. You saw him precisely to learn."

"Do you think he's mentally ill, Lisandra?"

"Maybe sometimes, but mostly no." He's brilliant, actually. Much of what he's accomplished in science, I ascribe to the calculus of his mystical neurosis.

Lisandra peeks up at the window and catches Alil rifling through his shelves, tossing books aside like a man digging frantically for buried treasure. She shakes her head.

"See Lisandra nods to Alil, careless throwing books around."

"Still, I am more cautious of his impulsivity. Ten years ago he left without warning. We assumed it was forever because he left a lengthy note behind. His will with secrets in this house and around the world. Hamil grabs the teapot, pours more tea into his own cup.

"Lisandra, I know what this tea does — it strips away our ability to lie, makes you hurl truth out of your soul like a diuretic. I didn't want to drink it because I'm afraid of what you'll see in me... by what I am. No one sees anything but a monster when they look at me. So, pardon the ugliness of my tongue."

"A monster? Trust me, I know what real monsters look like."

Hamil slowly sips the tea from the cup of tea.

"This is sweeter than Alil's tea."

It depends on who is pouring the tea.

Lisandra unbuttons her shirt, revealing a trail of scars wrapping around her body similar to his.

Nearly topless, she shows marks on the clavicle, her chest, and arms. Where small scars that look like scrapes. Right above her breasts is another big scar.

Lisandra lifts her dress to show similar hooks and scars that look like knives that slashed her ribs and thighs.

Hamil takes a big gulp, then sets the cup down.

"Look at these. Right here." She shows her outer thigh. It has a cut that looks like a hook."

Hamil shakes his head, trying to dislodge himself from the trance, the image of her nearly naked form lingering. No hint of shame in her posture, no self-consciousness as she stands before him with the ease of someone unburdened by modesty. To her, this body—this raw expression of strength and beauty—seems as natural as breathing.

"Don't be ashamed of yourself."

"You see. There is nothing that you may have felt or seen that I might have lived in my life."

"There's a little more."

Hamil takes another sip of the tea. At once he feels the same rush trickling into his veins.

"To begin I guess, it all began with my visions. Some of the most violent, sadistic, carnage imaginable. I know you're thinking hallucinations, but these are no hallucinations. I'd bet my entire career as a doctor. All of it beginning in my teenage years. Scenes of unimaginable suffering played before my eyes as if I were trapped in a horrifying movie. Men, women and children are all subject to unspeakable suffering and torment, haunting me relentlessly whenever it chooses. As if this wasn't enough, I could feel the pain of their suffering on my body and in my head. The hair on my arms turns to thorns pricking my skin. Anything from a gust of wind to a raindrop can feel like the lashings of barbed wire, rays of the sun burn my skin like a mist of fire, and the sound of pain plays like a song. Sometimes at the grand finale of this brutality, there is a cacophony of thunder booming that my senses shut down completely. If lucky, I only lay heaving like a tired dog beaten by its sadistic master."

Dark.

"Yes, terrible." Says Lisandra, memories of her own childhood pain manifest as Hamil explains.

"Precisely why I keep my mouth shut. I found it only appropriate to talk to a priest for some reason even though I'm not religious."

Lisandra's eyes swell. She feels a shiver ripple through her body.

"When I say this, people quiver in fear, quiver in disgust. All before me, find me a repulsive monster who should be locked in a room with white walls. Some ill monster never to approach ever again."

"I'm not like others." Says Lisandra

"What's worse is that my illness is inheritable—that I learned after having my daughter.

"I did." Hamil takes another sip.

"You did." Says Lisandra.

"May I ask what happened?" Says Lisandra.

"My daughter Adeline passed away, and my wife Annabelle left me."

"Oh gracious, how terrible."

"Annabelle." He shivers while saying her name.

"I haven't said her name in years."

Hamil stares at the tea cup. The water turns darker as it did when he stared at the tea in Alil's flat.

"I met Annabelle towards the beginning of the end of medical school. We were on the brink of graduation. Our relationship was limited to brief smiles in the hallway, chit-chat. She followed me around one day as I was heading towards the dorms. I didn't realize how slippery the ice was. I fell backward and cracked my skull on the cement university hospital steps.

Depending on the length of my collapse, death by frostbite, or blood loss might have been my doom, but with a strength she said, she scarcely comprehended, Annabelle dragged me from the cold cement steps.

She rode with me in the ambulance. Sat next to me in the ER, just waiting, until I came to my senses

Who knows how long I was in that emergency room.

When I saw her there, I started to cry.

The first thing I did?

I apologized. I was embarrassed.

The guilt kills me all the time.

"She saved my life."

"Almost like Alil, when I woke up, I saw her covered in my blood. Sitting at the foot of the emergency room."

She saved me, and I fell in love with my savior.

You know, there is a special type of love unlike any other. A divine gratitude that many experience." Says Hamil.

Hamil pauses.

A flash of Annabelle holding his hand at the emergency room.

"Is everything okay?" She says,

"Yea, sorry."

After that event, Anabelle and I formed a relationship. Falling in love.

"We had our first daughter Adeline a year after marriage. Her beautiful dark hair made the green of her eyes seem like emerald gems on a porcelain doll. The first two years of her life. She loved laughing, hugs, and kisses. She rarely made a fuss. The perfect child for a couple of young overworked doctors trying to hatch a family."

Hamil smiles, but it slowly turns into a frown.

"It was all well until the fourth year of her life — the beginning of her illness."

Hamil curls his hand into a fist.

"The first time we noticed something strange was when Adeline started gazing at the ceiling, her tiny hands reaching out to grasp something. My heart sank, recognizing instantly that Adeline had inherited my disease, and it

struck me like a dagger. I foresaw all suffering. The echoes of torment, it pained me deeply to witness her take on a path of misery."

"Shamefully, I kept the dark secret to myself. If Annabelle discovered the truth, it would devour her. Hearing sinister voices is a hallmark of violent madness—one humanity deems evil. Evil spreads causes self-harm and certainly harm to others. The burden of this secret was mine to bear alone. To hide the pain between us."

"At the age of five, Adeline spoke out in a language I call *Vox Doloris*. The voice of agony. Something I speak in my violent fits. Unfortunately, those words creeping out of her chest were more haunting than anything I ever spoke. I never told my wife about the voices because I didn't need to. I learned to control them after years of suffering, but I was 16, not a child when first struck."

"One day I noticed, Annabelle's look of concern for my daughter turned more to disgust with horror, when, at last, I confessed the full breadth of my illness. In hopes of realizing that

she loved me, and it wouldn't be so hard with Annabelle. But a look of anxiety changed instead to a look of terror in her eyes. A look of disgust.

"I couldn't bear that look of disgust in Annabelle's eyes when she looked at Adeline. She's suffered me all these years. I thought by telling her, she'd have a change of heart. After all, she fell in love with me. My condition is not as bad as she thinks. I tried to remind her that Adeline was as loveable as I, or as she took me, on our journey throughout life."

But I was wrong.

When I explained the voices, Annabelle developed a horrible anxiety and a sinking depression. When I held her hand, I could feel her soul shiver. Eventually it became that we all suffered from invisible illnesses living deep within us.

As Adeline aged, so did her frailty. She needed help moving around the house, holding herself with any ledge in our small home. She hobbled like a frail old woman at age six. It seems the older she grew, the harder it was for her to walk without her small cane. It

might have been that she loved her cane more than her toy dolls.

At some point, Annabelle snapped. She abandoned her position at the hospital, and ran off with spiritual folk, intoxicating herself with bullshit and leaving for weeks and months, to which I said nothing. I never scolded her. I mean, how could I? I owed her my life."

"At last one day, Annabelle met a pastor who convinced her that Adeline and I were demons, damned to our last breath even in the afterlife. By helping us she was nourishing evil. Annabelle would be doomed if she continued helping us. The solution, she told me, was to move to the holy land. A few days later, she ran off with the minister and left Adeline in my care alone."

Lisandra reaches out for Hamil's hands.

"I always imagined being a father meant seeing your child take a step forward to a better life. You know. The next step."

Until at last it was time for her to turn a social butterfly. She passionately wanted to learn and play with other children but how



dreadful the thought was. I suspected her horrific contortions and manic speech—would haunt the students and teachers. By today's standards, you'd think tolerance and empathy became virtues in humanity, but no. I was right. A world obsessed with horoscopes, demons, ghosts, and goblins. No school accepted her. To some, she was acting out her pain for attention. To others, she was possessed by the devil. The animosity mostly coming from parents of other students. I can assure you, no one can act out the torture of this sickness, and no evil could ever possess a girl with the perfect soul."

And through all of this clear. As she wore this burden like it was an extra layer of skin. Even I who suffer this, fall into fits of despair. Hating with a violent intent.

In my worst state, I was lucky to be referred by a colleague by a young girl named Zara to help raise Adeline. She was a saint. She would say Adeline was a precious gift from Allah. Something she thought sweet to say, but to me a painful reminder that God existed, and that we are not in his good graces. The age-old question that turns any man into an

atheist: If a God exists, how could he allow so much suffering upon a child? I had to bite my tongue as fury would lead me to snap at Zara, but she deserved nothing but praise.

"Were it anyone else, perhaps, I might have blown into an militant Atheist of the most rabid type— how dare they talk about an all loving God in the face of a child who suffers. She will logically come to the conclusion that she is not loved by God—no god would allow this."

Hamil's voice cracks as images of Adeline dragging herself around the house still haunt his memories.

"I tried treating her with medications, both herbal and chemically engineered—nothing helped. The drugs worsened the better parts of her thoughts, and thus, gave more reign to the illness. Eventually, Adeline's sickness worsened. She learned to control the voices like me, but the pain was visible in her eyes and a repression could be heard in her voice."

"As time passed, Adeline found herself mostly in bed, her days filled with incessant cries of pain."

"Then on the worst day of my life, I remember the weather was perfect, the scent of fresh-cut lawns and sweet flowers blooming sprinkled the winds like particles of fresh smelling potpourri. The children were free from school, their laughter echoing through the neighborhood. Adeline sat perched on the windowsill watching them prance and play.

I always kept a close eye on her. She fell so often, and was so brittle, but somehow she escaped my eye. I was cooking for both of us. Then I heard glass shatter and a loud hollow thump and crunch rippled throughout the block. My heart seized, my face turned cherry red, and I rushed outside. Panic surged through my veins as I raced towards the ring of children staring at Adeline's motionless body."

"I dropped to my knees beside her, my hands trembling as they waved over her face. No breath. I yelled to the kids to call 911. As the children ran off, CPR did nothing to revive her."

"The fall broke her neck and it was an instant death."

"I don't know how long I sat by her corpse. I recall staring at her

chest waiting for the slightest breath, hoping for one last breath to say I love you one last time.

Hamil shakes his head, his eyes a tear.

I believe that week, I hadn't said I loved her enough. Maybe it's why she went out looking for something endearing."

Zara and I were mourning Adeline's death, and when we were searching through the room, I noticed a small piece of paper under her pillow.

Hamil, pulls out a small paper from his necklace and hands it to Lisandra.

I take it you can read this:

كلنا نعاني لعنة موجعة

لكن والدي يحمل الشفاء

،سيشفيك

،سيشفيني

وسيصّيح العالم المكسور

Lisandra takes a look at the poem and reads it aloud.

"We all suffer a painful curse,

But my father carries the cure.

He will heal you,

He will heal me,

And fix the broken world.”

Lisandra gazes at the note, numbed by pain from her broken heart. She feels a great ball of grief grow inside her chest, and to her eyes burning into sadness.

Lisandra stares at the note paralyzed by the sadness.

A tear drops onto the note.

“Oh my God I’m so sorry. So so sorry.”

She quickly tries to dry the paper of her tears.

“This is... “I can't think. I’m sorry.”

She hands the note over to Hamil trembling from the sadness.

Hamil, takes the note away.

“Upon finishing the words, I turned to Zara to ask about her illness,” She said, whenever Adeline suffered a brutal episode, she'd choke in speech and sprint to the

restroom, excusing herself for allergies.”

I believe Adeline was clever enough to know Zara didn't suffer seasonal allergies year-round. Adeline knew it was pain coming from Zara's heart—that was her illness. I can't imagine the remorse she felt. My poor girl, guilt and this illness— a double-headed snake.”

Lisandra’s heart swells, as the depth of his pain was different, as the utter injustice of someone so young. Lisandra throws herself back into her chair. She feels her head growing dizzy.

“My will is to complete Adeline's wishes, to cure everyone's pain. Up until then I called our illness a disorder, but I refuse to call it anything other than a curse now. Because Adeline was right. I plan to vanquish this curse, as it was meant. In the ways beyond one could imagine in this task.

"Even with the loss of my brother and mother, I don't think I can imagine losing a child. Losing a child must be one of the worst emotional burdens to ever exist."

O h gracious. I usually only cry once a day. But now twice, my heart,"says Lisandra wiping her tears."

Anabelle and Hamil start talking about clearing their thoughts...

"It's ok." Says Hamil. "It sounds like we both have crippling tragedies."

"How do we begin to fix ourselves?" says Hamil."

"Go back in time." Says Lisandra

"Hamil, It doesn't matter how far back I go, this is destiny. To be assigned to me. But how to undo old age and start a child. I feel like I've aged centuries these past twenty years."

"I believe, If ever there is a desire to return to a jolly childlike state of mind, the first step is to

find a face in the clouds." Lisandra says.

"A face in the clouds. What kind of face?" Says Hamil.

Any type of face." says Lisandra.

Hamil looks up at the skies and smiles, squints, but his smile fades as he notices waves of dark clouds building in the sky.

"There seems to be a storm forming," Hamil says with a slightly nervous tone.

"Should we go in? We don't want to get caught in the rain, right?"

Lisandra squints upward towards the direction Hamil is eyeing. Hamil's heart beats anxiously, hoping she agrees.

"What do you mean? No storm clouds are gathering. How can there be a storm with no clouds?" Lisandra laughs.

Hamil closes his eyes, takes a deep breath, and lets out a sigh of disappointment.

"It happens when the storm comes for me alone."

Hamil stands up, takes his shirt off, and throws it aside, his eyes remaining vigilant on the clouds.

Lisandra watches him with growing concern, her eyes widening.

"Hamil, is everything okay?" her voice trembling nervously.

He says nothing, dropping to his knees and covering his head with his hands. He whispers to himself, the words incoherent and desperate, as if praying.

When the imaginary storm clouds finally settle over his head, he begins to shiver.

"Alil!" Lisandra cries out to Alil at the balcony overlooking the Library anxiously.

"Alil, help!"

Alil rushes out to the balcony of the library and glances out the window Lisandra crouched by Hamil.

Alil rushes, knocking over a tower of books, tumbling over his feet, shuffling over to the window, knocking stacks of books on the way. He skips the steps and lunges

over the rails onto the floor. And sprints towards Hamil's body.

Hamil is curled up, writhing in pain as if being lashed by an invisible whip.

A giant panic overcomes Lisandra, and she tries to call for help. Alil stops her, gripping her wrist. His body seems lifeless, his eyes rolled back into his head.

"Alil, we have to call for help," Lisandra pleads. Alil stops her.

"No," he says firmly, holding her wrist to keep her from calling emergency services.

"What are you doing Alil?"

Distressed and horrified, Lisandra watches as it seems Hamil is tortured by an invisible force. She starts to cry, her tears of helplessness falling onto Hamil's cold skin. Alil continues to hold her hand, keeping her grounded as they watch Hamil struggling in a distressing convulsion.

Lisandra frantically attempts to revive him, but hope fades as Hamil's body becomes cold and motionless.

Oh goodness, he's cold and stiff like a corpse.

Alil observes it without much concern.

"Alil!" Lisandra screams at the top of her lungs.

"He's dead she shouts"

"*Calma* dear Lisandra. Wait Just wait."

Lisandra kneels by Hamil, stroking his frozen cold cheeks.

Hamil's eyes shoot open, he takes a deep breath like he'd been holding it in his lungs for hours.

"Oh god." Lisandra lets out a deep sigh of relief.

"You're alive."

Lisandra combs Hamil's hair with hair fingers. His cold body now radiates warmth.

"Let's get you into a bed," Lisandra says softly, helping him to his feet.

"I'll be fine. I swear," Hamil insists, though his voice is weak, and his legs too weak to lift himself up."

Lisandra and Alil, Carry him to a bedroom.

"My god," Cora looks on.

"As Alil and Lisandra drop onto the bed, Hamil lets out a painful cry.

"No, it's not you."

Lisandra walks in with a bottle of water. When she returns, Hamil is snoring in a seemingly deep sleep.

Alil and Lisandra stare at Hamil, as he sleeps, watching every breath. Anxious to make sure Hamil won't die.

Lisandra's eyes droop.

I'm getting tired, Alil. Do you think he'll be ok.

"Alil. Yes. I do believe so."

Careful to not wake Hamil, she whispers to Alil.

"I think I might go to bed. It's been an emotional roller coaster today.

What awaits my dreams, or will they be nightmares?"

Alil bows.

"Yes, get some rest, Lisandra."

"I'll stay here and watch him  
a little longer."

Alil looks at Hamil, grabs his  
hand and says.

"To nearly die a million times  
is no random misfortune in the  
story of life."

Grace Lost On the Flower  
Garden  
Adeline in the Rose Garden

Hamil wakes to the slow, rhythmic creak of a rocking chair. Alil sits slouched within it, swaying gently. Though his posture suggests rest, his body remains strangely alert—his eyes half-open, as if caught between watching and sleeping, suspended in a state that is neither fully one nor the other.

Hamil watches, waits, then tiptoes across the marble, his footsteps hushed. Moonlight spills through tall windows, catching chandeliers, statues, and the gleam of Corinthian columns flanking a grand staircase.

Beyond the threshold, a silver path winds through cobblestone and shadow.

He moves toward the sliding door, heart pounding louder than his steps, careful not to wake Alil or Lisandra, or even the castle, whose vibrancy in the morning and night, seem a life itself in repose.

Outside, the moonlight glows brighter, guiding him to the patio.

The breeze carries the scent of flowers, drawing him toward the garden. Something stirs in him—a flicker of memory. A rose garden. A fragment of the past.

A gust of wind rustles the plant and a crashing wave could be heard not far from the Mediterranean sea head crashing the island.

“The wind’s so cold—and fall is barely here,” Adeline murmurs with a slight shiver in her tone.

“Want me to take you inside, Adi?”

“No, no... just a jacket—could you pass me my jacket?”

“Which one?” he called back.

“The velvety purple one, please.”

Hamil strides quickly to the coat closet and plunges into its dim, cluttered depths. Inside, a chaos of sleeves and wool engulfs him—a tangled forest of fabric he parts with impatient hands. He pushes through corduroy ridges, slick nylon, and soft fleece, until his fingers sink into the rich velvet of the coat he’s searching for.



"There it is—her jacket, plush and plum-colored, like royalty garments of older times for my princess."

As Hamil reaches for the purple jacket, a heady bouquet rises to meet him—rose, jasmine, in bloom, sharpened by a quick flare of bergamot. Beneath it stirs a dry, spiced heat—clove, ginger, cinnamon. He coughs as the powdery elegance veils his face; tugging the jacket again, the scent billows up, blurring his vision—the closet folds into a mirage, the door lost in deepening shadow.

From the closet it seems, Annabelle steps out walking gracefully as she did at the aisle of their wedding, her body is draped in diamond-laced lingerie—a shimmering web that clings to her curves, barely veiling the fullness of her form, almost woven into the fabric of her skin.

Slowly Annabelle creeps closer to Hamil, almost floating like a ghost

Hamil takes a big step back.

Why are you running away from me Doctor Elsy?" A name she preferred over Hamil.

Annabelle inches closer and lets out a soft moan as she runs her nails over Hamil's chest.

Hamil cautiously snaps away, but not far enough to stir Annabelle from flowing forward.

"Where have you been? Anna?"

She looks up at him, with her sparkling onyx stone black eyes.

"My chest is..."

"I know love." Says Annabelle

"The Scars."

"Yes. I remember."

Hamil closes his eyes. His heart races, her hands covered in a sparkling diamond henna wrapping around as she unbuttons his shirt.

Hamil shutters.

"I love you." Hamil chokes.

"More than you can imagine."

Annabelle responds, her voice turning sensual hiss.

"I love you too." Annabelle's breath brushes against his neck, warm and soft, a whisper that stirs

the air. He feels the faintest press of her lips, a delicate peck on his chest—something so soft, but spreading a great warmth throughout his body.

She kisses and nibbles, a warm tingle wriggles from the kiss down from his chest to his abdomen, and slowly, creeping to the erogenous zone that once pulsed and bonded with Anabelle's silky, lush *intima eius*.

The pain thickens, her nails sink into his flesh like slow-turning knives. Hamil lowers his gaze—Annabell's fingers are deep into his ribs, her nails slowly burrowing in, puncturing deeper. Her eyes darken; something malevolent stirs in them as the pupils swell, her black pupils start spilling over the white of her eyes.

She begins to dig her other nail into his rib, more blood spills out from his torso. Hamil watches in horror as Annabelle still digs deeper. She seems to be clawing for his heart but instead of pushing her away, he stands still, silently embracing the pressure.

This hallucination is the closest he'd been to Annabelle in years.

"Ouch!"

"Ouch!" Adeline shrieks in pain. The sound of Adeline's cry, quickly snaps Hamil out of his erotic trance, and in drunken stupor falls into the closet knocking over the coats and sweaters, hangers, over inside the closet. He snatches the velvet jacket and stumbles back to her, breathless, flushed, and pale.

Stumbling forward, like a newborn with wobbling legs, with the jacket in his hand, Alil

"Are you okay?" he asks, voice catching somewhere between panic and relief.

"I'm ok Dad. I just pricked my finger on this thorn. It's nothing." She smiles while rubbing her finger.

"But is everything ok with you dad?"

"Oh god, Hamil, grabs his chest holding his pounding heart. Sucking the air heavily. His eyes were bloody red, and drooping.

"You are out of shape dad." Said Adeline.

Hamil rushes back into the kitchen to a cabinet filled with a

medical supply box. With antibacterial cream to protect her from infection.

"Dad, It's just a prick, no need for all of the medical gunk."

"Better to be safe then sorry Adi."

As Hamil cleans Adeline's cuts, he glances towards Adeline, while wrapping.

"It smells like you've been spritzing your mother's perfume. On this jacket."

"It's an expensive fragrance my love."

He rubs Adeline's arms for warmth.

"But it's not like she wears it anymore."

"Well when she comes back and asks about her expensive French perfume. What are we going to say?"

Adeline scratches her chin. Annabelle has been gone for over three years. The last he'd seen of her, in her most mentally distressing way.

"I'm sure we'll have enough time to find an excuse," he replies with a gloomy tone in her voice.

Another chilly wind blows, making Hamil shiver too. Adeline sees Hamil stir.

"Maybe it is too cold to be outside." Her lips tremble.

"The chilly wind must be coming from Antarctica." says Adeline.

Adeline raises her arms gesturing to be picked up. Hamil bends down to lift her, she throws her arm around his shoulders to grapple his neck.

"Oopa, You are getting heavy." Hamil says, smiling as she sits comfortably on his forearm.

"Or your muscles are getting smaller." She giggles.

Hamil's stomach grumbles, he feels a pang of hunger tickle his stomach.

"I'm Hungry Adi. Are you hungry, my love?"

"Super Hungry." Says Adeline.

"What do you want to eat?"

"*Zuppa De Pesche*." Adeline says in an Italian accent.

"You wanna Italiano?" Hamil says with a similar tone.

"And seafood all of a sudden?"

Adeline laughs,

"Na, I'm kidding dad." I know it's your favorite, but I think chicken fingers a la frittata would be magnifique."

"Where should we order,"

"Shicky Mack's Pizza Shack?"

"Sounds delicious."

Adelin presses her hand against her chest in dramatic fashion.

"Those tater tots are to die for."

"For sure." Said Hamil. As he lifts her, he feels a whizz pass by his ears.

He turns again, and another jolt abruptly stops him. He hears a loud cawing of a bird in the

distance. Hamil snaps toward the sound.

"Dad?" Adeline stares at her father's frozen face then brushes her fingers across Hamil's rigid face. His arms remain locked in place, like a statue, while she dangles awkwardly from a frozen embrace. She lightly taps his father's cheeks which feel like stone.

Hamil's eyes dilate, the world before him blurs into a mirage. Against the horizon, he sees three large vultures, with great powerful wings with a wing span flapping and a storm of powerful smog. chasing an old man, and a young boy towards him."

"Dad!" Adeline cries out into her father's ears but, all is mute before the sound of this Sahara of the images, the sound of a young boy crying out in fear, "*Tashghil baba*" The echo of a child blares into Hamil's ears like a horn. Hamil remains motionless like a statue, a blank stare.

Vultures circle the who continues elderly man, who limps, blistered horizon, their wings carving circles in the heat-sick sky. Below, a boy drags an old man

through the ash—his pace quickening as the birds descend. The elder stumbles, collapsing onto a bed of jagged black rubble. He can move no further, by exhaust, breathless and spent beyond reason, the old man waves the boy off with a trembling hands

The vultures circle the tired old man.

He cries out to the boy—“Ejal!”

One sweeps low, with sharp talons outstretched. Reaching the elder, one latches on to the old man's torso ripping it in half. The lower half of his body, from his belly to feet is taken for feast by a second vulture.

"Baba!" the child screams—his voice raw, frayed—as he watches the torn elder pecked viciously by the hungry vultures.

The third bird continues to circle, looking for any remains to feast on, but sees nothing but the child hiding behind Hamil's legs.

Hamil stands motionless, his heart hammering in his chest.

It seems the boy sees him, He stumbles, desperate to escape, where he runs behind Hamil's legs. Hamil's limbs, frozen in terror, finally loosen, but his body loosens.

Adeline slips from his grasp and tumbles into the grass.

Hamil feels himself growing. His countenance, his power now, scaring the bird.

The child clings tighter to Hamil's leg, his breath shallow. The bird advances, wings twitching, hunger gleaming in its eyes. Hamil appears, and the bird jumps back and tries to grab the boy, but he grabs the bird by the neck and slams it against the ground over, and over until its spine snaps and feathers whirl around them like confetti. The two other birds, see Hamil, grow like a giant, they fly away, fearfully.

The boy remains, clutching Hamil's leg, trembling. The other vultures scatter, leaving only bones and silence. The child kisses Hamil's leg, then turns to the ravaged body of the elder there, a quiet surrender to grief.

The only second time where Hamil seems able enough to save a life. He turns to the mangled bird,

plants his foot upon its skull, and cracks its skull under his foot. The dream begins to dissolve.

Darkness folds over him like a cloak, and he collapses into the rose garden below. Thorns catch in his hair, claw at his face.

Adeline sees her father wrapped and tangled helplessly in the tangle of foliage and and crawls to him, whispering his name. No answer. She tries to pull him free, but the thorns bite deep—her fingers come away bloodied. Defeated, she tears off her jacket and drapes it over his body, which feels ice-cold beneath her touch. Then, without a word, she curls against his chest, pressing her small, fragile frame to his in a quiet, desperate offering of warmth.

Hamil stirs. A night mist rolls in, his senses blinking back from the mirage. The sunset he last saw has fled, replaced by twilight.

He gasps. “Adeline.”

Hamil jerks upward, his head and face are caught in a tangle of bush torn by thorns of sharp foliage tangle of the sharp bushes into his face. He winces as scratching pain keeps him careful to move, but then

he feels Adeline resting on his chest. The velvet jacket was covering Hamil like a small blanket, Adeline curled atop.

Hamil’s reluctance turns to desperation, he rips his head out of the bush garden. Adeline lay on her face pale and cold, her nose and cheeks cherry red from the cold. Her hands nicked everywhere from her failing attempts to her father's face.

Adeline stirs a cooing sound, soft coughing and He pulls her into his arms, heedless of the skin tearing from his face.

At the hospital, thorns still embedded in his cheeks, the emergency room goes quiet as Hamil enters, bloodied and breathless.

As he rushes through the emergency room of the hospital heart beating. Dr. Shah, a colleague of his standing by desk, sees Hamil rush in. They quickly take her to receive a CAT scan to check for any fractures, from her dropping.

“Did you pass out again?” Says Doctor Shah as she carefully

“Yes,” he says.

“Blood sugar?” Says Dr. Shah

"I can't say this time. I'm not sure."

"She's stable. Just exhausted," one says.

"Please," Hamil says. "She's delicate."

Doctor Shah pulls him aside.

"I know it's been hard since Annabelle left," Dr. Shah says. "Maybe you need help. For her—and for yourself."

"It's not that easy," Hamil replies.

"When her own mother does not the heart to do it. Shah writes a number on his prescription pad and hands it to him.

"Zara. Call her. She'll help."

In the backseat of the cab, Hamil taps the translator app on his phone, whispering the boy's words into the mic.

"Tashjeel, baba. Tashjeel."

The app translates: *Hurry, Dad. Hurry.*

A tear breaks free and trails down his cheek. He runs his hand through Adeline's tangled hair.

"Shit," he mutters. "What the fuck were we supposed to hurry for?"

## Marvelous Maledictions

### Lucian, Captain, And Catalano

"Alil's library, arranged with care by Lisandra and Cora over long months, erupts into disorder the moment he returns. The shelves are all forward make books are pulled out from look like teeth pulled from a mouth. What once approached the dignity of a royal archive now sways with the fragile balance of poorly stacked skyscrapers, swaying dangerously as the wind creeps in and out of the swaying balcony doors."

"I can't find a thing." Alil says, frustrated.

"This is not the way I left it behind."

"How did you arrange this library?"

"The Dewey Decimal System, Alil. What else might it be?"

"It might take months before I find anything on Hamil's illness without my manner of shelving."

"If this was left as it was, we wouldn't have this problem."

"You mean the crooked towers of books, balancing on each other, collapsing, like skyscrapers made of old cards. Is what you are talking about."

"Will you help me find it, Lisandra."

"Of course Alil, you are just throwing the books around."

"Do you think you can help me find Lisandra?"

"Of course I can, but I think it might be easier to just look online."

"I feel lost in this library."

"We might not even need to dig through the library by searching the internet."

"I'm sure we'll find something in an online book store."

"Great idea Lisandra."

"While you do that, I'll go ahead and keep scanning the library."

Lisandra settles into the chair by the office desk, where a small laptop rests at its center. She waits quietly for the screen to load. Then—a crash. The sound of books



tumbling sends a jolt through her. She cringes, reminded of the hours she and Cora spent, sweating and straining to make the library appear elegant, composed. Another loud boom—an entire shelf collapsing—draws another wince.

At last the screen loads. A wallpaper appears in the background showing a photo of a younger Lisandra standing together on Alil's old yacht. The computer keyboard of that room, the desk still showed signs of her cries dried into the wooden table.

“Oh Alil, I thought you were dead.” she mumbles to herself.

She opens up search engine electronic books.

“Divine Curses.”

Lisandra sees a familiar name.

“Lucian Morcaria, writer, painter, created a compendium of works on disease from beyond this world.

Lisandra cries out.

“Alil. Come over here and look,” says Lisandra.

Alil drops more books on the way.

“What do you have?” Asks Alil.

“She highlights. The name.

“Lucian Morcaria.”

“Look here, this name looks familiar to you?”

Alil squints.

“...Scholar, artist, Lucian Morcaria creates a compendium of the greatest witchcraft and celestial curses “Our old friend Luca wrote a book on divine illnesses.

“Let me take a look.” Says Alil.

“Lisandra opens up a Digital bookstore, reads a book description.

“Lucian!” Lisandra's eyes widened.

“It’s Lucian’s work, Alil.”

“Where can we get the book?” Says Alil, readying himself.

“We can buy it online digitally at the webstore.”

“Lisandra clicks onward.”

“Where is the webstore?” Alil asks.

“You can order it from the webstore. So they can ship it here.”

“I see.” says Alil. .

“Here is a list of Luca’s publications.” Says she quickly arranges by Date.

“Obliterari,” September 2014

"Autophagy of the Spirit,"  
November 2019

“Marvelous Maledictions I,  
October 2023.

“Marvelous Maledictions II.

“Marvelous Maledictions,  
that has to be it, right?”

“Those are pretty much all  
the books he wrote.

“Book One A-K Published  
October, 2023

“Book 2 of 2 is L-Z  
Published, TBD. To be determined.”

Lisandra squints To be  
determined.

“To be determined.” Says  
Lisandra confused.

“Yes, order those, Marvelous  
Maledictions.”

“It doesn't look like we can  
order these books. Only A through  
K. But maybe we can get an epub.”  
Says Lisandra.

Alil looked confused by the idea of  
an 'epub.' 'Can we print it?' he asked, eyes  
wide. Lisandra smiled. 'Yes, we can.'"

“Yes. We Can.” Says Lisandra.

Alil turns to Lisandra and  
wraps his arms around her.

“That's extraordinary.  
Extraordinary.” Alil smiles.

“Though it would be a waste  
of paper. We can just read it on the  
computer.”

Alil combs his beard with his  
fingers.

“Smartphones, Kindle, Nook.  
Doesn't it ring a bell?”

“No. I have neither of these  
things.”

“Have you really been gone  
so long?”

“I gave you a phone call, Alil.”

“I threw it away.”

"You threw it away? Why would you throw it away?" Says Lisandra.

"Why would I need a phone if I'm dead?"

"Sorry. Not only do I have to worry about myself dying, but also my phone."

"I never spoke on the phone."

"That's why I called you a million times, and never heard from you for years."

"I prefer handwritten letters."

"Lisandra precious it is to witness each person's unique spirit dance across a page, leaving behind a trace that says: you are in their thoughts. And this pencil is dancing for you."

"Where did you expect these letters to be sent, without knowing where you are?"

"Anyway, how quickly can you get this computer book, Lisandra."

"With one click." Lisandra slowly drags the pointer on the computer.

"Incredible Lisandra."

Lisandra clicks on "Buy Digital Version."

"Again, Only A-K are available "Odd." why would it be divided in two.

"Damn it. Where is it?" Lisandra says.

"It reads here, L through S. But it's grayed out.

"What does gray out mean?" Asks Alil.

It means there is no option. Why would there not be an option?

Lisandra pauses to think.

"I don't know."

"What now asks, Alil?"

"I don't think he ever published the digital versions for curses L-Z."

"There are no paperback or hardcover copies either."

"Might it be banned" asks Alil.

Lisandra, pauses to think.

"I doubt it," says Lisandra. Maybe we can contact Lucian or his publisher."

Lisandra quickly glosses through the publisher information.

"Looks like Lucian is his own publisher. Maybe we can contact Lucian over the phone."

"Where does Lucian live?" Alil asks.

Lisandra clicks on her computer browser and googles Publishers of Lucian Morcaria.

It says, "*La Sangre Belle* Publications."

"Let me look him up." Says Lisandra.

"He has a studio in New York."

"No telephone number. No email."

"I guess he doesn't really want people contacting him."

"Sounds like someone I know. Said Lisandra raising her eyebrow.

Lisandra looks outside the window, checking on Hamil, as he rests at the sea drive.

Alil catches Lisandra glancing at Hamil.

"It's always important to have someone in tune with the era. Children are important to this." Alil, smiles.

"Lisandra turns to the window, and looks at Hamil,

"Right," says Lisandra, her cheeks blushing.

"I do worry Lisandra." Alil whispers to himself.

"Worry about what?" Lisandra asks.

Alil takes a note and writes his name on it. He rushes to a vault in the Library.

"This is it, Alil" says

"I've forgotten the pin, can you open the safe box Lisandra.

"Sure."

Lisandra inputs the password.

"Perfect."

Alil pulls out a golden box covered in red rubies.

"I've never seen you take that box out. What's the special occasion."

"Give this to Hamil when the time is right?"

Lisandra laughs,

"What do you mean when the time is right?"

When the time is right for what."

"You said it. Not me." Alil laughs.

Lisandra rolls her eyes

"Anyway."

"We should contact him."

"Where does he live?"

"He lives in New York."

"You'll likely need to get to the city." Says Alil as a matter of journey.

"Something jumps at me and says, " You must go to New York, and yet, I feel slightly scared."

"What does your heart say Lisandra?"

"I say we are all due a vacation."

"I think you're right."

"You both need to go to New York. Find Lucian and ask him what he knows about the Sacred Sickness, but try not to say much. Learn as much as you can and share less than need be."

"You won't be joining us?" Lisandra pouts.

"I can't." Said Alil.

"Why not?" Asks Lisandra

Alil pulls out his passport.

Shows it to Lisandra and points to the date"

"Expired."

Says Alil..

Lisandra shakes her head, "Oh goodness, Alil"

"Why not swim." Lisandra smirks.

"I don't doubt my abilities to swim. "I doubt my ability to dodge a bullet."

Alil snickers.

"In America, you'll be shot in the head without proper travel documentation just to get rid of an overstock of bullets. And Illegal immigration. Illegal immigration is a simple pretext. Just a name they give to something far older: the need to control who gets to be seen as human."

"But both of you, after seeing Luca, I need you both to visit Padre Catalano."

"Don Catalano?"

"Who is Don Catalano?"

"He's an old friend. I need you to bring him this."

Alil grabs a note, writes a note in Latin, places it in the envelope, and gives i

I promised him."

"You need to reach the baptistry in New Jersey as soon as

possible. Then, at nightfall, head to the docks along the Hudson—Liberty Landing Marina, Jersey City. There you'll find an old boat captain, Gernot Meinhardt. He lives aboard his vessel. He'll be waiting. He'll take you and Hamil to a part of the baptistry few are allowed to see."

## New York City Lights Divine Separation

Hamil's eyes rest as the plane floats toward LaGuardia Airport, the glittering city sparkling into view. Passengers stare in awe, some for the first time ever seeing so much illumination. It was also the first time for Lisandra's ride to New York. But Lisandra barely notices the skyline — her attention is glued to Hamil's face. She follows the bridge of his nose, stubborn bump there, be it a gift of birth or life's rough touch, it seems to her an art. The scars that cross his face aren't flaws to her; they're deliberate, beautiful strokes of a sculptor's chisel. He looks almost unreal, she thinks and feels a masterpiece.

The longer she stares. the more she feels drawn to touch his face with her hands. She lifts her hand over Hamil's face . Her fingers inching closer to his lips.

"If Michaelangelo had seen you." She mumbles.

Hamil's eyes shoot open hearing her better than she thought.

"What did you say?" Says Hamil.

Lisandra snaps her hand away and turns her gaze to the plane window, her heart racing wildly. It was foolish, but she couldn't shake the feeling she'd almost been caught staring at Hamil like a schoolgirl fawning over her crush.

She clears her throat.

"I thought you were asleep," she said nervously.

"No, Just resting my eyes." Says Hamil.

"I was just saying, I like the view of the city."

Hamil leans over the window.

"Yes beautiful."

"You know what?"

"What?" Says Hamil.

"But even with the spectacle, the flash, from any city, I don't understand how people can live there. How does one find that often crucial solitude for calm, and peace for thought?"

“According to Alil, and I concur , inspirational light comes from blinking stars. Meditating with the right flicker feeds thought. The wrong one sickens—especially those of the city.”

Hamil shakes his head and remembers his own life in New York.

“You're right, but I don't think city folk are interested in quiet or meditation. I believe they seek a distraction. A deep numbing distraction.”

Just then, from the cockpit.

"Ladies and Gentlemen  
Sen-Flight Airlines welcomes you to  
Laguardia Airport, the time is 9:45  
PM. For your safety and the safety  
of those around you, please remain  
seated with your seat belt fastened  
and keep the aisles clear until we  
are parked at the gate. Thanks for  
flying with SEN Airlines."



Lisandra, exhausted from jet lag, drags her suitcase onto the closest bed to the entry of their Manhattan hotel room Alil booked for them.

Hamil limps to his room, looking for a place to park his bags. He returns to check on Lisandra and finds her snoring in bed with her long curly hair dangling off of the bed.

Watching her sleep reminds him of Annabelle after a strenuous day of carrying their daughter around the house. Hamil gently raises her arm onto the bed and curls her hair over her ear.

"Caught in the dangerous waves of another sea. How far will you follow me on this voyage?" He whispers to her ear silently.

He stood across the room, half-undressed, coat sliding off his shoulders but he heard a tapping on the window. A hissing whispering—threaded in from the window. Hamil looks out.

He moves down the hotel corridor, passing the bellman who sits slouched in the groggy hush of the city's sleepless skeleton. The air outside strikes him like a splash of

cold gin—misty, metallic, saturated with the rot of asphalt, smoke, and something darker. In New York, even the air smells scorched—like coal, like burning overcooked meat.

He lifts his hand. The rain is cold against his skin, light but steady. It runs along his fingers. He hasn't felt this kind of cold in a long time. Not since he left America. Not since the hospital.

A flicker in the corner of his mind: memory or omen—he couldn't tell. The city around him didn't care. Its breath came up from the gutters. The scent below the ground was worse than he remembered. It's as though the city has been rotting from the moment he left.

Just as he steps on the platform, a large rodent he mistook for a cat, scurries past him with another in its mouth.

Hamil cringes with disgust.

"Cannibalism."

As Hamil drops down into the subway, he starts to remember the warmth that kept the homeless warm in the winter. Usually it's warmer in the subway, but the poor

maintenance gives it an abandoned look. Cold in its own way.

"Cold is not just a touch, it is also visible.

"The subway station, with its peeling paint and flickering lights, felt less like a transit hub and more like a forgotten tomb. The air hung heavy and still, carrying the faint, metallic scent of decay. Each echoing footstep seemed to underscore the profound, oppressive solitude. Even slums of the third world don't feel so lonely." Hamil says to himself.

More homeless bodies sway like drunken ghosts. The eyes of the sickly stray, young and old, bulge with an inflammation and fresh brooding infection. The sound of the train's locomotion barely defeats the loud as the hocks and accompanied by a gurgling phlegm of the sickly shivering en masse.

As the subway train chugs into place jumping onto the A train towards the port authority, he stands alone on sticky train ground.

"Only two stops on port authority. To take the bus, another twenty minutes."

Stepping off the train, a familiar scent floats in from the hudson.

Sitting there with his legs dangling off the top, he imagines the beast of his nightmare twenty years ago, but nothing comes to mind. Instead, he hears an ambulance passing by and a memory of Adeline possesses him.

"Let's go to our favorite spot by the Hudson"

"Hamil takes hold of Anabelle's cold trembling hands.

"You once told me you loved the river." Says Hamil.

"I only love it because you love it."

"Yes, the splashing against the docks. What you hear is not what I hear."

"Were I to focus on the stream without you, it is bound to plummet to the depths."

"I see rising from the bottom, the bodies of the dead who have been taken. The gurgling sound of drowning and suffocation."

"Of people? Said Lisandra

"Of people. Yes."

"I see an invisible creature reaching out to me. Of course, I know they don't exist, but like a horror film, it doesn't end and hasn't done so for years."

"That's why you keep staring back blankly. All this time, a daydream is a nightmare." Said Annabelle.

"What about music?"

"Depending on the purity of the songs, it too may move me to feel anguish."

"Those suffering in the hospital, I know their pain. I feel the pain of their blood run through my own. What I am today is years of coarsening from pain. A double tragedy has made me a little better equipped to suffer. My soul has become so coarsened by an hourly tragedy and trauma that I no longer feel the pain that should shatter a person."

"Is this what Adeline sees?"

"I can't be sure, but if she inherited my illness, the likelihood of this psychosis is highly probable."

Hamil takes a deep breath, stands up from the ledge, picks up a

rock, and beams it out into the Hudson River.

## Adeline's Room

### Exorcism

Hamil stumbles over a plush toy on the way back from work leading to his porch. In the corner, Adeline huddles, her body wrapped in rosaries, trembling with terror. Across the room, Annabelle rips pages from the Bible, pasting them onto the walls like decor.

"What is going on?" Hamil cries out shocked as Annabelle prepares the room for a ritual, candles bunched up around a circle. Adeline.

"The minister says we need to cleanse her, Adeline must only be surrounded by the purity of the religious text. Away from all evil. Away from white walls—especially white walls, they are a perfect canvas for the devil's black paint."

Adeline's eyes .

Disbelief and horror churn in Hamil's stomach as he rushes he kicks the candles over to help Adeline, sweeping her into his arms.

"What the hell is wrong with you, Annie?"

Annabelle's gaze remains fixed on sticking biblical verses to the walls.

"The minister insists it's crucial for the divine separation," she explains.

"To cleanse Adeline of evil. She's not completely possessed by the devil."

"For you, well...For you, it's too late."

"You'll see after separation, she'll be reborn. A child, with the perfect healthy spirit."

Hamil shakes his head.

"I can't believe this. Don't you see what's going on?"

Annabelle silently continues, sticking pages of verses onto the wall.

"We're leaving."

"Come on Adi, let's get some ice cream."

Hamil jumps over the mess of candles.

As he shuffles past Annabelle, she brushes his leg with her hand.

"You can't run from the evil in you."

She looks up at Hamil.

"Once Adeline has been cleansed, she'll be reborn as an angel on earth."

Hamil shakes Annabelle's hand off his ankle and rushes out of the door carrying Adeline.



## The Hospital Room

### Neurolab

Adeline sits curled up next to her father at NYU Research Hospital. Poorly glued electroencephalogram wires dangle from her head. In the adjacent room, a patient shrieks twisted gibberish echoing throughout the halls. Annabelle looks horrified as she stands by the hospital door.

"Gahah! yaha! fuckarn! dough! shitmak! Grawaaaaara!"

"What the hell was that?" said Annabelle angrily. Hamil shakes his head in disbelief at the noise coming from the room."

"I don't know," said Hamil

Annabelle turns red with fury, "completely unacceptable."

"Mom, Dad, can we go back home?" Adeline softly begs her voice quivering with fear."

"It depends on Doctor Richter sweetheart." Says Hamil.

Hamil, tightens his embrace as she rests her head between his arm and chest.

Loud stomps near.

Adeline's Neurologist, Mark Doctor Richter steps into the room holding a stack of documents.

"Hey guys, how's it going today?"

"Bad. Really, Really, Bad. says Annabelle huffing and puffing. Our daughter is moving to another room where she doesn't have to listen to the profane ramblings of a madman. We left her alone here for two nights, and I pray, I fucking pray, she hasn't had to listen to that twisted babble for the past two nights."

Annabelle

"Hah! God forbid, if she did."

"Oh God Forbid."

"This is the best observation room in the building. She won't do any bett..."

Annabelle curls her fist and her body stiffens.

Hamil shakes his head, warning Dr. Richter not to continue the argument.

"...err, but I'll take care of it."

Annabelle scratches her neck nervously, her foot tapping the floor to the tune of her thumping aggravation.

"Well go ahead Doctor Richter. What's going on."

"Oh yea sorry, Umm. Well, the MRI shows no abnormalities." Annabelle interrupts.... Ok, great, moving on, what about her EEG?"

"We're not seeing any abnormalities in her EEG either. Not an uncommon thing. She did have an episode on the first day, but no specific part of her brain. Seems like she was just a bit scared or confused.

"Gee, I wonder why," said Annabelle, with a thick sarcastic tone. Her fist curled up.

Doctor Richter taps his pen on the folder. If I were to throw something out there I'd say "Juvenile Myoclonic Epilepsy."

Annabelle's heart drops.

"We can start her on a low dose of medications. Work our way up."

Annabelle shakes her head.

"So what then? "

"What should she take?" Annabelle pulls out her prescription pad, and starts writing."

"Well, we want to try and keep a level of emotional harmony in her brain, if this is some type of temporal lobe issue, the best thing is likely benzodiazepines. If you see any abnormal episodes, you could give her a spray of Valtoco. Those should stop her."

Annabelle writes down in her notebook.

"Valtoco. One Spray PRN."

"Is there nothing in her metabolic data or blood results that I can juggle with? This can't be some allergy or gut health, deficiency of some sort, can it?"

"Her iron levels are a bit low, but nothing too alarming. Now, I do know that Hamil has a rare type of anemia called Thalassemia—it's hereditary, more common in people from the Middle East. That might be playing a role here. In the meantime, feel free to boost her iron intake. Lamb liver's a great option, and supplements can help too. We'll keep an eye on it!"



"What about surgery?"

"No."

It seems generalized.

"We'd have to take her whole brain out."

Doctor Richter gives a quick smile.

Annabelle closes her eyes, her face in a state of complete fury.

"Nothing that we can do for her now, especially since we can't pinpoint..."

"Fuck, Fuck, Fuck, Fuck, Fuck Fuck." The voice in the next room echoes into Adeline's Room again catching the attention of all. It sounded slightly more robotic as though his voice was coming from a recording.

"Alright, Dr. Richter, we're done here," Annabelle says, her voice tight with anger. "I want my daughter out of this place. Now!"

"You want to stop the observation. She only has one more day, then she can go," said doctor Richter.

"I don't fucking care! She's a little girl! It's scary enough being here alone, but to be cradled next to that fucking menace in the next room. No. Nuh Uh. no. No thank you."

"Sorry, Annabelle, One second." Said the Doctor.

Doctor Richter heads out the door, towards a nursing station. She follows him by sticking her ear out. Listening closely to the conversation between Dr. Richter with the nurses.

Doctor Richter walks back into the room. Before entering he asks, "Hey Tina, What do you want to eat for lunch."

"Olive Garden!" Says a nurse, shuffling through some paperwork."

"The TNA runs her fingers down Dr. Richter's back."

Hamil sits still thinking up a means to treat Adeline at home without running back and forth to this medical facility.

Annabelle turns to Hamil angrily.

"What are you looking at?"  
Are you enjoying the clouds sailing

across the vast beautiful blue while our daughter is tangled in the red flames of hell?" A thick vein pulsates on Annabelle's forehead.

"I'm thinking. Ani.

"Just calm down, Read the room." Hamil points to Adeline with his eyes. Adeline is frozen stiff on the nook of Hamil's arm and chest.

Doctor Richter walks back in.

Can I ask you something  
Doctor Richter.

"What do you see there?"

"I see a beautiful young girl."  
Dr. Richter smiles.

"What you see is a child dead tired from restless nights with Charlie over there."

Charlie starts moaning and grunting. The sound of his voice blasts into the room again.

Annabelle drops her prescription pad.

"Mother Fucker." Annabelle stomps out of the room rushing towards the room right next to Adeline.

Doctor Richter and Hamil follow her.

She stomps into Charlie's room, raises her middle finger at him.

"Fuck you very much you sick monster." She sticks his finger out at Charlie's face. He turns to Annabelle with tired sickly jaundiced droopy eyes. She notices that his voice has been amplified with a small Bluetooth microphone and speaker.

"This is a joke." Annabelle falls into a trance. Her eyes were blank. "All of this is a game to you. Playing with precious lives for a laugh."

She pulls the microphone off of Charlie's bed and breaks it by stomping and kicking the speaker.

Annabelle steps back into Adeline's room, she starts plucking the glue of EEG wires from her head.

Hamil turns to Doctor Richter and apologizes with his lips.

Doctor Richter scratches his head. Slightly nervous of his next words, he says to himself, "Umm,

think, think what is the protocol for this?"

Doctor Richter scans the room.

"Oh that's right."

The doctor snaps his finger again and points at a crucifix on the wall.

"Remember folks, Jesus there loves you so much."

Dr Richter makes only glancing at Adeline and Hamil, but just glancing over at Hamil and Adeline.

"You can sign out with our CNA Tina."

Doctor Richter rushes to the next room.

Luca The Blood Artist  
The Unpublished

Hamil and Lisandra reach the doors of *La Sangre Belle*, a large modern art studio in Lower Manhattan. From the crack in the door, they catch the scent of cigar smoke, sage, and turpentine drifting through the halls. They pause near the entrance. Inside, Luca sits slouched on a vintage chaise, staring silently at a human-sized marble replica of Da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man*..

"I think, I think. I think." Said Luca.

"You think what?" Said Damyan.

I think I hate it. Says Luca.

"Why do you hate it?" Says Damyan.

I hate it because it makes me think too much and feel too little."

Lucian odiously stares at the carved statue.

"All that time wasted." Said Luca.

Damyan rolls his eyes.

"It looks magnificent, stop being so dramatic Luca."

A door knocks.

"Ugh, Get the door Damyan, tell them it's much too early to care about anything. If they fancy one of my paintings, they should wait until tomorrow night's soiree at Boswar and Wirth."

"Boswar and Wirth—what an atrocious name for a gallery," Luca mumbles to himself.

"How the lord accepts praise so early in the morning, must be irritating."

Damyan walks languidly towards the door.

"Hurry. Hurry you slug."

Luca points to the door with a small glass of Louis XIII cognac.

Damyan grunts as he stands, dragging his feet to greet the visitor.

Damyan swings the door open, his monotonous, customer service response voice.

"It's much too early for..."

Damyan gasps. His eyes widened.

"Lisandra!" he shouts, leaving an echo of her name bouncing throughout the halls.

Damyan pauses and turns his head back.

"Luca! Luca! It's Lisandra," he cries out passionately.

Luca whispers to himself.

"Liss, an, drrra"

Luca whispers to himself, "My Aegean princess swims the sea to visit me!"

Luca springs to his feet, hurling his glass of cognac across the room. He rushes to the door, shoving Damyan aside, knocking him into the Vitruvian replica.

Luca drops before Lisandra on his knees and kisses it over and over.

"Hail my goddess. My love. Lisandra. I am blessed, ever blessed by your sight. Again and again, but now in the flesh. Beautiful maple flesh."

Luca slowly turns his head, after, over to Hami examining him slowly from head to toe.

"Oh my, And who is this?—No! What is this..."

"This is, Ha..." Luca interrupts Lisandra.

"Wait a minute. Stop. Do not reveal his name yet. It might ruin the essence of this anonymity."

Luca stares at Hamil—silent, breath caught, eyes glistening. "Yes! What do I see before me?" His voice trembles with awe. "A broken, bloodied paragon—torn and radiant. Dressed in the ruined elegance of Cravat Noir, as if fate itself tailored him for this moment. The perfect gentleman, as man should be rugged and elegant both at once, dressed, standing there—ready to be immortalized by my hand."

Luca licks his lips. Staring longer at his hands.

He may quite possibly be my second Dorian Gray."

Luca gasps, "Or even Better! He could be the face of the Unfinished Caravaggio sitting in my chamber."

Luca gasps again.

"No, wait!---He is the face of my unfinished Carravagio!"

"Damyan, at last right physiognomy."

"Hurry Damyan. Come look!"

Damyan slowly approaches the door, dusting his clothes off from the particles of paint.

"He is the face of the unfinished Caravaggio!"

Damyan rolls his eyes over at Luca's obsessive rant, then shrugs his shoulders. "Yes, I can see it."

"Come in both of you my beautiful treasures of the flesh to my office."

"How do some people walk around without seeing beauty, must be blind or sickly."

"Come follow me, both of you," Luca waves them both to follow him as he dashes to a back office."

As Hamil and Lisandra enter the room, they find Luca unlocking a large bank-sized vault with a dial.

Luca pulls out a painting locked in the vault, it is covered in a

silky red velvety fabric. He faces it towards Hamil and Lisandra.

"Ready?"

Hamil and Lisandra stand poised by the piece.

Luca yanks it like a magician unraveling the mystery,

"This, my darlings, is a faceless outline of what was to be a Narcissus or a Bacchus before Michelango, Caravaggio left this world."

Luca steps toward Hamil, extending his hands with palms up.

"Come, place your hands on mine, and tell me your name."

"My name is Hamil Elsy."

"Hmm. Hamil."

"Is that short for Hamilcar Barca--the Carthaginian hero?"

"I've never heard of the name Hamilcar. For as long as I can remember it has only been Hamil."

"Hamil. Only Hamil."

"I think I've already found the perfect nickname for you then."

"Bravo! Bravo!" Luca claps, "I never met a Hamil or an Elsy, rarer the both and so—*perfetto*."

"Allow me to introduce myself— I am Lucian Morcaria. Many call me Luca The Blood Artist. I am a painter, writer, and contrarian. My purpose in life?--To leave a trail of beautiful bloody truth before death."

"Much as I would like to believe this is a visit inspired by something intimate, I suspect not."

Luca frowns.

"What brings you both to my studio?"

"Luca, we came because you have a wonderful book called *Marvelous Maledictions*." Says Lisandra.

"Ah yes, my last book ever written."

"Yes, but it seems only half published," said Lisandra.

"Half Published? What do you mean half Published?" says Luca confusedly.

"*Marvelous Maledictions*, the second part, are missing."

Luca scratches his chin.

"How odd. I'll have to look into that. I do recall it was two parts."

My editor and publisher should know.

"Un momento piacere."

Luca turns to his desk laptop. He looks over at a self portrait of himself thinking.

"Wait!" Remember, remember, September, October, November Decemb...Yes! That was almost 20 years ago."

"That it was due in October of 2023 right around the time of that genocide.

"Yes," he shouts, "That's Right!" Said Luca. Knocking the globe off.

"Now I remember."

"I was watching television while typing on a laptop, with the news faintly in the background. The first bomb dropped."

"Yes! The first bomb dropped. And like the spark that unlike the big bang, a revolution in my art took

form. A soul shaking revolution and it was then, I abandoned writing."

"I abandoned it after finding a new passion, or resurrecting an old passion."

I likely have the notes and research in my laptop, maybe a demo copy at home.

Hamil and Lisandra smile at each other.

"You didn't finish the book?"

"I did, It's done, just not formally."

"We need information on the Sacred Sickness.

as we can get. Any type of chemistry, genetics, history."

"Why get it from the book Lisandra dear, if it's all up here. Luca points at his head."

"Ok, Well, Can you tell us anything about the origins, genetics, theology, mythology, historicity. We need as much information as possible. Everything you can tell us will give us the deepest understanding of this illness."

Sacrum Languorum, the Sacred Sickness is among the cruelest afflictions ever to down from the gods. Perhaps not the only one—but certainly one of the cruelest. There are others who endure its grip, who have gazed upon the *Tache Noire*—that dreadful mark, when you glimpse the shadow of your own death reflected in the eyes of your mother, or your father, or your child. Those wretched souls suffer a dual damnation: cursed. Not only to bear the sickness, but to become its instrument. What is the consequence? Deadly violence. They do not choose vengeance—they *become* it. And they walk the path of the martyr, not from piety, but because of fate.

Hamil and Lisandra glance at each other thinking of the words.

What about its origin, any science associated— anything real.

"To me, Lisandra, it is the origin. What's most enchanting of the Sacred Sickness is its divine DNA. Yes, to the scholars in mythology, it is often called a sickness, but to call it a sickness over a gift is perhaps my greatest criticism of this blessing.



Imagine living with a condition created by the gods. Divinity coursing through your veins—rather—that does make you divine."

Luca fans his face with his hand, "oh goodness gracious *sacra benedictio*. I fluster just thinking about it."

Hamil's face starts blushing. His heart starts beating.

"How deep will one go, it's like going deep into the trail of god still trickling through man's blood—the rabbit hole of blood that ties to Socrates, Julius Caesar, Cambyses, Alexander the Great. It goes on.

To this day there are those around us who likely also suffer, but remain hidden. Given the horrors of the disease I wouldn't blame them for taking their own lives."

"By yesteryear's standards they are also known as oracles, seers, prophets. Today, they say just those suffering madness.

"What they really see is the suffering of the past, the future, and embody all of it in the present. Complex but easy to understand

when analyzing common visions. The elderly who suffer in their dreams represent the pain of the past, which still hurts today, the suffering of the children is the suffering of the future, and the pain the accursed suffer is meant to attract apostles, companions in their harrowing journey until the will of the divine is done."

Lisandra and Hamil stare at each other with awe, both blushing. Hamil gets flashbacks to the vision. Never before has this level of profound analysis of his condition been put together.

As Luca explains the Sacred Sickness, he notices Hamil's face flushing cherry red.

"Are you ok Monsieur Hamilcar? Looks like you can use some water or alcohol. More so Alcohol"

"Damyan!" Luca walks over to the door and cries out, "Fetch us some wine."

Damyan heads to a wine cabinet in the studio.

"Is there a cure for this disease?" Hamil asks nervously.

"A cure for the Sacred Sickness?  
Luca laughs.

"But who would want such a cure? Imagine being an essence of divinity. An oracle cursed and blessed bound to become some type of revolution or vision."

Nay! A Prophet!" Luca stares into Hamil's eyes.

Hamil lets out a deep sigh.

"Damyan, Damyan. Hurry Damyan."

Lisandra rubs Hamil's arm to comfort him.

Luca furrows his eyebrows.

"Oh, Why so glum the both of you?" asks Luca.

"Did I not answer your question to your heart's content?"

"No. We just have a ton of work ahead of us." Says Lisandra.

Luca pauses to examine them both closely.

"We should get going." Says Lisandra letting out a sigh. Luca drops the glass wine cups on the ground.

"But oh so soon?"

As Lisandra and Hamil turn to leave the studio disappointed with Luca's words.

Luca's suspicion quickens.

"But I wonder, Lisandra, you could have just called me over the phone to talk about this."

You came to New York to ask? One petite, measly question?"

"We have other business here too, nothing too exciting. Oh And you have no phone number."

Lisandra smirks.

"That's Right –Shoot." Says Luca.

"I do want to see you more before you go.

"Please."

"We are tied Luca. I couldn't promise."

"Not even dinner. I own a cozy restaurant, no long lines, not too far from here, they make the greatest... "

"No thank you Luca, Lisandra interrupts, but it was a pleasure seeing you after all those years."

"Right." says Luca, sighing with disappointment.

Hamil and Lisandra further approach the studio doors.

Luca stares at the painting of himself again thinking.

"Wait, wait, wait one minute."

Hamil and Lisandra return a foot from the door.

"I think I know of a cure!" Luca cries out.

"I just ignored it. Cast aside, as it wasn't part of the aim of my book."

"What do you mean?" Says Lisandra.

"Come visit my studio, I have more information on the Sacred Sickness More than, than you could ever want."

"I don't do much writing anymore. It hurts sometimes. Writing requires too much reasoning. A sentence must follow a formula to be sensible. If it makes

no sense then people won't read it. Thus, I find myself in a quandary. A quandary of logic and beauty.

There are many books serving money and others fame, but neither would compel me to create this work, as I was born with a conscience to the point of disease. As often I tried to be an author of the most common kind, but I am too uncommon.

At some point there is an obstacle: true and false, logic is the language of man, not the language of gods. It is by abolishing the language of my creative impulses that I transcend into the divine realm. If I leave anything in the studio, it will impede me.

Thus is the reason it lives there. Where it sleeps.

"Come to my home Hamil and Lisandra!"

Lisandra looks on reluctantly, but Hamil coaxes Lisandra with a look of desperation.

Sure, let's go," says Lisandra.

"Perfetto." Luca celebrates.

"Damyan, *Bello*, can you help these young ones to the divan while I clean up here."

"Hamil and Lisandra please have a seat outside on the divan, it's much more comfortable."

"As Hamil and Lisandra step out of Luca's office, he drags the Unfinished Caravaggio back into his vault and locks the door."

From his desk, he pulls out two small-frame revolvers and places them into his concealed carry holsters, and a dagger in a knife sleeve right above his snakeskin boot.



## The Walk of Truth

### Luca's Apartment

"My apartment is a few blocks from here. We can cut through Sherwood Park and be there quicker than a drive."

Sounds great.

As Luca steps closer he spreads his arms out stopping Lisandra and Hamil.

"Wait. Wait. Wait. Should we?" Luca says to himself scratching clean shaven chin.

"Should we what?" asks Lisandra.

Luca taps the guns settled into his holsters.

"We'll be fine—yes, fine." says Luca to himself.

"I feel a bit reluctant to walk with others by my side when passing Sherwood Forest. A sense of responsibility gnaws at me, but you both are adults, right?"

"You both can find the depth in the world where a child might only find fear." Lisandra and Hamil.

"I'm ok with it."

Luca turns to Hamil.

"Lead the way." Says Hamil smirking.

As they step into the park, A sweaty, shirtless raggedy old beggar lurches over to Lisandra colliding with her, nearly knocking her off balance.

"My sincerest apologies maiden "Could you spare a dollar for food?"

Lisandra, startled, reaches instinctively for her pocket.

"No—Liss, don't," Luca warns, stepping forward.

The beggar stares at Lisandra in the eyes,

"God bless you miss."

Luca notices from the corner two men rise from a bench not far from them. Their eyes locked onto Lisandra's pocket.

Like hungry wolves they rush towards her. Luca jumps in front of Lisandra shielding her with his large frame. He pulls two guns from his pocket and shoots into the sky.

Crack. Crack.

The shots ring and pop. The would-be thieves skid to a halt, stumbling backward. "In a blur of panic, they scatter, weaving through the crowd like rats in daylight."

"Run Filth Run." Luca shouts after them.

To rob a beautiful princess like Lisandra, oh how thou art shameless."

"Jesus Christ, Luca," Lisandra gasps, clutching her chest. Hamil watches the criminals escape.

Luca blows on the tip of the barrel, then tucks the guns back into his holster.

"It is always the guilty who run, the innocent stand."

Luca spits on the ground.

"You see, all criminals scurry away like rats when they hear a gunshot." Says Luca.

"And do you know why?" Luca asks.

"Why?" asks Lisandra.

"Because they know one day a well-deserved bullet is meant to pierce their heart and send them straight to the devil's den."

"While the innocent have no fear, they have nothing to hide from, not even death or the afterlife."

"I will say, though, they quickly identified a foreigner. Only foreigners believe something can be bought with a dollar in New York City. Something cunning to be weary of. But I'm not impressed. Beautiful crime looks more like the African Bushman salting a baboon's palate to find a water source in a desert—that is true beautiful cunning."

"I also embrace pure, kindly intelligent beggars who have adjusted for inflation. To them I always pay alms—an Islamic virtue by the way." says Luca.

"Back there, that elderly bloke who masterminded the wicked thievery is another reminder of worthless humanity. Elders are revered for their wisdom, until they undermine their vintage worth."

"Violence and theft in New York multiplied like roaches in a forgotten cellar.

Living in New York, has mercilessly dissolved any act of meritless respect and charity. One moment, you're walking through Manhattan, horrified to see a pregnant woman spat upon by a vagrant—but upon further inspection you'll find she deserves much worse."

"That's terrible, says Lisandra.

"Terribly true." Luca nods.

"Yes, dark, but again true. Oh Lisandra, what has become of me?"

"What has become of my Christianity?"

Whatever Christianity is living inside of me has been seared and evaporated through the nostrils of my big nose. It has become something deeper, though, something much healthier for the spirit."

"And what is that? asks Lisandra

"Beauty." Says Luca.

"The only thing really sacred in this world is beauty."

"But beauty isn't subjective," says Lisandra.

"Some insist beauty is subjective—a matter of taste, like perfume or politics. I disagree, at least partially. The world is littered with marvels that, when placed in the wrong frame, are mistaken for monstrosities. We flatter ourselves by calling beauty a trick of the eye, yet more often, it is nature's deliberate indulgence—objective wherever form conspires with purpose to seduce the gaze."

As Luca reaches the end of the park, he hits the walk button on the crosswalk.

"What is that?"

"What's what?"

"Music."

"Bellissimo!"

Follow me."

Luca stops in front of a tattered looking young boy resting close to a train station playing a violin.



"In the rotten, sallow, sandy grime of New York city streets, there is a beautiful creature often confused with a smelly skunk."

Luca, Hamil, and Lisandra walk over to a young boy sitting on a corner.

"Brilliant young boy I know you feel it, Let's hear the Adagio For Strings."

The boy closes his eyes and places his head on the chin rest of the violin, and settles his dirty calloused fingers on the strings. As he plays, a tear forms a few seconds into the song, dripping down over the boy's dirty cheeks.

Luca tears as he watches the young man play his song.

"Artists who weep before their creations have, at some point, been tormented, or tormented themselves to elicit the expression of grief. A tragedy like *Adagio For Strings* is impossible to play without the right amount of scars in the spirit.

A quarter way into the song, Luca pulls out a wad of hundred-dollar bills, and a business

card, dumping all into the violin case sitting in front of the boy.

The violinist holds his eyes closed undisturbed by the sound of money trickling into his case.

Lisandra notices the wad of money dumped into the violin,

"That's over a thousand dollars."

Luca cringes.

"Ugh, never count money. A profane use of the mind to count money especially if it settles itself on the workstation of creativity. "Imagine using your head like a cash register instead of a canvas. Perhaps it's why I've lost a sense for numbers. Were it not for my fingers and toes, I'd no longer be able to count at all." Luca laughs.

Luca takes his watch off, and drops it into the case.

Poor young one. The world is full of those who are judged by their history. No faith in them. Well I have faith in them more than I do those boring resume bound. What about Tragedy? The bravest souls, the deepest of them. Only ones to trust in the fields of life's battles.

Luca drops a business card,  
with the address to las sangre belle.”

“Come now, Let’s go.”

They take a few steps over to  
Luca's skyrise luxury condominium.

## Luca's Apartment

### The Haircut of Truth

Luca hits the golden elevator button to the penthouse of the luxury apartment, an entire floor dedicated to him, it has a finger print where only he could rise to the top.

The vast hallway shows a glass wall. With a view of nearly all Manhattan as far as the eye can see.

"This is absolutely stunning, Luca."

"Nothing compared to my darling Lisandra."

"Yes, we can all sit by the balcony, and the beauty overcomes the infestation below. But it can't creep up here—that's for sure."

My apartment is a fortress. I'd argue this is the safest place in New York, no doubt in my mind. No theft will ever reach this place. I can see everything here. If they should even attempt, one small skin cell, should leave a skin cell, with that cell I will find them, and destroy all of their future generations attached to that DNA."

Luca pulls out his phone—sleek, gold-cased—and

presses his thumb to the scanner. A soft light blooms beneath his skin. The device hums, then prompts a retinal scan. He leans in, one eye glinting in the lens. A final gesture: he presses his index finger to the panel beside the door. With a quiet click, it unlocks.

Before he enters, tells to wait right before the door.

"Wait a moment here." Says Luca,

Luca closes the door leaving just a needle-width opening.

Luca pauses.

"If someone wanted to rob me, they'd have to cut my eyeballs off and my finger to enter my home. But! If someone is willing to kill me, and rip my eyes out to steal my most precious works, I guess I can die satisfied knowing my work is to die for." Luca snickers then sticks his eyes over the retinal scanner.

"All in jest, but this paranoia you might be sensing is reasonable."

The door unlocks. Luca turns the knob down.

"Come in both of you," says Luca, and be careful.

Hamil and Lisandra tiptoe  
into Luca's pitch-black apartment.

"One.

Two.

Three."

Luca flips the switch, a  
spotlight illuminates a painting on a  
golden easel.

## BREAKING NEWS:

CNN Oct 27, 2023

### A War Report:

"This is Paula Dowd, reporting from Cape Grecco beach in Cyprus, where fisherman Alil Roma says he found a young girl miles into the Mediterranean."

Luca jumps up off the couch. He inches toward the television screen.

"Shut your mouth Damyan turn the volume up quickly,"

"What did I say?"... Damyan replies confusedly.

"I said shut up and Chop, Chop, you slug." Luca nudges him with his hand. Damyan grabs the remote and raises the volume on the television screen.

"...She was all bruised up and swam miles into the sea. Alil the fisherman says he saw her bobbing in the water, while fishing off the coast of Isla Varen."

"By the grace of god, this girl survived, and what unimaginable pain for her."

"Mr. Roma, a fisherman?"  
Hah, how he identifies himself—a fisherman. "Luca's eyes begin to swell with tears. He glares at the television screen, pausing onto the image of Alil."

"Damyan, run and get me a bucket of boiling water and salt."

Luca Pauses.

"Wait, the powerful type of salt. The ones they use to melt snow. Hurry Now. Go Run. I have a vision."

"I don't get it. Why do you need boiled water and snow melt? It's not even snowing."

"Just do it!" Luca explodes at Damyan.

Damyan stares in confusion.

"Run! before it's too late for you!" Luca waves his fist at Damyan furiously.

Damyan sprints down the flight of steps, hopping past two and three at a time.

Sweaty and tired, he falls upon the office of the building janitor.

"I need a bucket and some salt." Says Damyan breathlessly.

"What for?" Asks the Janitor.

Damyan looks at his watch anxiously.

"Oh for fuck's sake."

Damyan pulls out a strap of cash and hands a hundred dollar bill over to the janitor,

"Just get it!"

The Janitor grabs the hundred dollars and rushes to the basement.

Hamil glances at his watch, tapping it impatiently, the seconds stretching longer with each passing tick. The janitor hands the bucket off to Damyan, who snatches it quickly from his hands. He bolts toward the elevator.

Damyan anxiously stares at his watch, tapping his feet. He snatches the bucket and salt, and runs to the studio, out of breath.

"Now boil the water and melt the salt." Let it stand before my feet, like a stand before the sea of the world." Luca orders.

Damyan hesitates. "For what?" he asks.

"Luca grinds his teeth furiously."

"What else but to drown you."

"To drown you deep in this bucket." Luca snaps.

"Ask me another question and you're fired from my life and my love."

Damyan steps back, his heart pounding in his chest. He could feel the intensity of Luca's fury.

A few minutes after Damyan melts the salt water into the bucket, he tiptoes back from the stove area towards Luca who is frozen still staring at the paused television screen.

Damyan quietly leaves the bucket on the floor next to Luca.

Luca lifts the bucket and places it on a small desk in his studio.

"Now shush. Damyan."

"I never said anything...  
Damayan angrily whispers to  
himself.

Luca rolls up the sleeve of  
his right hand, unlocks a drawer  
and pulls out a large sharp knife."

"Damyan's heart starts  
pounding."

"What's going on?" Says  
Damyan.

Luca grabs the knife, and  
slowly cuts three lines across his  
wrist.

"With a sudden, decisive  
movement, Luca drew the glinting blade  
across his wrist. Three crimson lines  
appeared, a stark declaration against his  
pale skin, and blood, warm and viscous,  
welled up and spilled over, a sacrifice to the  
burgeoning 'vision' that consumed him."

Out gushes blood.

"Lucaaaaaaa! What have you  
done!

What have you done!"  
Damyan wails, then dashes out, and  
rushes out of the room.

Luca dips his mutilated  
wrists into the bucket of melted salt

water. The water quickly turns a  
pool of red.

Luca moans as his skin  
sizzles in pain, his nerves give way  
to a vision. The brightness of the  
room multiplies, a pain rises from  
the depth of his gut, and a powerful  
nausea from the sting bites into his  
heart.

Luca moans in pain then  
drops to the floor, spilling the  
bucket of blood on himself.

Luca's Apartment  
Stylish Interrogation



## Standing Before the Painting

Lisandra and Hamil stand before the painting—her younger self, drifting through a sea darkened with blood.

“It’s beautiful,” Hamil says quietly.

“...When I first witnessed Lisandra’s suffering on Television—when her tragedy passed like fire through my own veins—I flew to Cyprus to visit Alil. I begged Alil to arrange a meeting with the girl, to let me see her up close. I wanted to photograph her, to preserve what was still human in her, and capture it on canvas. I offered him a million dollars.”

He pauses.

“But Alil refused payment. He said her story mattered more than money—that it should live on, as a reminder. As a wound the world must not forget.”

When I finished, it became an instant Mona Lisa. Nearly all my fame I owe to Lisandra’s tragedy. It sounds terrible in retrospect, but we all know who the real enemies in

life are—right. He nods over to his painting.”

“Wait one moment,” Luca says.

Luca walks into his bedroom and pulls out a small stool resembling a barber’s chair and sets it in front of a large mirror on the wall.

“Come over and sit here.” Luca taps on the stool gently.

Hamil walks over and takes a seat.

“I’ll be right back.”

Luca walks back into his room.

Hamil stares at the mirror, the cuts are almost completely healed, but some new scars stand out reminding him of the pain he endured the night he awoke in Alil’s hut.

Luca returns to the room with a pair of scissors and a bottle full of water.

“Hair serves as a curtain to the grand stage of your eyes, your nose, your lips. They are the curtains of the *Teatro La Fenice* or

the *Palais Garnier*. Our graceful drapes hover over a stage, teasing and as I like to say elegrandizing. Until at last the sight and sound bears down on your face. You are now the main attraction, the star, stage, and the actor. Your hair, in its silent elegance, complements your unique identity, adding to the allure and charm that makes you the showcase.”

Luca sprays a mist of water over Hamil’s hair and begins cutting with practiced ease. His hands move quickly, shaping layer after layer of black strands. The floor soon fills with fallen hair, but he doesn’t look down. He’s focused, almost obsessed, as if getting it right means something more than just a haircut.

He trims the beard leaving it short, but neatly covering his face.

“I submit that maybe the greatest artists are those capable of expelling the genius of human creativity without committing some horrifying act of violence upon themselves. Vincent Van Gogh would agree with me. He lost an ear to accomplish immortality.”

“No doubt the memory of pain is the key to seeing a world in a way others dare not.”

Luca walks over to his bedroom and pulls out a large digital camera and snaps pictures of Hamil, his long hair now well-groomed and layered to perfection.

“Well, you’re all done. Those scars I noticed are extremely thick and echo pain. I take it from your life’s harsh fumbles and tumbles.”

Luca pauses briefly.

“It must be difficult to suffer your holy affliction.”

Luca pauses to notice Hamil and Lisandra, whose faces blush at the same time as he looks into their eyes seeking some unnatural reaction.

Luca looks into Hamil’s eyes through the mirror. The room falls silent.

“It courses through your veins doesn’t it?”

Luca continues to stare into Hamil’s eyes from the mirror. The gaze is different than one who looks into you face to face, It feels as

though he is looking at the entirety.  
His front and back.

"Hamil and I should get  
going. We are late for other  
appointments."

"I assure there is no need to  
be embarrassed or scared of  
revealing this secret you hide from  
me."

"I am a doctor. Of all things  
mystical."

"I..." Hamil, continues to look  
at Luca in the eyes.

"I know it. Nothing you say  
will convince me otherwise, even if  
you don't admit it now. Even if you  
leave, and I never see you again, I  
will know and do nothing but  
believe, and continue life miserably  
disappointed, wanting just to know  
a little more about you,

Luca places his hand on  
Hamil's shoulders and gently  
whispers into his ears.

"All I want to know now is  
what is the worst part of the  
illness?"

Hamil holds his breath,  
unwilling to respond with a level .  
He stares at Lisandra, her face

flushed. The pressure builds Hamil's  
chest, battling the truth from  
bursting out.

Hamil's face turns red.

"It's...It's the gloom in the  
eyes of the children. They sit there  
waiting for punishment— those are  
the ones that sicken me the most,  
and theirs are the most  
unforgettable too."

Lisandra shakes her head.

"You see."

"But why try to hide this from  
me? I knew back at the studio I  
smelled a perfume of tragedy. "

"How did you guess?" Said  
Lisandra.

"I can see deep pain.  
Especially in these scars." Said Luca.

"Forgive me for drawing it  
out of you against your will—but  
doesn't it feel better now?"

"When truth is hidden for too  
long, it swells, and just like the  
universe—once smaller than one of  
the beautiful freckles on Lisandra's  
face—there came a universe."

"We have to meet with one of Alil's friends."

"As I promised, I'll share everything I know."

"While this thing boots up, can I get you both some wine?"

"No thank you." Says Lisandra.

"It's an old bottle, one of a kind."

"What about water?"

Hamil and Lisandra refuse again.

"You are both missing out on life."

"I'll be right back."

Luca leaves the room.

Lisandra strides over to Hamil.

"Oh Hamil, why did you?" Says Lisandra.

"I couldn't help it." Says Hamil.

Hamil, shrugs, and Lisandra's head turns

Luca returns,

"Both of you come over to me."

Hamil and Lisandra step into a large room set together like a small museum and, a small library, some Greek and Ancient Egyptian artifacts.

Please enter a large hall, made of glass. full of books and artifacts. Much larger than his own apartment.

Luca returns with a cup of wine. The laptop screen finally loads. He opens up his Word document

An ancient plant stuffed in by they say Asclepios, the god of healing. "Mythical drugs."

"Precisely."

Have both ever heard of Hul Gil?

They both nod.

"There is an ancient Sumerian drug of divine origin."

"We actually still use Hul Gil to this day."

"In 3400 BC the Sumerians cultivated a little drug called "Hul Gil." It was said to have divine and godly properties. The Sumerians passed it to the Assyrians and then the Egyptians.

"Today the plant is known to us as Opium, and is used to make happy drugs, like Fentanyl, Oxycodone, and Heroin. Trust me, I've gone through many types of Hul Gil. All powerful drugs.

Luca, shakes his head, and blows and puffs at his laptop.

"I don't believe this is the same drug." This is not your typical opium seed."

"One of the many gifts left for humanity, desecrated by him."

I believe if you find the first Hul Gil, it might be a cure to your illness.

Now, the Hul Gil you see today is not the same that exists now in the fields around the world. We need the Hul Gil a little more ancient than that.

If your disease is truly Sacred Sickness, and I'll grant you that because I believe everything.

"You might be thinking, I'm crazy after I tell you this, but remember, you came knocking on my door about something mythical."

"Are you both ready to set aside the switch in your brain to help you believe?"

Luca Raises his brow.

"Luca and Hamil nod."

"Well then, In that the era of Gods and Titans roared throughout this world roamed the powerful Titan Cronos, so powerful that his offspring ended up being gods—imagine that. How much prouder can a father be right?

However, it was prophesied by Gaia that Cronos, like his father Uranus before him, would one day be overthrown by his own children. Determined to escape that fate, Cronos took a drastic step—he swallowed each of his offspring at birth. One by one: Hestia, Demeter, Hera, Hades, and Poseidon vanished into his gut. He believed he had devoured them all—including Zeus. But Rhea, unwilling to lose yet another child, deceived him. She hid the infant Zeus and fed Cronos a swaddled stone in his place.

Years passed. Zeus grew in secret, strong and defiant. When he came of age, it was time to fulfill the prophecy. Rhea, seeking to reclaim her children, turned to Metis—the Titaness of wisdom—for aid. Together, they devised a plan to make Cronos disgorge his swallowed heirs. The age of the Olympians was about to begin.

Metis, the Titaness of wisdom, brewed a potent elixir and entrusted it to Rhea. She offered it to Cronos under the guise of aid. But once he drank it, his strength waned, and his body heaved. One by one, the children he had devoured were disgorged—Hestia, Demeter, Hera, Hades, and Poseidon—spilling out into the world once more.

Freed at last, they joined Zeus in open revolt. With the Hundred-Handed Giants as their allies, they waged a cataclysmic war against Cronos and the elder Titans. In the end, Cronos was defeated—overthrown as foretold.

And so, it was not Zeus who was sent to Tartarus, but Cronos himself—cast down into the abyss, bound in the deep.

Luca opens a panel in his apartment, behind it was a library hidden behind a wall. The abandoned room is full of book dust.

“Ha Choo” Luca sneezes then covers his nose with his arm.

“Excuse Me.”

“Ugh, I told you I hadn’t written in a while. You can smell the negligence in the air.”

Luca flips the switch on his wall on an air purifier.

“I’d like to welcome you to The Blood Artist’s writing *bibliotheca*. Here I have books, scrolls, relics going back centuries.”

Luca walks to his laptop, which is still open. Look how old this thing is, Luca laughs. “Not even a touch screen.”

“I hope it still works. Might take a while to update.”

Luca turns on the computer and turns over to Marvelous Maledictions book one.

I only published after falling back in love with painting—something I hadn’t touched since grade school. I

spent years chasing literature, only to find success with a brush. Who knew I had the painter's touch?

"You want richness and fame, you should revisit your childhood passions.

"Here we go."

Luca opens a folder called Sacrum Languorum. He scrolls through files and folders, ultimately finding manuscripts. He quickly mouths the files on his computer

"Maledictions 1.epub,"

"Maledictions 2.epub."

"There is the second one."

"Why are they separated?"  
Lisandra asks.

"I separated the books to avoid bulkiness. If I put them together my book would likely be tangled with the academic or reference section. I can't bear the idea of my book being tangled in a new section. A section called "Alive."

"A section of living books. Marvelous Maledictions is alive."  
Luca murmurs in an enchanted trance.

Luca opens up a program called, digital library, clicks

Search in Local Database Only."

Inputs the keyword, "healer, medicine, god, gods, medicine, drugs, divine, in Homer's Iliad, Pindar's Odes, Pausanias, Hippocratic Corpus, Ovid's Metamorphoses, and Apollodorus.

Luca's eyes scan the screen reading pages of data, his eyes to parch, he dizzies from the quick transitions.

"Goodness. Gracious."

Luca grasps a box of black and gold wrapped cigarettes by the keyboard.

"Would you both like a gasp of this delicious Himalayan tabbacco?" Says Luca.

Luca sticks the cigarette into his mouth.

"You don't mind do you?"

Luca and Hamil shake their heads.

"You won't die after a puff."

Luca takes a puff of his cigarette and blows it at his computer screen and keeps scrolling.

“Sometimes it helps when I blow smoke on the screen. I don’t know what it is, but it helps.” Luca shrugs.

“You both don’t mind, do you.”

“Fine with me Lisandra nods.”

Lisandra and Hamil walk through a glassed case of art. Undoubtedly.

“He hears Lisandra and Hamil look around, mystified by hand written scrolls, ancient art.

“Marvelous, isn’t it” says Luca while glossing through his research.

Some of those took a fortune to buy, and others a fortune to steal.

“Bingo! There we go. That’s our lead.”



## The Divine Staff

### Asclepius

Luca searches the image and pulls up the picture of a snake wrapped around a rod. He turns the laptop over to Hamil,

“Does this look familiar?”  
Asks Luca.

Hamil stares closely at the symbol.

“Yes! Yes it does. Unless I’m wrong it looks like the symbol doctor’s lab coats, insurance cards, and medical devices.”

“That’s right. But do you know the story behind the staff?”

Hamil squints at the image,  
“Actually, No.” Says Hamil,

“Barely,” says Lisandra,  
squinting

“Well then, a quick lesson in Greek mythology.”

Luca clears his throat.

“This rod belongs to  
Asclepius, the god of medicine.”

“Asclepius is the love child of the sun god Apollo and Princess Coronis of Thessaly, though love might not be the way to describe those two. According to myth, Coronis was unfaithful to Apollo, engaging in an affair with Ischys, a mortal from the line of Eletus and Hippea.

Imagine that, cheating on a god with a man.

When Apollo discovered her betrayal, he sent his twin sister Artemis to strike Coronis dead with divine arrows. At the time of her death, Princess Coronis was pregnant with Apollo’s son—Asclepius. The unborn child was rescued from her womb and entrusted to Chiron the Centaur, who raised him as a stepson.”

“You both know who Chiron the Centaur is right?”

Hamil shrugs,

“Nope.”

Lisandra scratches her head,

“I know a Centaur is  
half-man half-horse.” She said,

"Yes. Chiron was the centaur of centaurs. He taught the likes of Achilles, Hercules, and Peleus."

"Recognizing Asclepius's sharp perceptiveness, Chiron the Centaur took him under his wing and imparted the sacred art of healing. Asclepius absorbed the knowledge with such mastery that he soon possessed the rare ability to restore even the most severely wounded creature. He could raise a dying centaur from the brink of death with nothing but the power of his medicine."

"Asclepius avoided humanity, or preferred to ignore the hostilities between centaurs, gods, and humans. Of course he felt a greater allegiance to the Centaurs as he was raised by them. Every night Asclepius heads off the beach on the island of Kos and gazes at the stars in search of inspiration."

"One night Asclepius heard a loud moaning while deep in meditation."

According to the Babylonian oracles, those lacking depth in their souls sound no more than insects, bugs or snorting pigs to gods passing by. True substance, they say, can only arise from deep where

souls cry. This time, however, he heard a cry—one that called to him.

Luca pauses to catch his breath.

"The Sound."

"It was Doriana, the wife of Hippocrates, crying out in anguish. At the time, she was suffering from a disease known as Tartarus Rot, an illness believed to have crawled in from the underworld.

Asclepius followed the cries through the dark like leading him to a small, crumbling cottage—wood warped, walls of mud barely holding it all together. The door gave way with a groan, dust blooming in the still air. Inside, on a threadbare bed, Doriana writhed in pain. As he stepped closer, the stench met him—familiar, repulsive, but he knew that musk. It was a viral disease spread by the saliva of Cerberus, the three-headed hound that guarded the gates of the underworld.

As he approached, the air seemed to shift. He saw his gaze frozen to her eyes—a vision struck. It was a woman suffering, a murder, close to where he recognized on

Lake Boebeis. One arrow pierced the woman's heart; another, her skull. The image burned into his mind. It was the first time he had a vision, and it was one quite macabre."

As the vision faded, Asclepius pricked Doriana on her neck with a strand of hair on his beard, a small stream of black blood leaked out. Staring briefly, at the viscosity of the goo, he trampled his way outside, running around looking for some foliage to find the nest of the Laophis-Crotaloid snake, also known as the Giant Viper snake, which is now extinct by the way. He went from nest to nest looking for baby Viper snakes. Once he found them he rushed back to the hut. Ever careless again he crashed through the hunt tumbling all apart. Standing before Dorianna again, he ripped her clothes off, and forced one of the snakes to bite her on the thigh. After about a minute, the poison knocked her into a numbness. Once she was nearly frozen stiff, he performed a surgery that is said to have removed all of the rotten tumor-like infestation in her body. Then knit her back together with another string of his long beard.

While Asclepius stood by Doriana's body. Hippocrates and his daughter sat frozen in shock by what they were seeing before them. A few minutes later, Doriana rose from her coma; the first thing she felt was disbelief—a heavy, suffocating disbelief. Of the pain no longer tormenting her. The sharp burning torment of the Tartarus rot was gone."

She stood before him—this towering, naked, furred divinity. Who could say what such a being perceived? With trembling gratitude, she slipped from the bed and knelt, wrapping her arms around his legs. Her lips found the feet of Asclepius. She kissed them once, then again, and again, her body shaking with awe.

Her heart swelled with a reverence beyond comprehension. She was blind to his blood-slicked form, oblivious to the grotesque image he presented. To her, he was no man, no aberration. He was a god—a living miracle—and she kissed him as if devotion itself had taken flesh.

Once Asclepius noticed her vitals now returned. He felt he was there too long. Humans are a disgusting bunch to the gods. Standing in the muck of human

households standing too long in a pig pen—rooting, shitting, snorting filth.

Asclepius stormed out of the home, barreling through it like a bull crashing through a haystack, scattering everything in his path. Asclepius, bothered by his vision, left to consult Chiro the Centaur over this vision. Chiro reluctantly told him what Apollo and Artemis had done to his mother. Falling ever more angry towards the gods. He decides to reconnect human identity, and the human side of his existence. Something he ignored as a result of an ongoing war with gods and centaurs.”

A revelation. Oh and what a revelation.

The turmoil of the identity.

Like us he thought, who am I? His question was, “What am I?”

“Asclepius spent days brooding on a cliff on the island of Kos, even mourning, as the vision of his mother's death was now an eternal part of him.”

Once Asclepius was done with a long deep contemplation, he took a giant leap, from the ledge of

the cliff gliding, and leaving a giant splash, in the sea bathing himself in the sea. In his mind, he was baptizing himself as more human than god.

Asclepius returned to Hippocrates' home. Shortly after leaving the sea, his wet golden curls and dripping body.

“Imagine that, a giant of god, likely handsome dripping wet beyond hanging dong. In front of all to see.”

Luca starts to flush. He fans himself.

“Hot.”

“I doubt anyone cared, though, people weren't so Christian back then, or actually not Christian at all. Christianity this was about 460 BC.”

Anyway, Asclepius dressed himself with clothes made of weed to hide his body. As it was obvious that men and women covered their bodies. He helped rebuild the home and turned it into a massive temple-like structure made of mudbrick and clay, decorative colorful sea stones.

The home was built so massive and it was almost like a castle, with walls as high as high as those of Troy.

Pretty good deal, right? You have a god, who saved your wife's life.

Lisandra bows her head in approval.

"Wrong."

Asclepius fell in love with Dorian and had a child with her. Out of Jealousy Hippocrates found a temple of Zeus after turmoil. Prayed for him to bring justice for what Asclepius had done to his wife. At once, Zeus plotted a human for fear that he might reveal the healing secrets of the gods to humanity, including resurrection.

Hippocrates's jealousy led him to hide the origin of all the medical language. So hateful was he that he erased every idea, everything of the gods from memory, such that the magical stories became the theme: Natural Causes of Disease: Illness is not punishment from the gods but has physical causes that can be studied and treated.

Then of course, now that Hippocrates, knew all of the secrets of man's illnesses as far he could know, he let it be known, that there were no such things as divine illnesses. He wanted, perhaps, out of jealousy to end the paradigm of divine healing, and instead, focus on the humanity's ability to heal, which as you can see, hasn't really done too much besides, helped cope with pain and get rid of some bacteria. Everything else is really just our own natural doing.

After finding out what Hippocrates had done, Dorian left the home to see him. Never to be seen again, though they say she made her way over to Egypt.

Hamil starts getting flashbacks to his night on the edge of the New York river cliffs. The girl's eyes now throb.

Was that Asclepius he saw, back then by the cliff. All those years ago.

Gluck  
Captain Gernot Meinhardt

While Hamil and Lisandra gaze onwards down the river from the bow, Luca fixates on the old little steamboat, its flaking paint, and rusty muddy floor with disgust. He feels uneasy standing on the boat. A loud pop followed by a sharp snap startles them all, the sound vibrates in his chest. The thick, acrid stench of oil fumes invades his nose.

"Ugh. Is it normal for boats to reek and groan like dying men?" But from where I can't tell if that stench is coming from the crusty Hudson or your rickety boat."

Luca mutters, standing at the bow like some windswept statue, his hair whipping back in the breeze.

The Captain lifts his chin, his weathered face unreadable.

Another violent lurch of the boat sends a mop bucket and a sagging bag tumbling overboard. Water surges onto the deck, soaking everything in its path.

"You know Captain." Luca calls over the groan of the motor, "it won't be long before this thing flounders to the bottom of the river. One wrong wave, and this thing will sink faster than the Titanic—though with significantly less grace and absolutely no orchestra."

Captain Meinhardt chuckles, the sound low and steady. His eyes gleam with a quiet defiance.

Captain Meinhardt shakes his head.

"The one who built this ship willed her never to sink. One day, she'll be dragged to the scrapyard—her steel ripped apart, her bones stripped bare, her name forgotten—that will be her death. But Gluck will never drown. Not in a river or an ocean. She was meant for something, even though she seems only doomed to drown."

Hamil turns back, the words of Captain Meinhardt, reaching him, as though the Captain was talking about him, not the boat. Though the Captain was talking to Luca, Hamil felt as though the Captain was sending him the message. He couldn't shake the feeling those words were meant for him. Slowly,

he turned—and his breath hitched.  
He felt his heart drop.

Hamil looks at Gluck with a sense of solidarity, then turns back towards Captain Meinhardt. The Captain's gaze was locked onto Hamil's eyes.

## Nova Religio

Luca hovers at the boat's edge, restless, fingers tight around the exit rail, anxious to jump back onto land.

Just behind him, Hamil still, bearing Lisandra's arm curled into side—curled by his side.

The Captain shuts the lights all of his boats off.

"What the hell, Captain. It's pitch dark out here. Can we get the lights back on before we hit a small stone and capsize."

Captain Meinhardt stays silent.

Luca is interrupted by a sudden burst of bright halos leading into a deck. They guide Glück toward a narrow corridor—a hidden passage, carved for vessels small enough to slip through unnoticed. The Captain eases the throttle, steering the boat gently into the darkened tunnel.

"This must be it. The Great Baptistry looms above." From this distance, Luca can only make out an immense shadow—its grandeur swallowed by darkness, but its presence heavy. It's not merely a

passage; it feels like an entrance to an underground harbor."

A sudden light flares, harsh and nearly blinding. There, standing in a dim light, against the shadows, is a man clad entirely in black—suit, tie, and shiny leather boots. The grinding sound of a crank breaks the silence, and an elegant staircase begins to descend like a moat door, much more elegant and technologically futuristic.

Luca stands anxious at the front of the boat, where one is meant to exit.

The boat comes to a stop. The engine powers off.

Luca leaps out of the boat and onto the platform.

"Goodness Gracious, Thank God."

As Luca steps closer to the man in black, he mutters under his breath, brushing water from his shoes with a sharp kick—casting off the thicket of the damp night.

Luca extends his hands to introduce himself.

The suited man responds with a hand.



As Luca, takes his hand, he is struck by the face of

He recognizes him as a figure of quiet renown—a celebrated actor, a fixture among the worldly nobility Luca studied well as an admirer of. This was a face familiar from the rarefied circles of a quiet Noblesse, a

He steps forward to shake his hand and introduce himself. As their hands meet, his grip tightens slightly—drawn not by the gesture, but by the ring: gold, heavy, and marked with a striking emblem, its face carved into a shape unfamiliar, uncommon, almost ancient.

Luca gasps in awe, “Don Alfonso Catalano.” He keeps a tight grip on his hands. Even as Don Catalano

“*Dios Mio es un honor to meet su Excelencia.*” Luca kisses the hand of Don Catalano.

Lucian Morcaria. It’s a pleasure to meet you. I wasn’t expecting you to be with us.

Do you know me? Said Lucian in shock.

“Of course, your work, your art is polemical. You are an artist of

great passion. *La Sirene of Scars*, is a monumental work. I will never forget the eyes of Lisandra on the painting.

Luca blushes.

“I can’t believe it.”

“I am honored.”

Lisandra and Hamil board the platform. Don Catalano turns to Hamil and Lisandra.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you. Princess Lisandra.”

Lisandra, blushes, as Don Catalano stands in the corner of the

“And you.”

Catalano stares at Hamil seemingly bewitched by his aura. He rolls his eyes.

“Doctor Hamil Elsy.”

“He jumps off the boat.”

“Don Catalano, I’m pleased to meet you.”

“What a pleasant bunch we have here. I am honored by all of you.”

Father Catalano, lights the baptistry, unraveling the statues of goddesses and gods.

"But how odd." Luca stares.

"These places are usually covered in paintings and carvings of Christ and other christian religious sculptures. By missing, or by replacing. There is something delightfully blasphemous here. What does it all mean, Don Catalano.

Catalano takes a deep breath, pulls his glasses off and nervously tucked it into his coat pocket.



## The Umbrahael

"*Santa Purissima*, what the hell is this thing?" Luca brushes his fingers over a 30-foot massive wing covered in pearly white scales."

Catalano slaps Luca's roaming hands away.

"A wing."

"A miraculous artifact of supernature is what you see here."

Hamil, Lisandra, and Luca, gaze at the wing, hanging above an elegant tabernacle. Approaching the root of the wing, it seems to have been ripped off whatever creature who wore it for flight.

"This, dear guests, is the severed wing of the Umbrahael."

Hamil, Lisandra, and Luca stood in silent awe, their eyes fixed on the enormous wing.

"This wing was torn straight from the back. At its base, you can see the tangled nexus of bone and tendon, still raw. It attached high on the upper back, anchored to the scapula and braced along the spine—positioned perfectly to bear

the force and torque needed to lift a body into the air.

To make flight possible, everything had to change. The chest was dominated by enormous pectoral and deltoid muscles, layered with new structures over the trapezius and latissimus dorsi—powerful, specialized for flight. The rest of the body follows suit: legs made lighter, the pelvis shaped, the entire frame built for air.

And the lungs... massive. They'd have to be, to pull enough oxygen through such a system. The heart, too—twice, maybe three times the size of ours, driving blood with relentless speed.

This isn't just a human with wings. The Umbrahael is a full reimagining of the human form—rebuilt, reborn as something meant for the sky. What you see here is the appendage—it is nature's attempt to overcome the limitations of man—no, Nature did overcome with the majestic Umbrahael."

Luca chuckles, interrupting.

"As much as I try to be gullible as I am, this is not something easy to absorb. I'd have to vomit everything in my soul to

believe this nonsense. It seems my soul is completely empty of the tank."

"Tell us, is the Umbrahael is some type of mythical bird or dinosaur gone extinct."

Looks at Luca, with a piercing sincerity.

"The Umbrahael is a species of man."

Luca interrupts.

"A species of man?" Luca mutters to himself.

"I've read everything—history, esoterica, every footnote of human myth. There's no mention of this *Umbrahael*. Not once."

"What about the Annunaki, said Lisandra, statues of men with wings."

"The Annunaki."

"Verily."

"No. No, no. The Annunaki is a mystical creature."

Luca, rubs his eyes, and shakes head

"Is it so impossible to believe?" We did have tails like our monkey cousins, why is it difficult to have wings."

"You've seen these things over and over again just not in the flesh. They are a race of men similar to the Babylonian Anunnaki."

"Have you all heard of the "Anunnaki."

"Yes, mythical creatures like nephilim only exist in religious fiction."

Catalano points at an old large carving of the Anunnaki."

"Luca holds his chest, his heart pounds. He looks at his digital watch and notices his heart is pounding not unlike the levels when he does physical exercise."

"Why haven't we heard of them?" Asks Hamil, stunned by the news.

"The knowledge of the Umbrahael has been a secret."

"A secret?" Luca's voice cracks sharp with disbelief. "Why a secret?"

“If these things are what you say they are, then—then I must say, fuck the lot of you for hiding it from us. I mean, for God’s sake... His voice falters, but his anger rises, the words tumbling over each other. “Unfathomable. Immoral.Unconscionable. Truth be damned is all I hear. ”

Luca’s head begins to throb, the pressure mounting as his face flushes deep red. He swipes a hand across his forehead, his breaths coming faster, shorter, a sweat starts to form at the forehead.

Can’t we wait one moment before continuing. Luca pulls a small box out of his pocket, and pulls a pill. He chucks it to the back of his throat. The redness, the anxiety of his incredulity, calms down.

Don Catalano steps over to a small fountain, with running water, he gets a small cup and hands it over to Luca.

His face quickly fades.

“Phew.” Luca lets out a sigh of relief.

“Okay, okay, if what you’re saying is true, then where do we even begin to deal with all of this?

With history. With the world. Revelation. All the genetic testing... the marvels of science we could’ve used to understand this extinct creature—wasted!” His voice rises, cracking under frustration. “What if Lavarenti had died without sharing it? What then?”

“Are we just going to copy and paste this into history?”

“Reveal it,” said Catalano.

“Withholding knowledge like this—historical knowledge, the kind that could change everything—that’s no different than murder. No, it’s worse.” His voice shakes as he spits the words. It’s a crime—the worst kind of crime. This leaves gaps in reality. Gaps in truth.”

Catalano shakes his head

“Someone as wise as Lavarenti thinks far ahead of the implications of sharing knowledge. He believes some knowledge should be forbidden.” Says Catalano.

“From who?” Says Luca incredulously.

“From the world.” Says Catalano.

"Goodness Gracious, if there were ever a time to withhold knowledge for fear of people caring, this era is not it," says Luca.

"For the world, not yet, but Alil believes Lisandra and Hamil are ready to learn."

Hamil stands before recalling the conversation Alil talking about the church of Hama, the connection between all the religions in one temple.

Centuries of unity to be adopted into one man, and then onto the centuries of humanity's beliefs.

"I think I see it," says Hamil, his eyes locked onto a statue.

"Get what?" Said Catalano

"Just a conversation I had with Alil about a Mosque in Syria."

"The Mosque in Hama."

Yes!" Smiling at Hamil, the mosque in Hama, is something Alil tastes. The Flavor of history, the flavor of faith...

Luca Interrupts.

"Can we get back to the men with wings, then some old mosque with Alil's obsession with faith."

"Calma" Luca says Catalano, maybe you should relax. Breathe."

Father Catalano unlocks a golden tabernacle sitting below the wing of the Umbrahael and pulls out ancient papyrus scrolls and two notebooks.

"We are going far, far back. Said Catalano, These ancient scrolls, according to the Lavarenti lineage, trace back thousands of years to the Macedonian conquest of Egypt. Stolen after Alexander's conquest in 332 BC. Following his victory, Alexander crowned himself Son of Rah, or The Pharaoh of Egypt. The oracle who officiated at his coronation issued a grave warning: to maintain his divine status, Alexander must be vigilant of the Umbrahael."

"You have these scrolls," asked Luca.

The scrolls provide scant detail on the later history of coexistence between the two peoples. Yet, according to Lavarenti, peace endured for centuries—until, as with all mortal

achievements, it fractured. The great rift when the Egyptians, seduced by their own grandeur, began to embrace the doctrine of self-deification, asserting divine lineage and elevating themselves to the stature of gods."

"Lavarenti, of course, chose to change the name of *Ba-al* to The Umbrahael. To call them *Ba-al*, was to resurrect the degradation of these beings.

It was basically a curse. One they did not take too fondly.

Lavarenti wanted to start a new history after their genocide.

"We begin a new story of man. History revised too."

"A New History?" Said Luca?

"That's right." Said Catalano."

"You plan to rewrite history."

"No, add like a revelation," said Catalano.

Luca's thoughts start overwhelming him. forehead is sweating profusely as he imagines the world's reaction to something as critical as this. He burst forth a nervous laugh.

Luca interrupts.

"This is purely fiction Don Catalano, What you give us here today is a fiction that will perhaps, if anything rouse the Abrahamics, in a way to once again, disgrace the ancient Egyptians who took centuries to admire. The world has slandered the Egyptians far too long, even though their civilization is among the most artistic. They must be praised rather than used as an example. I won't allow this to follow the road of degradation, as I feel it coming on."

Catalano falls silent, his eyes casting a deep stare.

"Truth is what it is, even if you don't like it." Said Catalano.

Catalano turns to Hamil and Lisandra, keeping focused on them as he continues speaking.

At one point in ancient Egyptian history, Viziers, Nomarchs amassed great wealth; they found it insufficient. Something was missing—a void no riches or influence could fill. Even today, we recognize that possessions alone fail to bring true happiness. What was missing for them was what we now call spiritual fulfillment—a hunger of



the soul. We seek it too, but for them it was to be a god rather than submit to one. So they sought the gods in search of meaning, but as they prayed, a realization took hold: to truly satisfy them. To bring them true happiness. They must become gods themselves—the highest, most beautiful, divine beings in the land—that is when they began to take more heed of the Umbrahael.

Winged and majestic, the Umbrahael soared above the world higher than the pyramids. They roosted in the woodlands that once fed from the Nile, watching silently from the skies, untouched by the toiling Egyptians, but just like men, they had all of their mental faculties set in place for learning and creativity. Back then there were no traditions, they often consulted the priestly caste, who often shared knowledge, language and philosophy. They adopted the ancient language as their own alongside their own songs. Which was the way they communicated too. Loots, Harps, Lyres, each inspired by the sounds of the wind coming from the Forests of the Umbraheal like birdsong in the spring.

Although it was easy to praise oneself for all wealth and

achievement and godliness, How could humans call themselves gods while such beautiful winged creatures gracefully fluttered above them?

The Egyptians began to imitate. They raised ever taller pyramids—perhaps unknowingly—in a quiet attempt to rival the flight of the Umbrahael. They stitched crude wings from bull hide and adorned them with scavenged feathers of mighty birds, crafting desperate, earthbound imitations. Yet, it was not flight alone that stirred envy.

The Umbrahael were ageless—hawk-eyed and long-limbed, with powerful jaws and skin like glazed porcelain, uncanny in its perfection. Their wings shimmered like sculpted silk, seeming less like ornaments and more like living extensions of their grace. To the Egyptians, they moved not as men but as birds made flesh, drifting through the world with a beauty that defied nature.

In awe and jealousy, the ancients developed mummification, a desperate vanity to be like them. By preserving the body in death, they hoped to grasp the Umbrahael's

eternal youth, their healing, their divine elegance.

They never saw an Egyptian see an Umbrahael die. The myth was that they didn't die. This was when admiration turned to obsession. And eventually, envy.

The Umbrahael had never interfered. Neither had the Ba-al. But the Egyptians, striving for godhood, could not tolerate being second to any creature—no matter how divine.

The peace between them snapped and guards always attempted to seize them but failed. They were much too strong. Much too aerodynamics peaceful even in the presence of a noticeable tension

One day, the Ancient Egyptians captured an Umbrahael male. They sought to study its body, to unravel the secrets of this mythical creature. At first, it seemed scientific curiosity, but shortly it decayed into cruelty. The Egyptians tried to torture it, perpetually gut the creature with their sharpest spear. But it was a failure. The Umbrahael's skin was like a steel hide: thick, impervious to any blunt tool. You see the pearly white attached to the wing, their

bodies it's almost like their body and bones were strong, and powerful.

"Until, one day, a snake wormed its way into the underground dungeon where the Umbrahael lay captured. For the first time, it showed a deathly fear. The Umbrahael trembled in fear at the sight of the snake."

The creature tensed. The captors noticed the trembling fear. They seized upon mocking the Umbrahael by holding the snake. Words of its weakness reached King Tatunkhamun. He followed the men to the dungeon where his militia mock the Umbrahael who stood there chained and trembling in fear. Tutankhamun walked steadily toward the ranks and pulled the serpent from the guard's hand. Holding it just below the head, he looked into its eyes. Then he turned to one of his men and thrust the snake into one of the guards, the snake opened its mouth and mocked him. He turned away, tense with silent anger, and pressed the snake to the neck of the Umhrael.

Young Umbrahael limbs tightened, then fell. The body folded in on itself, it curled up and died.

“At once the Pharaoh ordered his military to gather every snake he could find and eradicate all of Umbrahael.

Father Catalano points to a statue of Egyptian royalty wearing the Uraeus or the Yaret.

The snake crown burned fear into the heart of the peaceful Umbrahael. With the help of the cobra, the Egyptian were forced to fly. They descended deep into the caves of an island. While, the Umbrahael was a creature of flight, and though they could escape, it was only so long. Ancient Egyptians used guards to chase them far into the sea.”

The Pharaoh commanded an army to watch over the caves for eternity.

Descending into the cavernous depths, the Umbrahael—guardians of the women and children—discovered a colossal emerald embedded into the earth with the dust of fragments sprinkled throughout. They sealed themselves within and named it the Vicoose Stone. In their desperate bid to escape the pursuing Egyptians, they unwittingly trapped themselves inside a living tomb, hemmed in by

serpents, scaled horrors, and unseen predators.

The stone pulsed with a strange force. Around it, the air thinned, the beasts hesitated. The Vicoose Stone seemed to cast a silent ward—repelling the swarm of deadly lifeforms. Only the distant screech of bats and the hiss of wary reptiles disturbed the stillness. It became both a sanctuary and a prison.

And so long as the great stone remained unmoved, it shielded them. But if it were ever to shift—even by an inch—the plague of the cave would descend, and not a single Umbrahael would survive.

## The Reaper Ipzil DalCaver

The exile of the Umbrahael in the caves lasted for centuries. In the sunless depths, their wings became useless—no longer tools of flight, but veils and fading ornaments. They trudged through the dark, and a slow, quiet weakening spread among them. It was more than physical. It touched their spirit, their way of life—even their blood. Their wings lost their shimmer, and decay began to whisper through their lineage.

One truth became clear: the Vicoose Stone was not just a relic. It was sacred—a living force they needed to survive. It had to be revered by the centuries to come, or the careless hands of youth would doom it and the lives of the Umbrahael. Behind it, always, came the din—the unholy shrieks, the fevered scratching of the brood it held at bay. It was less a shield than a covenant. And the price of breaking it was written in claw and poison. Even the smallest fracture—a chip, a hairline crack—could unleash a genocidal plague. In moments, the Umbrahael would not fall in battle. They would vanish.

So harsh was the religion on the young that those children who dared show irreverence, who questioned or strayed, were brutalized with the harshest stones. And it was by this cruelty—this deliberate breaking—that they survived. Winged things meant for the open sky, sunlight were chained to the darkest moments within the earth. Yes, of course they needed to survive. Those who most do not know what they should fear the most.

Above, in the sunlit basin of the Nile, the centuries went on. The Egyptians ruled the Nile, the Umbrahael had once inhabited the skies. They constructed obelisks, deified their rulers, and omitted all reference to what had been forced underground.

“I am also an expert in ancient Egyptian history. So please enlighten us, this took place during the empire’s height, which was...?”

“Between 1550 and 1070 BC,” Catalano answers smoothly, without missing a beat.

He gestures toward a series of statues.

“It was Egypt’s golden age. Akhenaten’s monotheistic revolution—the worship of Aten—was brief but seismic. A radical break from tradition. But after his death, the old gods returned. Egypt slipped back into polytheism.”

“From 1070 to 664 BC, the empire fractured. Power was divided—internal dynasties fought for control, and foreign invaders like the Nubians and Libyans carved out influence. The priesthood, especially in Thebes, grew monstrously powerful. Egypt struggled with internal division and external threats. It briefly regained strength before falling to the Persians, and later the Greeks.

Around 332 BC, Alexander the Great conquered Egypt, ushering in the Hellenistic era. The land of the Nile became a kingdom under the rule of the Ptolemies, a Macedonian dynasty cloaked in pharaonic rites. Cleopatra VII, last of their line, reigned as Egypt’s final queen.

With her death, Egypt fell to Rome—and with her, perished the last embers of that cultural vanity which once defied the Umbrahael.

While Egypt contended with threats both within and beyond its

borders, the Umbrahael survived—grimly, but without extinction. They were never made for the caves, yet they adapted, even flourished under conditions that would have broken others.

Though the end of Ancient Egypt is often marked at 30 BC, with its rituals, pride, and memory subsumed by foreign rule, the Umbrahael persisted. Long after Egypt fell, through the rise of Rome and later the dominion of the British Empire, they remained hidden in their caverns, untouched by the tides of empire.

Until one day Ipzil, son of Senazul Dal-Caver was born.

From the moment of his birth, it was clear—this child was unlike any other. He made no cry, not even the first instinctive wail that marks a newborn’s arrival. He was silent. He never spoke, not once. And even as an infant, he didn’t fuss or stir. He simply watched.

“He was Umbrahael by blood, but in soul, something else—something broken, or maybe better, a consequence of centuries of life now,

As a child he seemed an  
aimless cloud drifting from one  
another, his gaze always  
upward—toward the great torches,  
toward the jagged ceiling.

The Umbrahael had a tradition  
of testing for the children's piety.  
When the age of Divinity aligned  
with what might have been his sixth  
or seventh year—the age when  
Umbrahael fathers were charged  
with passing down the sacred terror  
of the Vicoose Stone.

Words had failed to touch  
Ipzil. So he turned to ritual.

Among the Umbrahael it was  
said: if a child does not flinch at the  
name of the Stone, the lash must  
teach him its meaning. Senazul had  
no taste for cruelty, but he believed  
in history. And history, he knew, had  
never flinched from cruelty.

So he struck.

"Once."

"Twice."

"Third time the hardest."

But nothing moved him to speak.

When the time came for  
Senazul to present his son before the

Ilrazeem—a tribunal of priests he  
understood precisely what was at  
stake. The trial was never just for  
Ipzil. It was a judgment of love  
between mother, father and son.  
Should the boy falter—through  
indifference, through flaw—the  
sentence would not stop with him. It  
would fall on Senazul and Jenina  
alike. Such was the law of the  
Ilrazeem: justice, cold and  
impersonal, Ipzil's disorder would  
become their death.

In desperation, Senazul wove  
a lie.

He told the priests the boy  
had been struck silent by the  
sanctity of the Vicoose Stone. That a  
single glance had overwhelmed him.  
That silence was not resistance, but  
revelation.

He turned mute, Senazul said,  
because the holiness of the stone felt  
to him, as

Ipzil stood before the  
Ilrazeem, where the Vicoose Stone  
hovered—a moon of death  
suspended in stillness.

His body held unnaturally  
still—not like a child, but like a statue  
awaiting its sculptor's first wound.

The eyes, once adrift—languid  
as smoke trailing through

shadow—now found their axis.

They brightened.

His pupils widened—twin eclipses blooming in tandem—as though some buried instinct had stirred, some beast long dormant rising to stalk a sacred, motionless prey.

Then, with terrible certainty, his gaze locked onto the Vicosé Stone.

And did not waver.

Without warning, a priest's hand broke the stillness and struck Ipzil across the face. The sound cracked through the cave, echoing down its deepest corridors.

Senazul flinched, feeling his son's pain. The blow was harder than

But Ipzil did not move.

His head remained turned toward the Stone. His gaze stayed fixed—steady, expressionless, untouched by pain. As if nothing in the outer world could reach him now.

The priests studied the boy's face as one might study a mask—searching for cracks, for something beneath the surface. For a moment, something passed across

his expression—faint, uncertain, unnamed.

The second blow came quickly.

Louder.

Sharper.

A sound that tore through the silence like a seam ripped open.

Ipzil staggered. His body lurched, but his knees held.

He did not recover like a child summoning strength, but like something recalling its form.

His spine straightened. His chin rose.

No tears. No trembling.  
Only the same fixed gaze.

Silence.

They also searched his body for any damages or scars, but

After the trial Ilrazeem spoke. They named him trustworthy. Anointed him, not merely as a reverent child, a candidate for priesthood. A guardian.

Senazul's heart surged with joy—so sudden, so immense, it felt almost unbearable. He could scarcely contain himself, already rehearsing

how he would tell Jenina of Ipzil's report.

When they returned home, Jenina collapsed into tears of overwhelming relief. She pulled Ipzil into her arms, cradling him tightly against her chest as though to shield him from the past. Her fingers trembled as they threaded gently through his hair. She kissed his cheeks again and again, her lips unsteady with gratitude.

"My son..." she whispered between sobs. "They say he is not broken. They say he may become one of them. A sacred one—that's why he is as he is."

Bless him and his condition.

Among the Umbrahael, the females bore wings far more magnificent than those of the males, though their full splendor remained hidden until the rarest of moments. A female's wings unfurled to their true span only in the presence of deep calm—when love took root and the instinct to protect grew quiet and certain. In such a moment, Jenina's wings became vast beyond belief—so wide, so fluid in their grace, that she could wrap both Ipzil and Senazul within them, not as a shield, but as an offering.

In the years that followed, Ipzil slipped back into the rhythms of Umbrahael life. His days were filled with quiet repetition, learning under the watchful eyes of both Senazul and Jenina. Most of his education centered around mastering the ancient Egyptian language—a tradition carried forward with little purpose beyond its own preservation. For Ipzil, it was another task, another routine. He simply moved through life much as he always had: silently, dutifully, and without question.

And so, the parents bore silent witness to their son's peculiar hunger, a hunger that echoed a deeper hunger for meaning—one that might one day lift him beyond the confines of the caves and into the hallowed ranks of the Ilrazeem.

Unlike the rest of the Umbrahael, Ipzil chose to stay away from those of his peers. He had nothing to say, and even if he did, how would he say it?

As Ipzil aged, Senazul caught him staring into torches for longer than he did as a child. How insidious was this trance, Senazul thought. Was Ipzil developing the deep spiritual connection with the



Vicose Stone—like the rest of the Umbrahael or was there something more sinister under this new obsession? Senazul kept watch more closely now—closer than ever. The pride with something colder, something Mistrust. It gnawed at him in quiet moments and gripped harder each time Ipzil vanished for too long.

Ipzil was planning something dangerous.

Then came the moment. He found Ipzil hunched over an old mining cleaver that he had been sharpening, his eyes kept drifting back and forth at the great Temple where the most where the stone's most fragile to the sealed mouth that led deep into the heart of the Vicose stone. Each glance lingered too long. And as the edge grew sharper, so did Ipzil's eyes. He wasn't just focused—he was hungry on the idea of what came next. Senazul had grown more watchful than ever. Although the Pride of the Ilrazeem's praise still lived in his chest, there still lingered a doubt. The doubt came from a part of his heart coming from the memory of his lies. Ipzil was not struck with awe. No— that was Senazul's lie. Something in his son's eyes had changed. It wasn't just

the silence anymore. It was the way he moved, the way he looked at things—especially the Temple. Senazul couldn't say why, but he felt it in his bones: Ipzil was planning something. Something reckless. Something dangerous.

Then, one day, the feeling was confirmed.

And then, after long weeks—months, perhaps—when the blade was honed to his liking, Ipzil rose.

He gripped the weapon in both hands and rushed towards the sacred route, which was off limits unless it was to see the Ilrazeem for moments testing.

Senazul did not let him get far.

Senazul's wings were not yet developed. He could barely launch

He caught Ipzil mid-flight, striking him down with a sweep of his powerful wings. Before Ipzil could recover, Senazul seized the cleaver from his hands and shattered it—once with his fists, then again beneath the weight of his wings. The metal cracked and scattered, its shards skittering across the stone floor like fallen stars.

Ipzil roared. He lunged at his father with wild fury, his strength now frightening, almost equal to Senazul's, but not so yet. Senazul prevailed. With a final, forceful heave, he drove Ipzil to the ground and pinned him there. The rock trembled beneath them.

As Ipzil laid subdued, he wriggled around, his eyes still pointed, with a lustful hunger to do as he hoped.

Senazul felt Ipzil growing stronger. At last Ipzil broke free, but before he could get away he flapped over with this wings, threw him off balance, he stepped on Ipzil's back, and with the torch burned him the back.

The flame hissed on this But almost at once, a sickness rose in him.

It was not physical, though it stole the breath from his lungs—it was a spiritual corrosion, swift and sour. His hand, the very hand that had once rocked Ipzil through fevered dreams and infancy's tremors, had become a vector of cruelty. The realization struck him not as melodrama, but as a truth stripped of illusion. This was not

discipline. It was desecration—quiet, irreversible.

Ipzil's body slackened. His limbs fell to stillness with the weightless finality of surrender.

For a moment—brief and terrible—Senazul allowed himself to believe that it had worked. That violence, in its most refined and wretched form, had driven the darkness out. That through sheer force of paternal will, he had wrested his son from the brink.

But beneath the silence, something remained. Watching. Waiting. Untouched by fire.

But then Ipzil stirred.

His fingers twitched. His eyes opened. Not in submission — but in rapture.

Senazul staggered back as Ipzil rose from the dust, slowly, deliberately. The charred edge of his skin shimmered in the torchlight. He plucked the flame from his father's grasp as though reclaiming something sacred, then held it to, running his hand through the fire with a lover's intimacy. There was no scream.

A ticklish grin spread across Ipzil's face. The pain, Senazul realized, had not broken him — it had awakened something. Twisted pleasure bloomed where agony should have taken root. The torch was no longer punishment. It was an invitation.

Ipzil had found something in pain—a strange kind of language written in fire and sensation. The burns didn't just hurt him; they seemed to reach something inside, speaking quietly rather than shouting. Each mark was like a small message, a pattern he was learning to read.

He was no longer just exploring sensation — he was courting it. Devoting himself to it. Like a poet lost in the body of a muse, he would learn every language of suffering. Fire was just the first kiss.

The sight of his own son writhing in agony, his skin blistering under the intense heat, quickly curdled Senazul's blood. It was the first time he'd ever seen an expression in his son's expressionless face. A bitter remorse washed over him. He had intended to punish, not scar. The

first look he hoped to see in his son was happiness. At last he saw the first facial of his son. He thought he stirred his son to life, that the pain would be a lesson, a deterrent, as it should have been in his childhood.

But the fire had ignited something else in Ipzil. Instead of cowering, instead of breaking, Ipzil's pupil's widened, a strange, orgasmic expression replacing the terror. The searing pain, he realized with a sickening dread, seemed to bring him a perverse pleasure instead, a kind of bliss. It was as if the flames were not burning him, but rather, caressing him, awakening some dormant pleasure.

Ipzil rose slowly, the motion almost fluid, unnatural. He reached out and snatched the burning torch from Senazul's hand like a starving dog

Then, without hesitation, he dragged his hand through the flames.

There was no scream. No flinch. Only a shudder—of pleasure.

To him, the fire wasn't torment. It was a relief. Like dipping his skin into a cool, cleansing mist.

What Senazul had wielded as punishment had become something else entirely. A revelation. A gateway.

The torch was no longer a tool of discipline—it was a chalice, offering a forbidden intoxication.

More pain.  
More *feeling*.

Ipzil turned away the Vicose Stone and wandered farther into the unseen corridors of himself, clutching his strange torch of pleasure. What began as a flicker soon became a compulsion: the pursuit of pain, not as punishment, but as promise. He sought out sharper means, deeper wounds slicing himself with sharp stone, branding himself with smoldering coals—each act a sacrament of sensation. He was not merely enduring agony; he was chasing it, inviting it. No doubt, it was love, though not the kind sung in hymns or whispered between lovers. It was darker, more possessive. And yet, perhaps it was not so different from falling in love with a woman. The longing, the surrender, the unreasoning need—they were all there.

One day, as Ipzil wandered the quiet breadth of the Umbrahael graveyard he found himself struck upon a boy. Eriah, small and knelt in the brittle grass, clutched his father's lifeless hand as if it might still return his grip. His sobbing was light and yet, its tempo hit hard.

Ipzil stood at a distance, silent, unmoving.

He had seen mourning before—wails, laments, the grand shows of loss. But this was different. These were not tears of parting; they were tears of belief, shed not in resignation, but in fragile hope. This boy was not pleading with death—he was expecting an answer. That was what struck Ipzil: the absurd, unprotected belief that the world might reverse itself for love.

The sight fixed itself in him. The swollen eyes, the trembling limbs, the soft repetitions of a name now meaningless in time. This, he thought, was not merely grief—it was something rarer. It was a child weeping for resurrection. The kind of pain that still believed in its own miracle.

And for a moment, Ipzil envied him.

This, he realized, was the sensation he had been chasing. Now no longer the childish pain alone, but the agony of the heart.

You see, tears shed for resurrection are not the same as those shed for death. Ipzil could feel it in the air—Eriah's grief was a substance, a desperate kind of suffering that cut deeper than mere loss.

As the child wept over his father's body, Ipzil knew somewhere in the origin of those tears, the key to his most profound pleasure .

For years, he had dwelled alone in the cave, untouched by the world, devoured by his own unnatural cravings. Silence and his own panting and moaning were the echoes surrounding. had been his companion, and the dark, his sanctuary. But something dark changed. A spiritual hunger stirred—twisting, growing, impossible to ignore.

He would return home to find that burning hunger.

When he finally stepped across the threshold, he found his mother planting the maidenhair fern, the most abundant and beloved plant

of the cave. around the hut of their home. her frail hands gently arranging tiny glittering stones that stuck against the walls like external decor with mud.

A sound of footsteps behind, she felt a loom approaching. It's too early for Senazul to be back from his duties to the Ilrazeem. She turned back.

Standing before him, as Ipzil returned home, his mother's eyes were filled with heartbreak as she took in the sight of him—his once-handsome face now a swollen mask chiseled by wounds and abuse likely self-inflicted. His body was a canvas of scars, each a testament.

But in the stillness, something subtle shifted. In that fragile instant, Ipzil moved toward her—not as the boy who had vanished into shadows, but as something altogether other: a creature carved from longing and helplessness, bearing a vulnerability she had never glimpsed in her son.

With a trembling awkwardness that seemed to twist itself inside him, he reached out. His hands, unsteady and searching, sought to hold her—to reclaim the warmth of a touch long denied.

He tried to echo a memory—the embrace of the boy who once held his brother before consigning him to the bottomless dark of the cave. It was a gesture he thought he understood, but one he had never truly known.

His mother froze in thought. For a long time, neither moved. They both stared at each other. Then, as if her own sorrow had finally broken free, spread her eyes. Ipzil approached slowly, it was their first connection, Jenina never felt a connection with her child, as with anyone in a sphere of family, there is always a radiance of love, with a fragile and hesitant exchange, the space between them filled with years of loss and unspoken grief.

But the softness didn't last. As her tears dried, the silence settled around them, thick and suffocating. Without warning, something darker, something deep and unbidden, surged within Ipzil. His embrace found its way crawling up his mothers arms slowly finding itself gripping itself his mothers throat. The grip tightened around her throat, a sudden and violent force surging through him. He threw her down, holding her there, watching the life drain from her eyes. Her

struggles grew weaker, her breath faltering, the greater he struggled the more hiccups of pleasure Ipzil felt crawling into his heart. The feeling that washed over him was beyond imagination. It was the feeling of love. He'd felt love for the first time—a pleasure that filled the hollow parts of him, making the flames and puncture wounds a fleeting pleasure, like scratching an itch at most. The pleasure left him with a sense of fulfillment that transcended flesh, as if he had reached some deeper truth about himself, a satisfaction he hadn't known he was seeking.

As Ipzil sat in pleasure Senazul returned home from his duties, he was greeted by a foul odor emanating from the family temple room. With a light foot, he tiptoed into the house, hearing only a gnawing sound, like a biting and chewing. And a snap and pop. falling upon the gruesome image of Ipzil kneeling over his wife's bloody dismembered body. Fury possessed Senazul. He toppled and struck Ipzil with all his might. However, Ipzil's body and strength was impossible to overcome. Pain, again, brought him more pleasure than harm. With the last bit of energy Senazul could muster, he dragged himself over to

his wife and kissed her bloody lips, and severed head until Ipzil conquered his fatigued and defeated his father, mutilated, and tore Senazul apart into pieces, ripping each wing off, each arm, each leg with equal thrill. With a new passion, Ipzil found the depth of purpose in murder and concluded that the key to a fulfilling life was now to kill in as violent a fashion as he could imagine, this was his new flame. Alas, Ipzil knew no amount of pleasure from a slaughter would ever compare to the violence he just committed towards his father and mother.

“What now then? Who to kill? Ipzil imagined himself now going on a rampage. Door to door, killing and dismembering the Umbrahael like they are rats in a cave. A murder spree, to each Umbrahael and strangling each of them. It was to be a festival, but he reconsidered the act. He realized that killing them one-by-one was more work than fun. To torture and kill each of them, rather than kill so quickly? How much solidarity did he feel with the Umbrahael? Were he to kill all the Umbrahael, might that give him a similar thrill?” Ipzil’s father Senazul was, perhaps, the only one who had the strength and wit to protect the stone from her son, but with no one

else protecting the stone, he knew precisely how to answer the gruesome question. Genocide. To kill them all at once is the thrill he needed. The priests who guarded the Stone had no chance to fend off Ipzil. Perhaps, among all the Umbrahael, he was the strongest. When Ipzil reached the temple of the Ilrazeem, they saw the sinister eyes of Ipzil, like never before. With the high priest remembering the dead eyes of Ipzil, now ablaze. They each covered each other.

Ipzil tore through each of the Ilrazeem guardians with an intensity that bordered on madness, his fury and need for destruction driving him forward without mercy. His movements were savage—blows struck with such force and precision that there was no resistance, no opposition to his cruelty. They fell, one after another, their bodies crumpling under his relentless assault. The air around him crackled with tension, as if the very atmosphere recoiled from the bloodshed.

With each fallen guardian, his heart pounded harder, louder, as the sacred stone drew closer, its presence like a magnet, pulling him toward it. Finally, he reached it—the holiest, most vulnerable part of the

stone. The sacred core that had been untouched for centuries. A deep thrill raised him and with the entirety of his strength he swung. The metal hit the stone with a deafening *clang*—a sound like a war horn. The impact reverberated through the cavern, shaking the very ground beneath him. Again. Again. Each swing rang out, a violent rhythm, until the stone saw to crack, slowly at first, then with greater urgency, as though the stone itself was screaming in protest. The noise, it's said, was like a great bell announcing the beginning of the end. The air was filled with the screeching of bats, their shrieks growing louder, more frantic as they poured out from the jagged cracked hole of Ipzil's hammering. A flood of creatures followed—reptiles, insects, twisted and contorted, tumbling out of the broken stone like a swarm of writhing nightmares. They surged toward him, their bodies crashing over one another, a living flood of hunger and chaos.

They came at him like a storm, relentless and overwhelming, rushing at the Umbrahael with an intensity that matched his own—an unstoppable force



## The Story of Ipzil & Cyra

### Love at First Sight

"A tragic story like that of Ipzil must have a happy ending or life has no meaning does it." Said Luca.

"Happy Ending?"

"I suppose so, says Catalano."

"Against all odds, survived the relentless attack. The epitome of injustice for a people who suffered enough at their own hands."

"If there were ever a creature who deserves to die, this Ipzil is certainly the first on the list," said Luca shaking his head in disbelief.

Justice doesn't work that way, for as long as life has taught me it does, is it Don Catalano?"

Lisandra turns to Hamil with horror.

"That which kills them kills me, but Ipzil, never saw himself as an Umbrahael, and so never thought himself a blood relation among them."

Ipzil survived on whatever vile, twisted life forms he could scavenge from the depths of the Umbrahael cave—rats, insects, things that skittered and squirmed in the dark, no matter how foul or disease-ridden. Hunger gnawed at him constantly, a savage, unrelenting force that drove him deeper into the shadows, where only the smallest, most repulsive creatures dared to thrive. He hunted them with a brutal efficiency honed by years of isolation, each kill offering a fleeting moment of relief—a brief silence in the hollow ache that had become his only companion.

Long ago, the ancient Egyptians drove his people into hiding, forcing them beneath the earth, into darkness and silence. But now, after centuries of retreat, Ipzil walked where no Umbrahael had dared in millennia—into their rightful home: the world above.

He was no longer the creature bound by ancient laws of hunger and fear. He was the first of his kind to cross the cave's threshold, to leave behind the shadowed womb of the earth. It took more than courage—it demanded longing, defiance, and

the will to reclaim what had been lost.

For the first few months, Ipzil marveled at the sands of the beach, entranced by the rise and fall of the sun. Even in rain and thunder, he stood motionless, mesmerized by the elements. The memories of the caves faded with each passing moment, and his face—once marked by bruises and burns—healed swiftly beneath the sun's warmth. His rapid recovery did not go unnoticed, especially by the ever-watchful, covetous descendants of the Egyptians.

"All of it changed his life. The pleasure of self-immolation and the rush of pain and a desire for self-mutilation was a thing of the past. Ipzil felt an aching desire to fly up into the clouds, the top of trees, but his broken wings were no longer able. To reach as close as he could to the clouds, but Ipzil To think! There may have been a time He could once upon a time reach heights with his wings."

"One day, as he wandered along the empty shore, the air heavy with salt and silence, a distant voice brushed against his ears. It was a sound unusual enough to stop him

mid-step—a thread of life in the vast quiet. Instinctively, his fingers curled around a sharp, jagged stone, a crude weapon born of a violent thirst and new suspicion. Ipzil braced himself, expecting to see one of his people. "

He had learned to recognize the shapes of his own kind from afar—the pale, long-winged figures of the Umbrahael, their skin like drained parchment, their movements slow and deliberate. Faces marked by cold indifference and a quiet, relentless vigilance. He hated them in a way that was both simple and profound, a resentment bred of loneliness and exile.

But as his eyes adjusted and the figure before him came into focus. It was a young woman, Cyra, wandering into the beaches, standing in the sunlight, her body glowing with the warmth of the day, a stark contrast to the cold, pale skin of the Umbrahael. Her skin, a rich bronze, shimmered under the sun, kissed by its golden rays, and auburn freckles dotted her cheeks, each one a tiny mark of nature's brush. Her long, dropped like, soft and glossy like silk that seemed to shimmer with every movement.

To Ipzil, she was the very essence of this world above. She was everything that was not below. The sky, the warmth—everything he had longed for, condensed into one walking being.

To Ipzil, Cyra was no Umbrahael, the lack of wings made her chest seem smaller. Petite, and warm, unimposing. Cyra was no Umbrahael. She was something different, something that seemed too vibrant, too alive for his world.

Cyra's story is a sad tale too. On her father's ship, it washed ashore from a sunken ship, and ended up drifting into the island. Landing closely. Cyra was a young Persian woman, a remnant of the Persian empire, whose presence on this island felt like his breath caught in his chest. In that moment, as he watched her from a distance, something he'd never felt before. A feeling of one might say, love at first sight.

Cyra sat in grief, her eyes fixed on the wreckage of her father's ship, tears tracing silent paths down her cheeks. Ipzil remained nearby, still and watchful. He didn't move, even as she slept.

Days may have passed. He stayed, witnessing her suffering.

The taste of sorrow, once rich and intoxicating, changed. Her pain stirred something deeper in him—a slow, heavy melancholy. As he watched, a new feeling grew, unfamiliar yet undeniable. He wanted to help her.

Long ago, a young boy had cried for his father, and Ipzil had only stared. But now, as he watched Cyra, tears welled in his own eyes. Someone so beautiful, carrying so much sorrow—something inside him ached.

After a few months, Ipzil knew that Cyra was to have children. He felt proud and eager to be a father. When the time came, Ipzil took Cyra to the beach where they first met and sat by her womb, awaiting the infants' arrival. But to his surprise, they weren't having just one child, but three at once. His pride multiplied as he pulled each from Cyra's womb.

Once the first cry struck, Ipzil cradled the newborn tenderly and placed him on a soft bed of fragrant flowers and leaves. The baby's cries were a symphony of life, filling Ipzil's heart. Beside the

firstborn, a baby girl entered the world, her cries even more spirited than her siblings, further delighting Ipzil. He gently laid her next to her brother, marveling at the sweetness of their voices, reminiscent of their mother Cyra. Their skin sparkled with a golden bronze tan like hers.

Cyra lay on her back, her gaze fixated on Ipzil's. Feeling an inexplicable draw, she inched closer to him. Yet, as she approached, an unsettling feeling washed over her. Instinctively, she backed away from Ipzil, her fear growing as she watched him. The third child, lying still, seemed disaffected by the world around them. However, before turning to welcome the final child, Ipzil noticed something unsettling. The third child had jet-black hair like him, and bore a striking resemblance to his father, Senazul—one arm larger than the other. Hint of a wing peeking out of the back.

A haunting déjà struck when the third child finally let out a cry. Ipzil's eyes filled with love and tenderness. Yet, a terrible idea took hold of him. In a disturbing twist Ipzil said that by consuming his children, he could somehow reach the depths of his womb.

Ipzil, consumed by his madness, took the newborn and bit the child, starting at the throat, draining it of life. He then turned to the young girl and did the same, still feeling no change within himself, he continued his horrific feast on his children.

## Woozy With Hygeia

### Time to go Home

A loud moist bubbling sound interrupts the long story of the Umbrahael. Each continues to marvel at the long wing, Hamil, Lisandra and Catalano turn to Luca.

"Humph." Luca grabs his stomach.

"Don Catalano Is there a toilet nearby, somewhere?" Asks Luca, his face sweaty and pale. I need to freshen up."

"Yes, of course, " said Don Catalano."

"Right over there, at the door."

"Thank you." Says Luca.

Luca dashes down the corridor towards the restroom.

Hamil, Lisandra, and Catalano watch on as Luca rushes off.

Just as he opens the door, he lunges over the toilet.

"Deep from Luca's belly rises a stew of human bile and

half-digested food. The vomit exploded and splattered making the toilet bubble like molten lava in a volcano. A loud yell echoes through the hollow chambers. The three could hear his hurling.

"I hope he's ok, " says Lisandra.

Luca sat on the floor of the large, lavish bathroom, polished in marble and gold.

Water trickles from running water spilling out the hands of a statue of the Greek goddess Hygeia.

"Cleanse me dear goddess. Cleanse me."

Luca takes a sip and swooshes the water then spits it back into the toilet.

Luca grows lachrymose as he stares into her mythical eyes.

"I've never felt so sick in the gut."

"My most blessed apologies, Hygieia." Luca kisses the perfectly carved marble of the statue. He shakes his head then heads back to the group.

They all stand, watching him, he grows more exhausted as he approaches the three.

"I don't know if I can stay here any longer."

Maybe Lavarenti is right. Some stories should be forbidden. I feel my innards slithering around like a Yaret. For someone like me that is a rare thing."

"Welcome to stay. Welcome to go."

"As you please." Says Catalano.

"I'm definitely going back, said Luca. I need some dramamine or pepto, or both. "

"We need to go back to the hotel. Wait for Alil. I fear someone might get a little too curious."

"Right."

"But if we were to come back alone, is it only through Captain Meinhardt?"

"For now. Yes."

Lisandra agrees. I think we should come back when Alil arrives."

Now we return to New York.

"Let's"

"Alright."

"Let's get going."

"It was a pleasure meeting you Father Catalano."

"Likewise," Catalano Bows.

"As Hamil, Lisandra, and Luca step back on board of Gluck. Yes, It's time to return to New York and wait for Alil."

"Once you come back, again, contact Captain Meinhardt. He'll bring you over on the boat."

Luca pulls out a cigarette in a case.

"Would you all like one?"

"Will do."

"Damyan, I'll need to go home at once."

"You are welcome to stay at my studio."

"If Damyan could just drop us off, at the hotel, we'd be glad to sit around."

"Or you Luca, if you like, we can leave later. You look a little sick.

"There is something odd going on with that baptistry that doesn't make sense. It makes all the sense but not.

"So that's what Lavarenti and Alil did. What those three wanted to do was conquer the world with this syncretic. No no. Not unite the world, but conquer the world. These three old men conquering the world. Sure. That'll happen. Good luck."

Just then he thinks about Hamil, and Lisandra... oh no.

"Oh no."

"They have wealth. The beauty, the brains"

"They have the Prophet."

"But the conquerors..."

"Impossible."

But tell us Don Catalano,

All of this, so quiet, not one person is here from what I see.. Has never been here.

What is the purpose

"Alil, Lavarenti, and I have a grand vision: We aim to unite humanity under a single religion and nationality for believers and non-believers. A syncretic that weaves together the fabric of the god, gods, and godless creating a matrix of spirituality and science that supersedes the wisdom of all other religions on this planet."

"I'm sure that was a focus too at some point. There is nothing new about religion, and it took the sword to move people once the concept came to light."

While Lucas Hamil recalls the conversation about the mosque in Hama.

"Catalano, his voice fills with excitement, this is nothing new, " said Catalano, it's just a matter of timing. You can see examples of this in the statues of Hermanubis, Constantine's divine Jesus, Sikhism, Santeria, and Pantheism. All of these syncretics are."

"No sir. This is nothing new, but for it to happen, it must be in tandem with the spirit of the era and the spirit of man."

Luca, Lisandra, and Hamil stand in awe.

“By creating this colossal religion, all conflicts plaguing the spirit of humanity will cease.”

“Among those is someone who can help us. Hand out the truth of this. Someone who could bridge the gaps in thought.” His eyes sparkle with the possibilities, envisioning a future. At the same time, something is missing from the equation. This vision requires something more substantial – a unifying figure that everyone could believe in.

Luca interrupts Catalano just say Catalano, you are looking for a prophet. A living embodiment of divinity, or who?”

Catalano reads aloud,

“What is most important to a non-believer?

What are chemical substances that unite everyone in the Universe?

"Oxygen, Carbon, Hydrogen, and Nitrogen."

“Not only does everyone have the same spirit, but also the same body. To be a religious one must hold these substances on earth as

they hold a rosary, or tasbihs. A unity of the mind, body, and everything in the world: the spirit, the mind, the body are healthy within ourselves and in the sum of all the gods. The final syncretic is what you see here.”



## Forbidden For a Reason

Luca arrives at his apartment dragging his feet. His hips ache from standing longer than he ever has in his life. His neck is in pain from glaring around a great temple certainly built by Catalano, Lavarenti, and Alil.

"Can you help me into the apartment Damyan Bello? I might need some Dramamine and I how hate the scent of medicine cabinet"

"Of course," said Damyan softly.

"They pull up in front of Luca's studio apartment. Damyan parks the car in the parking lot of the studio, and helps Luca out of his car like he'd broken his foot."

As they reach the door, Damyan rests Luca onto the couch like a wounded child.

Luca stumbles past the mirror, barely looking at his own reflection. The air feels heavy, thick with silence. A dim light flickers above, casting weak shadows across the room. He looks around. The statues he once admired now seem ugly, awkward, almost cruel in their

plainness. What he used to call art now feels like a mistake—cheap, broken, and empty. Each piece reminds him of how wrong he was, how far beauty has fallen into something lifeless and false.

Damyan you should have seen the interior of this building. "This is the most beautiful religious structure I've ever seen. It dwarfs the Basilica of Sacré-Cœur's with its soaring arches. No one builds like this anymore.

"The incomparable depth of structure, magnificence, wonder." That is not a building, that is a breathing building. A hidden castle with a beating heart. A soul.

This one might quite possibly be the most creative hallowed of all things for years to come. Ever for the rest of humanity."

"Absolute Genius." Says Luca, lying on his couch.

Luca, turns his head over to the painting of Lisandra. His stomach growls. Still in pain, he limps over to the painting of Lisandra and smiles, but it quickly turns into a frown.

This and only this I prize.  
Luca says in a tired tone.

Luca kicks the painting  
knocking the easel over then  
stomping on it until it is torn and  
smashed to pieces.

"What have I done?" Luca's  
heart was pounding, the pupils of  
his eyes dilated, the hair on his  
arms stood.

Damyan runs into the room  
bothered by the clatter.

"Oh. My. God."

Luca falls to his knees then  
lays atop his destroyed painting.

"What have I done?" He cries  
out to Damyan.

"Cast me into hellfire." Says  
Luca curled by the remnants of his  
favorite work.

"He lays down on the  
fragments of the painting on the  
floor."

"My beautiful *Sirene of Scars*."

"But why Luca? Why would  
you?"

"Because."

"What I've seen."

"What I've heard."

"What was it?" said Damyan."

"It was... perfect."

"As rich as I am, I'll never be  
able to afford a creation like the  
Baptistry, to paint it, to design, to  
celebrate as a domicile so holy. To  
make it my home.

"What hellish stories, I've  
been told by Damyan."

"Best if I had stayed in the  
car with you now that I think of it."

Luca rushes to his bathroom,  
sick to his gut, then hears a voice in  
his head.

"Beware of false prophets  
who disguise their will as altruism.  
Those wielding power to seek  
manipulation.

To conquer.

To subjugate.

What fuels their appetite for  
conquest?

Why?

Indubitably a thirst for tyranny. The good wish to conquer and abolish suffering, an important part of my existence.

My friends. Such beautiful friends.

"Are they friends?"

"Friends? Hah! They conspire.

I warn, to a friend who offers nothing but trust—he is a peasant whose only currency is praise. A slight odor of dissent. Either he will apologize and give alms yet again as one who praises, or he moves to find another friend, one who accepts praise and trust as gold."

"In many cases, the scar from the lashing has bloodied him to a vulgar darkness. Who needs a bloodied dismembered peasant waving back? This old friend is now scarred or dismembered, praise is less meaningful."

"What are you talking about?" Damyan replies confusedly.

"I loved you more than anyone else."

"What are these powerful old men really up to?"

Luca begins to research Alil, Catalano and Lavarenti further.

What do they have in common besides being rich, powerful, and crazy?

The Bloodline. Each one has some scheme. I smell it emanating.

Are these old men trying to conquer the world starting with America?

"But how."

"Three old men and what army."

"Luca gets flashbacks to his conversation with Catalano. Stuck at a moment of one of the most shocking moments.

"...Why?" Are those really men with wings? For god's sake, unbelievable. We have genetic testing, and marvelous science to understand this extinct creature..."

"My god. Those winged indestructible angels."

It was in the moment of his search, he began to revise his own thoughts. Did anything stick out?

Old men on the verge of becoming fossils. What are the big secret elder priests? What am I missing?

Will they grow followers, so deep, and that they plan to absorb the planet with lost souls. Convert some. Archaeologists to the point of zealotry.

Luca scratches his head, lays down on the floor.

Luca's eyes light up. I must leave.

He goes to the rooftop, to stare outside, the balcony, trying to rekindle an emotional state that lets him follow a new passion, and become a new born artist. The once grand extravagant largesse of the city, with its skyscrapers, each seemingly a poetic beauty of the skyline. He spreads his arms and imagines himself with wings. The wind blows his hair back. The beauty of his existence the wealth he created, all of it,

"He whispers to himself

"Umbraheal."

With one step as though he might jump off.

"What a creature."

"Pity" they no longer exist.

"They aren't extinct are they."

"How could I be so foolish."

He starts to remember.

"But it has never been open to the public."

No one knows what happened to Lavarenti. I was quite interested in becoming a member of the congregation if there was one, but it was completely abandoned.

Catalano, I don't know if you realize this but people have been squabbling over whose god is more powerful, logical, or truer for centuries, how is this any different?

"When they all stand before Zeus and Jesus there will be a mutiny in the blink of an eye as opposed to centuries of hateful destruction."

"I can't wait to get back home."

Can you believe what would happen? One Ruler. One

Pope. One Moral King? One religion. How long will this last without some tyranny?

You wish to resurrect a world of banned books. *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*, Who will deny the world of Madame Bovary?

But If I were to believe. And be part of a unity, what level of joy, and yet, what level of misery will change this? What dissonance in belief and nonbelief is being concocted here?

"Was it a religion for all and none? Does this make sense? It does and does not. It's beautiful. It is a masterpiece of abomination. I want to become a part of it, but I know it won't happen."

What would it be to be blasphemous under this new belief structure by Alil, Lavarenti, and Catalano? To be just as united, in the structure, such that the potency of this unity makes me a wise member of the structure.

The Genius within.

Oh goodness gracious.

What would it take to be thrown into the sea?

Another religion to overtake this one.

What religion? What kind of religion... with no followers?

Everyone has their own religious identity. Destroying every god is what it seems to me now, not creating one under many.

These three don't want to bring people together.

They want to kill god. Create a new one. That I cannot let them do.

Researching Luca searches the history of the three men. They are not trying to do this noble thing. They plan to restart the Roman Empire.

"Remember—no madness. Not here. Not me. I know what madness is—oh, I've seen it: frothing, smiling, certain. I am not that. I doubt it. Doubt is the great crown of sanity."

He unscrews a flask, flings cold water into his own face, gasping like a swimmer from a dream.

"Yes, yes—any fool can doubt science, tear it to rags and call it

wisdom. But this—this I cannot doubt. Not now. Not here. Because this is no simple thought, no idle law of physics. This is a symphony of truth. And truth—truth cannot be halved without killing it."

"To doubt this... would be to murder it. Silence it. Erase a thing that should not be erased. No god, no wretch crawling on their belly in the dust, should be denied the truth—whether they beg for it or not."

"Insane? Ha! I say that word to myself only to remain clean. Sterile. Clinical. Cartesian. One must dissect the mind to keep it from festering."

"So I will pretend. Yes, I will pretend not to know. That's how sanity survives now—masquerading. Feigning ignorance while keeping the knife behind the back. False doubt... is a strategy. A camouflage."

"And just to be safe—yes, always to be safe—I will be wise with what I know. So wise... they'll never see it coming."

words, and you will note once our conversation begins. There is an essence to science, and if I stray too far I will be ridiculed.

For science is the rule of truth. And, so, just to be safe I won't be clear. I must be covert and careful with my words. But if this is false then I will end my life, I cannot live without this certainty in my mind, but I am not one to commit to death so quickly, so it makes sense that this is the Truth. You are the history that goes unspoken today because it speaks incorrectly.

"They want to restart the Roman empire and seize power."

"What good can come of unity, a religion for believers and nonbelievers? Inevitably they will fight over Somewhere there will be a rift. "Who is the greatest god? One man, one group over another." Luca said.

"They erect a Baptist Temple empty. No one has gone in or out.

"The amount of wealth to build this thing.

"They are a suspicious bunch.

"Abandoned, but why?"

"You see this picture I painted?

"I can't believe you hadn't heard of it."

"I had my war to fight at home."

Lavarenti, Alil, and Catalano all three of them are descendants of royalty going back as far as the Holy Roman Empire.

"So eager was I to learn about this relationship between the three.

He sold vast wealth to build a Pisa Baptistery in NY. They will only censor... the world. Teach us to besmirch Madame Bovary."

"It's a beautiful place, a waste of wealth."

"As if that isn't bad enough"

"Angels."

"Luca laughs."

"Where are these Angels? Supposed to be the guardian?"

"Flying in the clouds?"

"We know there is nothing there.

"Quite the opposite, they are living underground."

"Holy shit." Luca appears.

"These Angels, according to Lavarenti, are impossible to kill. Though some are mixed among us."

"But we don't know where he was."

"I was born without the neurosis required for mystical thoughts but somehow bound to some level of destiny. To be born without the ability to believe, as others do, and speak destiny? Hypocrisy! There is nothing beautiful in hypocrisy.

## The Origin of The Temple and Church

### Bloodline Wealth

“Suspicious—all too suspicious. It was in total that Lavarenti, Alil, and Catalano, who founded this church, invested in the plot. This cost them hundreds of millions of dollars or even billions.

“How did those three get all that money? So silently too.”

“Luca starts researching each of them.”

“All three of those men are descendants of kings. But where did Lavarenti, Alil, and Catalano get all of this money? Alil, Lavarenti, and Catalano all boast direct genetic ties to kings: Alil descends from the Frankish, tracing his lineage back to Childeric the First. Lavarenti has ties to Constantine The Great, and Catalano is a descendant of Alfonso X of Castile.”

“No doubt these all have hereditary wealth beyond our wildest imaginations. Gold, Jewels, and above all land everywhere.

Alil is connected with Constantine or the Royal blood of

De Lucignion bloodline, or even Constine himself they say. Each again, having deep ties to incomprehensible, limitless wealth with money and assets around the world.





NYU: Annabelle files  
Annabelle in the Hall

"I am Professor Laurent Offray de La Mettrie, the great-granddaughter of the brilliant physician Julian Offray de La Mettrie, it is my honor to teach an in-depth course on my great-great grandfather's work, *L'homme Machine*. Icons like Hippocrates, William Osler, and yes, even myself, shall be revered as heroes in an epic journey."

"But a warning! My class, The Story of the Human Body, might challenge those who cling to comforting falsehoods. We will delve into dangerous truths and intimate questions that might feel like a desecration."

Professor La Mettrie steps back, clearing the way for the students who wish to leave. Two students nervously rise and exit the classroom.

"Two spirits not yet ready to see the beauty within," she mumbles.

"For the brave rest of you, please take out a piece of paper and a pen.

"I like to begin this course with a simple quiz. If you answer correctly, you will be on track for a perfect score. If not, your maximum will be 92."

"It's true, those with a better childhood education have a better chance of getting an A, but fear not the inequity. I have never had a student with a perfect score, nor one stuck at 92.

"Is everyone ready?"

"Yes," the class responds in unison.

"Alright then. The earth was once believed to be flat. But we know this is false. Please write words and draw the correct shape of the earth.

"Write your name on the paper, answer the question, and draw the earth's shape on the second half of the paper. When finished, fold and pass it forward."

"That's it?" a student blurts out excitedly.

"Shockingly easy, isn't it?"

The class snickers as they scribble their answers.

"So much confidence in this room," the professor remarks, causing another round of laughter.

"Pass the papers forward when you're done. Are all the papers folded and on my desk?" She looks around.

The class looks around and concurs.

"Excellent."

The professor turns to a student sitting in the front row.

"Mademoiselle, what is your name?"

"My name is Julia"

"Julia, I caught you peeking at your mate's answer for a question a child should know."

The professor walks over to and uncovers an anatomical skeleton with shifting eyes.

"Julia, you will be under the strict vigilance of Herman von Helmholtz. He will be my eyes, and if you are suspicious, he will turn his gaze upon you. Cheat again, and you will see him in your nightmares."

Julia's face flushes with embarrassment.

The professor spreads the papers out on the table like playing cards and pulls out a red pen.

"Jonah, please raise your hand."

Jonah smiles and raises his hand, winking at the professor.

The professor winks back and draws a red X on his paper.

Jonah's mouth drops and his eyes widen. "What? How?" he reddens with embarrassment.

A classmate next to him laughs.

"What's so funny?" the professor asks.

"It's just funny. I mean, who gets the shape of the earth wrong?"

"And what is your name?"

"I am Jacques, like Jacques Cousteau, the deep-sea diver."

"Parlez-vous français, Jacques?"

"No, Parlez-vous I don't."

"Then you are Jack, not Jacques, and I will mark a big X on your paper."

"Wait a minute, did I get an X because I laughed at Jonah?"

"No. You got an X because your answer is wrong."

Jonah laughs at Jacques.

"A perfectly justified mark," Professor La Mettrie comments.

"And you, you must be Jenaveve. Your pink ink and bubbly hearts complement that lovely dress."

Jenaveve takes a deep breath, gulps the air, and fans her face with her hand.

"Jenaveve, fear not a wrong X mark. Failure is critical to success, and it's best to commit the mistake within the first few minutes of any task."

The professor marks an X on her paper.

"Alejandro, raise your hand."

"Yes, Professor."

"Hablas español?"

"Umm, sí, profesora."

"Es un placer, Alejandro."

The professor marks an X on his paper.

"Actually, two X's because you didn't connect the figure."

Alejandro drops his head on the desk. "Shit..."

"Please hold your profanity for more challenging moments. The more you use them, the less frustration they can carry out of your soul. "

The professor puts down her red pen. "I can't believe it," she says, staring at the papers.

Professor La Mettrie struggles to open a desk drawer. "It's jammed. I haven't opened this drawer in a long time."

She clears the dust from her desk and pulls out a blue pen. She marks a check on one of the papers.

"Perfect. Only one correct answer in the history of this course thus far."

The entire class looks at each other and turns to the last student.

"Annabelle Sheene, can you please stand up?"

Annabelle stands and bows to her classmates.

"Tell the class the true shape of the earth."

"The earth is an ellipsoid," answers Annabelle.

Jonah jumps up from his chair. "It's pretty much the same thing, or I'm sure the class meant it," he protests.

"Is Jenaveve's circle an ellipsoid?"

"No."

"What about Alejandro's curl? that which he calls a circle"

"No."

"Is a triangle a circle?"

"No."

Well then I've proved you all wrong.

Jonah grumbles as he drops back into his chair.

"How did you come to know the earth's shape?" the professor asks Annabelle.

"It was never taught to me as anything other than an ellipsoid," she replies.

Professor La Mettrie raises Annabelle's paper. "Do you see, children, the word you wrote on your paper became the image you drew? From brain to hand to paper can either be true or false. To most of you, it was false and yet, in your mind for most of your life, thought to be true."

"For the sake of medical education, a digital picture of a man's body is the aim I hope to convey. As close as one can get to a picture-perfect image.

"And that, children, marks the end of our class and the beginning. I hope I taught you a lesson on precision."

Just as the students stepped out the door,

Hamil rushes into the classroom late. His hair is covered in fluff.

"Am I late for class?"

"Yes. Super Late" Hamil looks at his watch. I thought this class was 75 minutes long."

"Late is late."

"Damn it."

"Can I go over what I missed in another class?"

"We can go over it now."

"Oh." Hamil

"Ok."

Annabelle stares on, charmed by the messy, scraggly Hamil, who ran into the room. She slowly makes her way by the door.

"Do you have a pen on you?"

"Hamil rummages through his bag,"

"No, I must have dropped it."

Hamil gets a flashback to himself in the janitor's room sitting in an empty IT room.

"I look at you and sense you'll be the student I unjustly vent my frustrations on. Are you sure you want to be here?"

"Yes, of course."

Annabelle walks backward into the class.

"He can use my pen."

"Thank you so much."

She slowly approaches the doorway, listening to the conversation between Hamil and the professor leaving.

"You also don't have a piece of paper. Do you?"

"No, I don't. Sorry."

"Annabelle steps back and opens up her notebook. You can have a piece of my paper."

Thank you so much, again. Hamil too stressed by the moment, lacks the

Annabelle rests outside of the classroom, her heart pounding as thoughts of Hamil being in her class make her flutter as love at first sight seems to have possessed her.

As Annabelle stares dumbfounded as she stares at Hamil with eyes of affection.

Professor La Mettrie notices Annabelle's crush.

"Hamil stop. Come back in the room. Don't forget to thank Annabelle."

"Where is that hauntingly beautiful music coming from?"

"It is the monks of our abbey," Hamil replies, standing at the edge of the auditorium. Soft notes float through the air, enveloping. "I love hearing them from the top bench—my choice to be a divinity student is the right one. We can listen to them best from the church balcony. Come with me, Cristian."

As they make their way to the balcony, Hamil marvels at the near-empty hall. "I can't believe so few come to listen."

"In this case, none," Hamil replies with a hint of melancholy. "Quick, quick! They will begin Verdi's 'Dies Irae' soon."

Cristian's eyes light up with excitement. "It's at once haunting and peaceful. Everyone carries a tragedy in their heart. Most people run from sorrow, so they always feel exhausted. But if you nurture a mellow heart, it will treat you better. It will impregnate you with a catharsis bearing fruit in all things you do."

"I haven't learned Latin yet, but when I do, I'll sing along with the brothers," Hamil said in his voice.

"I understand Latin. I can translate for you," Cristiano offered, joining them.

"That would be beautiful. Thank you," Hamil replies.

Christopher pulled out a pen and paper, handing it to Hamil. Hamil took a page from an old Bible on the pew and rested the notebook on his leg for both him and Cristian to see. Christopher began to translate:

"That day is a day of wrath,

The world will break into ashes.

Witness David and Sybil."

Hamil stares at the quote, feeling an inexplicable shiver run down his spine.

*"How a tremor is to come, all will be overrun."*

Hamil's face groans pale as the song continues. "Are you okay, Hamil?" Christopher waves his hand in front of Hamil's face.

"Death and nature will be stunned...

Cum resurget creatura,

Quantus tremor est futurus..."

Hamil drops the pen and notebook. Music drowns the world around him. Muffled chanting grows louder, seeping through the walls.

"Hamil, what are you looking at?" Cristian whispers, but Hamil's eyes fixate on the university plaza. Cristian waves his hands in front of Hamil's face. "Hamil. Can you hear me?"

Hamil shoves Cristian aside. He opens the window, revealing the grand cobblestone rotunda surrounding the church. Shadows of rushing people called his name. He started sweating and panting, his lips moving without sound as the crowd chanted:

*"Princeps di la sanguis shed*

*Princeps di la putris dead*

*Principes de la fractis head*

*Princeps di la mortis est"*

Hamil wakes up surrounded by students on the green, below the church.

"What the hell happened?"

"You fell off the top balcony."

"Oh."

Hamil stands up, wincing in pain.

He dusts grass from his sweater.

"Oh?"

"Just Oh"

"I'll be fine." Says Hamil.

"You literally fell off the tip."

"You should really go to the hospital."

"I'm fine. Just back off."

A group of Emergency Medical Transports rush to Hamil.

"Let's get you over to the Hospital."

"No."

"Come on."



"I said No."

Hamil winces then heads over to his dormitory."

Cristian, stands by Hamil,

"Really. I know you are."

"You were speaking nonsense, Hamil," Cristian said, concern evident in his voice.

"What happened?" Hamil asked, disoriented.

"You jumped off the cathedral balcony onto the grounds."

"Jumped off?" Hamil repeated, incredulous. "That's what everyone is saying. "Cristian, are you a true believer in the supernatural?"

"I am." Cristian said without hesitation.

"I didn't jump off. I was pulled."

"All those who watched you on the ledge saw you jump. Cristian and others below saw it."

"I can't believe it. I saw a mob of people. They were screaming. At the window."

Cristian recounted what happened.

"We were listening to the music when you started staring out of the balcony. You mumbled something odd. Even on the ground, you kept mumbling before collapsing. You seemed to be talking to people. While translating the monks' song, something went wrong. You lost the words."

"It's nothing brother."

"You suffer from sleepwalking or something like it."

"Yea that's it."

"I understand."

Hamil, would you be interested in being roommates for the school year?

I think it'll be fun.

It doesn't look like you've tumbled off of towers more than once. I see it in you.

Maybe I can be around.

"Watch your back."

"Make sure you don't find yourself falling off of roofs."

"and you can just be there for me."

"What's wrong with you?"

"I love man more than they say I should."

"You love man."

"Nothing wrong with loving mankind."

"That's not a bad thing. I personally hate men. I think men are putrid creatures." Most of the time, I look in the mirror and hate myself."

Cristian laughs

"The world needs more love and brotherhood."

"Precisely."

"Oh, Hamil."

"That's not something you need to worry about. Well, I mean, You shouldn't"

"I know but the world isn't as tolerant as it was."

"Yea, I mean. Look at you."

You look like you can knock down a few enemies. I can never do so, as a man of god.

"I'd never want to see it happen, but even the crucifix can dispel evil."

"You were bullied growing up."

"I am still bullied."

"I am content after talking to god at twilight. It helps, but is lonely when you cry out, and he doesn't say a word.

For the majority of my life, I've been alone."

"I'm sorry to hear that."

"Don't be, there are those who suffer more than I do."

"Hamil pulls out his crucifix."

"Certainly, look here." "And here." Cristiano puts his hands over the large cut on Hamil's chest.

"I've had a ton of problems making friends here."

"And you are pretty much the only one who has talked to me this long."

Hamil smiles, I'd live to be  
your roommate cristian.

Lavarenti  
A Poem

"Holiest vicar! A Seraph with golden  
wings!"

"Greatest Papato on the balcony of  
kings!"

"Bring forth the savior! Bring forth  
our leader!"

Thus was the sound that nearly  
wakened Saint Peter.

Where in his tomb sleeping,

He heard the world cheering.

But in my ear hearing,

Another false prophet

Another king to the people

But no vision or spirit did I ever see,

Love by the people is pure  
veneration,

My ode to their health is their  
celebration.

Yet there I submit to the devil's  
pride.

To wear the mantle of a Pope so  
wise I stand,

Yet wisdom alone won't heal our  
land.

A healer, philosopher, bearing the  
keys,

In suffering's abyss, far deeper than  
the seas.

The final prophet divine,

is born in agony's twine.

Wisdom reigns in my thoughts, yet  
silence in my speech,

Destiny and art intertwine, a lesson  
to teach.

Not the holiest Pope, father to the  
masses grand,

But a father to the abandoned, left  
in the sand.

By birth forsaken, by my hands let  
go,

A journey I embark on, a path  
unknown.

Who am I to claim, never to fully  
see,

The devil's whispers, the man I  
cannot be.

A riddle of destiny, a seed to sow,

No man's birth, no one bound to  
know.

Yet now I stand, embracing my fate,

The true king of suffering, holds key  
to the gate

### The End.

“Lavarenti, what happened to Lavarenti.”

“He is waiting.”

“Waiting for what.”

“Waiting for you.”

To the caves on Isla Varen.

“Islavaren

“IsleLavarenti.”

“I get it.”

He’s there, isn’t he.

Down there is where the Umbrahael lies.

Lavarenti waits there too. But no one can go down.

Only the worthy, like I said, can hear the sound of the mountains, the part that is most dangerous.

“You need to go there, with Alil.”

Hamil reaches a hole in the cave. In Isla Varen,

He holds up a flame, and all surrounding is the room sparkles, the flame, reflects the light, up until it ends.

Captain Meinhardt, Catalano, and Lisandra reach the wall.

The ancients saw below and pure darkness, dropping a stone, you never hear it fall.

“You had a daughter?”

Said Lavarenti, but Alil told me... you were the end.

“So then you are not the end.”

“My daughter died.”

Long line going to divine times, half man, half god cannot die, neither can their offspring.

“You suffer, because you are god trapped in man.”

“Inside of you the aim is to fly away.” to jump from mountain to mountain, but you have far been let astray, while your body does protect you.”

“So then what about my daughter. When she broke her neck.”

She is not dead.

I buried her.

“What do you mean she’s not dead.”

Hamil’s hear starts racing,

He now sees a perfect image of his daughter rolling around in her casket.

“I have to get out of this cave, she’s alive, and buried.”

“She is waiting.”

“Waiting for what.”

“Waiting for you.”

“Before she died, did she say anything.”

She said she wanted me to cure the world.

Lavarenti’s eyes brighten,

To save the world.

Alil didn’t know this.

Lavarenti looks at Hamil straight in the eyes.

You must go to her.

“How the fuck to do I get out of this cave.”

“You must gain the trust of the Umbraheal.

“Yes, says Lavarenti, sitting at the end.”

“There is only one way out.” Climbing back up is not an option. Is it?”

Even I couldn’t get them to bring me back up.

They do not trust me enough, but you.

You, so beautiful, so lovely, You, Alil, knows. Is the one.

Go ahead.

They will only trust someone who understands them.

What are they more than anything else, creatures, like us, like dogs, cats. If they trust you, they will.

You’ll have to swim. Swim far. Under the sea you’ll need to go, to which I cannot, for my breath does not allow this . At last, you must take the final punishment.

You must crucify yourself to them.

Yes. Die for them.

Remember, you cannot die.

Never forget this, you were born, with this inside of you.

To some degree, you already have, you have been on the path to it all along, and the closer you get the better, the clearer, it is, don't pay much attention to the dark monsters.

When you are begged to follow, you follow and never evade. You never ran.

Lucian Looses it.

This is it.

“Lucia is the one.”

Where is he going.



“You have a daughter?”

Lucian Couldn't take.

Why should I be sidetracked? I am here for my daughter. Not go diving into caves.

Because the caves are deep. No one can survive a fall so deep.

It means.

You want me to fall into the caves.

“If you wish to fulfill the prophecy, it's important to deep into the pits.”

“There is no way to climb back up.”

Tell me, Hamil, how many times have you fallen from heights.

You will live. The only person who can ever fall below, will survive,

You will likely fall deepest into earth than anyone else ever would, or could, by their own manner.

Oh my.

Ipzil, Dal Caver.

“You must first accept. Yourself as the End. Indeed you are the end.”

The end of What.

Cuts-NonBelief Lie, How far,  
Agbatana, Poem AnaSpeech

When grief accumulates, one  
cannot sleep.

Even in writing, it's best to  
wrap your thoughts in a song. Have  
your words float around with wings  
then be dumped into a bin, or  
forgotten like our corpses when we  
die. We like to believe that our  
memory will live, but it will not.

The reason I got into writing  
was more because I wanted to live  
even after I die.

How far I've gone to go  
beyond, and how far I've regressed  
to be both true and false at once."

"The language puzzles, The  
metaphysical mind games, and The  
self-abnegation." Still no sign of  
religious neurosis."

Just as there are many still  
waiting for the end of their lives, I  
am still preparing for birth.

If you truly embody the  
essence of our epoch, then within  
the depths of your soul resides the  
collective suffering of the past,  
present, and future. Your visions,

passed down through generations,  
bear the weight of ancestral pain.  
The anguish endured by the  
children today foretells the  
struggles that await the generations  
yet to come. They are your  
children's generation. Moreover, the  
pain you experience in your  
physical being serves as a reminder  
of the present-day suffering that  
exists.

Who knows at this age, but  
questions. For someone like me  
who thought death was on his  
stoop, why not simply wait to die,  
then strain my head in the process."

"I suppose Anabelle had a  
head start realizing our disease was  
invisible to science. But how  
negligently she fell into the  
religious route for a solution.

If I were to plunge as  
Annabelle into the celestial world  
for an answer, I'd lose my instinct as  
a doctor and drown in a deep  
puddle of mysticism. But were I to  
abandon the spiritual path and  
return to pure science and  
materialism. Well, I'd never be here.

I'd suffer from hopelessness  
and never be closer to my  
daughter's wishes."

"When I explained the voices, Anabelle knew that this was beyond the passing words we use in our medical community: To accept this, Anabelle suffered great suffering and perhaps regret. When I held her hand, I could feel her soul-shaking. Eventually, it became that we all suffered from invisible illnesses living deep within our hearts."

Cuts-To the Caves/Masterpiece  
of abomination  
The Notebook

The cave walls are webs of  
giant diamond chandeliers covered  
in a spiderweb of sparkling stone  
and silk. A calm wind sways the  
designs of the church. Water  
gushes and sprays out of chambers.  
Gems and flowers reach out,  
decorating the floor. A small  
mountain rumbles far with snow  
gently landing atop its snowy  
summit, and, yet, no visible sun,

All that seems is an infinite  
black above. Turning his head  
below, a tangle of  
hummingbirds, bees float in  
harmony, vines, edible plants, olive  
trees, date palms, gardens of  
foliage, and herbage, for the small,  
sweet animals crawl about  
respecting your feet. Gold, crystal  
and large glimmering stone and  
bush are the dress of all corners.  
From the chirping of a bird, every  
sound the drip of the water stream,  
to the buzzing of a bee is an  
orchestra to this theater of nature  
playing before him.

Hamil and Lisandra descend  
to the caves that span the towers,  
leading them towards the depths.

The flickering candlelight cast  
dancing shadows across the ancient  
stone, while gentle streams  
embraced the structure's arms.

## Cuts- Celestial Water

I'll start to unravel this here.  
'Who would I be and who are those  
like me?

... Those souls who wait on celestial  
waters for angels to drag them to  
heaven are just bobbing on Earth's  
salty dark seas waiting for some  
great golden ship to net them unto  
heaven. And bring them from the  
sea unto heaven. But who fishes  
them instead are pirates of the soul  
on a voyage to wicked ends.

But what about the rest of  
us? We are told to inhale the divine  
essence, but we lack the organs to  
smell such fragrances. We are  
encouraged to savor the truth of  
the divine, yet we are born without  
tongues for that taste. We are  
instructed to see the path towards  
enlightenment, but we are blind.  
Thus, we find ourselves disabled or  
crippled on our journey toward  
divine enlightenment, encountering  
a profound sense of humiliation  
within our spirits.

## Cuts-The Blessed Child Wisdom of Christianity in Children.

Losing a loved one is sorrowful. The pain remains until it leaves the body in a long-winded heave from the lungs. There is nothing wrong with religion in adults, but in children the consequences are as malignant as cancer.

Something in your childhood must've spurred something in you.

All see the tears. All see the horror. The empathy, with which abandonment comes, knows quite well that there is a certain doom, but no one can see the inside of the child.

But then there is the part of a child, whose lungs are smaller than their imagination. To see death and to hope for a resurrection is a common thing among the religious, but the concept was not meant for children, resurrection truly is one last vestige of hope to anyone who believes in any possibility.

To see the cross, a man dead, but resurrection. There is no time

to breathe, when the thought of damage.

A bird dedicates its entire existence soaring through the skies, yet its gaze often fixates on the earth below. As humans, we possess the ability to observe both the vastness of the sky and nature's feet with equal measure. However, when it comes to matters of mind, our focus tends to be reversed. We find ourselves predominantly looking upward, contemplating the heavens, while only sparing glances at the path beneath our feet.

A writer cannot form an idea, without stepping into the corners of the soul. If there is too much positivity then his words are a lie.

"The day isn't as it might seem. Don't forget, the sun has killed many people with its cancerous rays and overbearing heat. While the moonlight... has never hurt anyone."

Cuts-University: Professor  
Cambell  
Unity dwells in in Ice & Fire

"I'm Professor Adhamh Campbell," he said, voice thick with Aberdonian gravel and salt. "A Doric Scot, born an' bred in Aberdeen, wi' a tongue that rattles like a diesel engine on a winter mornin'. To some o' ye, this might be a wee bump in the road. My words won't sound quite like yours. And seein' as this course is nearly all words, I'd suggest you buckle in your lugs for the trill o' a lifetime."

The class laughed, uncertain whether he was joking or testing them.

Cambell nodded, satisfied. Then suddenly, he leaned forward, eyes bright. "Now then. Let me begin by sayin'—and meanin' it, too—I love ye. Every last one o' ye. Wi' all my heart and soul."

An awkward silence. Then a hesitant voice from the front row: "Thank you, I suppose..."

Another student snorted. "Yeah... thanks," he added, tone thick with sarcasm.

Professor Cambell narrowed his eyes and scanned the room like a hawk in prayer. "Silence, a lot of ye. And Christ, so many furrowed brows, like you've all swallowed a wasp."

He let the silence grow thorny, then asked, "Is that it, then? Is that all love gets these days? No one here is daft—or brave—enough to say it back?"

The class chuckled again. One student, somewhere near the front, spoke up: "Do you mean... like Jesus-love?"

Cambell turned sharply toward him, as though the question had pierced something in him. "Aye," he said. "Like Jesus-love."

The student shrugged. "Sure, then."

Cambell folded his arms behind his back, steeped his fingers, and began pacing slow as smoke.

"Right then. Let's take inventory."

"One frigid thank-you frae yon lad. One shoogly we laugh from the back. And one slightly coerced declaration frames our dear penitent."

He pointed. "You—what's your name?"

"Daniel."

"Ah, Daniel. A name wi' weight. Daniel, driven by some ancient guilt stitched intae his bones by Sunday sermons and wide-eyed mothers. He looks tae the sky, beggin' for approval, for forgiveness maybe—tries tae feel love, truly—but he fails. But it's no' your fault, laddie. You see, lyin'... lyin' is more intimate than love. Aye. Most folk lie about love. It's easier. Love's a war, lyin's a lullaby."

Daniel exhaled, shoulders sinking. "A bit, yeah."

"Aye," Cambell said, smirking. "It feels good tae confess, does it no'?"

Some laughter now, but it has softened. The mood had shifted, like a breeze had passed through the marrow of the room.

"Let me tell you something," Cambell said, his tone turning quieter, almost reverent. "Love is too demandin'. Not all people feel the same. And yet we're no strangers to one another. Other things bind us. Firmer things."

He began to pace, hands gesturing like he was pulling thread from the air.

"Emotions and words—they're born from the edges. The brink. The extremes. From fire, from frost. From fear and wonder. Every culture—every poor sod ever born—has chosen a word for their pain. Some weep. Some laugh so hard it breaks them. But they name it. Even animals name it, though wi'out words."

He stopped and addressed the class. "Have you ever seen a dog sneeze? Universal, that is. A shiver o' the soul. A recoil, a flinch, a gasp. Language older than language."

He pointed to the windows. "Now imagine centuries—centuries—of folk tryin' tae talk tae one another across deserts, across mountains, across silence itself. Inventin' metaphors just survive their feelin's. And others across the globe, doin' the same, only colder or lonelier or drunker."

He stepped back to the chalkboard and scrawled:

THE CALCULUS OF PAIN



“This course isn’t about grammar,” he said. “It’s about communion. About how doctors in their white trenches speak the broken wi’out ever sayin’ I love ye. And still, they say it.”

He turned, solemn now.

“There are some who fall on a spectrum of pain. Some feel it too much. Others not at all. But those who know it see it in others. Unmistakable. The recognition burns like a second sun.”

He looked over the class one last time, voice nearly a whisper:

“To find the unity of man—that’s the work. That’s the journey. That’s where we begin.”

He tapped the word *Lochmendy* written in chalk above the board.

“And this, my dear scholars, is the threshold.”



## Cuts—Here we go again

After a million little deaths:  
But I have felt the pain of my soul.  
The soul's pain lies somewhere in  
the memory.

Contrary to what the priests  
say, the soul is not indestructible. It  
can feel painful.

What else explains, the  
memory of pain, you only heard as  
crack and crunch from some deadly  
plummet you can't remember, but  
certainly feel.

or chasm, the well of fluttering  
luminaries, that can only be  
explained as the shadow of neurons  
dancing and pirouetting, that no  
one can see. They are the shadows  
of neurons.

That's what I'll call these  
dancers. The shadows of neurons.  
For nothing else can explain them.  
bursting in a form of petite  
consciousness

A question not worth asking,  
from delirium I will ask the same  
question too.

"But Why?" questioned  
Cardinal Catalano with despair,

Hope for the greatest pope  
left in the air.

As winds of change carrying  
bloody rain,

A storm of boos, a hail of  
words, the storm pain.



Lisandra's song



## Cuts-Grotesque Masterpiece Bones of a million men

As they approached, Hamil  
braced himself for what he  
anticipated would be a grotesque  
masterpiece, perhaps constructed  
from the bones of a million men, a  
monument to humanity's treachery.  
Hamil reaches the bridge of the  
towers that leads to the man's  
grave.

## Cuts-Hunt began Head Start

"As you know, the hunt began with my daughter's note. Embracing it as truth, every word, was the first step. It meant dispelling my scientific prejudice to understand the world through as Alil does. I had three items as evidence of the supernatural origin of my illness: this tear wrapped around my neck, the self-realization that came with it, and, of course, my visions.

"I suppose Anabelle had a head start in realizing our illness was invisible to science. But how negligently she fell into the religious route for a solution. The problem with Annabelle is that she chose a route as an end.

"One of the earliest accounts of the sickness as something divine came from the works of Herodotus, where he mentions King Cambyses the Second. It was said to have been sent by the Greek Olympians as punishment. As the years passed, it changed from a divine to a natural like any other. This again, a consequence of the prejudicial, or

perhaps, connivance of Hippocrates."

"Another old account of the Sacred Sickness comes from a paper book written in 1932 by the Harvard University Press. According to the book, contemporaries of Socrates mentioned incantation and purification as means to dispel illness but provided no hint of where to find them. Still, to find the religious text with the right incantation is impossible. It would be like digging through the sands of the deepest oceans for the oldest scrolls.

"Inevitably, I found myself lost in a circle. From one end of the world to the other, I knew I'd eventually fall into a precipice and die without being one inch closer to the right place. On one occasion, a vision led me to tumble down a steep hill, where I ended up nearly breaking my arm and leg.

"Death to me is a gruesome thing, and before a biography speaks of death, I quickly end that final page."

"Cambyses died on his way to Persia from Egypt to help squash a rebellion, but on his way there, he



cut himself with his sword and gangrene consumed his body. He died in Agbatana, or modern-day Hama, Syria. Right on the border of this.

"I don't know who you are yet, but I know that everything is going in the right direction and that from the moment I saw you, I felt some destiny."

The Doctor reached out to the Woman with an open palm to hold her hand.

"And I know why you don't want me to say your name, by the way."

"Why is that?" asked the Woman.

"You are who you are, just as I am who I am," he repeated the Woman's words from their first meeting.

Cuts-Tea of Truth cuts  
Irresponsible, Anything Better,

I prefer to seem an irresponsible  
drunken fool, than something so  
broken"

"What an odd thing to say.  
Yet I know what you mean. I ask  
them, why anything but yourself?  
says Alil.

"Anything is better than  
being myself. To be myself is to  
become that which you see before  
you."

"Why are you apologizing?  
You are sorry for what." Asks Alil.

Lavare: It's a notebook.

From the time of great Eden, when  
full

bloom of laburnum and yellow  
daffodil

filled sight, gentle wings of even  
gentler things blew dew at the  
celestial

green, red, and white.

No form of

imagination can ever incite,

few above too,

could conjure the sight.”

in dark blight, you forget why my  
tribe first

set foot in the night.

on your beauty and digest it for all.

Fertility and simmering stew and  
boil.

the soil in every settlement abroad.  
All the

The world in all forms is simple and  
slight.

Your hardened great stones and  
palace of

green, great mountains of white,  
they leave

nothing for the short willows as he  
sways by

in fright. For every small creature,  
restless at

night, I hold feathered pillows to  
rest in the night.

As your fog floats about, rain  
pounds in hail violence.

his lighting, fire igniting, little do  
you notice,--and doubt even care of  
the

blaring and booming filling the air.  
The play

in constant motion, seas, tundra,  
poles and

depths counting; all in despair I  
tread by

you closely to protect arrogance of  
all those

great things that seek to ensnare.  
True, the  
great beauty for which you create,  
shines to  
all with full glimmer, but none  
would last  
long in the sharp teeth of hard bite,  
as I  
I am the hand that produces life. I  
see your  
The north pole is covered in a  
freezing of white.  
Barely can one walk the helm of  
great white.  
Who will enjoy your mountains And  
woodlands of long full of monsters  
afar,  
seek refuge in gray and black, to  
massacre  
the small, weak. My goal is to  
protect save  
and create a rampart.  
dethroned. A tragic presence you  
are to me,  
forever and for so long. So you pass  
by me,

to undermine this, my new, my  
great--  
My long dark wings, once golden in  
hue, my body once chiseled by  
thunder now  
blackened by infected gardens with  
covered  
with a decaying muddy brown stew.  
I bid personal beauty  
many years adieu. All i do eat is the  
product of my creation, how dare  
you  
poison . What falls right below us in  
fright,  
must surrender to our own  
aesthetic delight.  
We are the creators, lovers of  
nature in tight.  
You, pity small  
things, and temporary might.  
As each of these foes stood  
quivering on  
dark stone, an ancient sound  
funneled

between the two gods. Both turn to  
the

right, in spirit and light, stands  
there an

ancient dark essence, pleasant to  
smell, she

is an enchantress in flight.

## Cuts-Abuses of False Gods

When they release the angels, there will be peace, and the false prophets will die.

Sometimes dreams for those without worldly experience confuse them with real experiences, and the hallucinations start. One who sees the world in all its splendor, need not keep dreams as memories, but dreams can also be nightmares

Oh Anabelle, why ever choose a route as an end. Dangerous pirates roam the seas of assent and dissent. fall is that she chose a route as an end. The most one can get via religion is a path, but how many dangerous pirates steer men on a passage that never ends—even after death

Hamil followed a woman through the underworld, marveling at the statues and pillars forming the great halls and corridors.

"Asclepios truly believes he can bring her back to life?" Dr. Elsy asked.

Remember, I must not come off as crazy. I know what insanity looks like and I am not that.. pulls out a flask with water in it, and splashes it into his face. Now, although one can doubt all science, rebuke it with any other thought—which is why I will pretend not to know. Pretending not to know is a sign of sanity. It is false evidence of doubt, which I have already justified—and, just to be safe I will be wise with my words, and you will note once our conversation begins. There is an essence to science, and if I stray too far I will be ridiculed. For science is the rule of truth. And, so, just to be safe I won't be clear. I must be covert and careful with my words. But if this is false then I will end my life, I cannot live without this certainty in my mind, but I am not one to commit to death so quickly, so it makes sense that this is the Truth

You talk as though you're crazy, but the reality is, that you are

too sane. Much too sane. Seeking a vision.

A madman would never use the word crazy. It would be a contradiction. To be crazy and

I am very sane. You know what insanity looks like. The great sign of sanity is to doubt

## Cuts – Shelves of Fiction and Nonfiction

Undressing the protagonist is more difficult to find if there is any truth at all. Not to say there is a lack of truth in common fiction, but that in many occasions pure fiction it's better to avoid beautiful truth for the sake of enchantment. Lying where one must be honest becomes a common practice. It's like trying to quell a misbehaving child, there is a lie in there.



## Cuts-Luca cuts

"Rational thought yields little in terms of creativity. Those accomplishments worth noting I have achieved from bubbling passions and desires within my blood. I've come to believe that creating a masterpiece requires a multi-layered infliction. One must disturb every cell of trauma, leaving no emotion unexplored. I have felt—deeply—and perhaps that is the truest compass. For some know themselves more intimately than others. Some have walked through more violence, more shadows, more silence. But there is no greater authority on truth than the one who has truly felt it.

"I choose to believe what I want to be. Aristotle and the ancient Egyptians believed that the origin of thought was the heart. To that I passionately assent. Any idea that doesn't make your heart beat is not a thought worth thinking, writing, or painting"

Goethe said in Faust, "That which issues from the heart alone bends the heart of others to your own." true in everything you do.

Everything you create. Everything you are."

"Reason. Trust no one who claims to be reasonable.

They'll find reason in their madness, but not in those of another."

"You are the one who feels this sickness. You will always know more of its suffering, but I know the secrets of suffering itself." Said Luca

"One who is blessed and cursed to suffer until his will is done. But woe the consequences of his destiny abused, or that he or she should know."

"A writer will always find darkness in all things dripping from his thoughts. If there is too much positivity then his words are a lie. They are a deception. They want something from you. They beg your attention. What is the darkness of Catalano, Alil, and Lavarenti?"

"Step in the wrong direction. A person is much too broken to be able to think with a true heart. The universe of this nation is a desecration of a writer's heart."

“At some point, you will realize that much of what you have accomplished has been the product of madness. And say I must not come off as crazy. So out of the fog of delirium, all that's left is right and wrong, a lie becomes the only sensible act.

All who read this passage should now know that there is a type of person with a destiny and those can already see themselves alive, dead, and beyond. Where to stand now is to find these blessed and cursed and let them speak as they were meant.

You are not someone of typical physiognomy.

“You have this ancient look. Like an Akkadian. The essence of a remnant. Easily forged with stone and bronze.

“Yes! You are the face of the past, living in the 21st century.”

“Hamil laughs.”

“I can't tell if that's a compliment, or an insult to my genetic evolution.”

"Why don't you tell me more about yourself." Says Alil.

## Cuts-The Rest of Us Celestial Waters

"No amount of voyages in self-abnegation we undertake, none will ever steer us in the direction of God."

But what about the rest of us? They say breathe in the god's vapors but we have no noses. They say, taste divine truth but we are born without tongues. They say to see the path but we are blind, so born disabled or crippled on the way to divine enlightenment, we too feel humiliated by those chosen by God.

For souls like mine, who ourselves adrift upon celestial waters, waiting for angels to guide us towards heaven. Instead, we find ourselves aimlessly bobbing on the vast, salty seas of earthly existence, with pirates steering us towards a never-ending voyage. A pirate will never cast back their spoils into the sea unless it benefits their gain.

I was never meant to live. And neither are those who seek meaning either and hope to find it here. Especially here.

## Cuts

“I mean, I love the concept.  
The blasphemy above all things but  
no wonder this project of yours is  
taking so long. In need of a prophet.  
Good luck with those. It's been  
millenia and some people are  
waiting.”

## Cuts- Liberty: The Holland Tunnel

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"Do not tally the sum of your fears in one breath."

Luca opens up his laptop. "Sorry for the wait time." I haven't turned this thing on in years.

On February 7<sup>th</sup> the headlines published, "Governor Athens to Destroy the Great Church of the Hudson". And here, perhaps, is when Bartholomew had his first calling. It was a Bartholomew tradition to check the news online at 6 am. He later slept till 10 am. Between those hours, Bartholomew said he had the most vivid dreams. They were the type of dreams where all the senses manifest. But Bartholomew didn't fear them. He couldn't wait to be back. Bartholomew says dreams are revelations. Often they can reveal more about your soul than any level of introspection in the darkest corner of the room and the brightest candle burning can offer. That day, Bartholomew had a dream that he would stop monsters from trampling over a village. He was a hero in his dream. Later that day around 10 am. He dressed neatly

and headed out into the streets by the Hudson to breathe the air along the river.

Bartholomew's daily walk brought him face-to-face with a heartbreaking sight: his beloved church slated for demolition. Flyers opposing its destruction blew in the wind, a final stand by a dwindling faith. He saw the church as more than a place of worship; its gothic spires and weathered stones were a testament to history. Though his memories of the nearby Catholic school were

hazy, the church held a unique charm, a stark contrast to Jersey City's modern sprawl. He couldn't comprehend why, if deemed unfit for education, it couldn't stand as a city landmark. Bartholomew envisioned the destruction not just as rubble, but as a permanent scar on the city, replaced by the cold efficiency of a trucking company. It would be a stain, a final blow to a cherished memory.

Yellow tape was wrapped around the church. A giant wrecking ball hung near a balcony at the church. It was then a nerve in Bartholomew that forced him onto

the church's doorstep. Just before the first phase of destruction, Bartholomew hurled himself in front of the church.

The construction crew, annoyed by Bartholomew's defiance, moved to drag him out. As they approached, they couldn't help but notice his imposing physique. Bartholomew removed his long coat like a cape, revealing a powerful frame that seemed to move with the grace of a falling flower petal. The crew hesitated, daunted by his formidable presence.

Bartholomew was a powerful wall, his strength seemingly divine. He slowly backed towards the church, anticipating their attempt to seize him. When they attacked, he effortlessly hurled them aside, one by one, sometimes two at a time, as if they were feather pillows. This small battle quickly drew a crowd. Commuters along the piers stopped to watch Bartholomew toss the crewmen around like rag dolls.

Soon, a news crew arrived with police, surveying the chaotic scene. The majority of onlookers laughed at the spectacle, calling it a bullfight where the bull was triumphantly standing still.

Police swarmed Bartholomew, convinced his protest was over. But a wave of students, fueled by general discontent surged forward. Their reasons came from defiance, a yearning for freedom, and outrage. The protest swelled, drawing activists and citizens. Some dug symbolic graves, a chilling foreshadowing. The city pulsed with raw energy.

"The Holland Tunnel is jam-packed and crawling with traffic. You'd think people would be desperate to escape the state, especially with the swelling population emerging from the swamps. Then again, considering the type of leadership, it's not surprising."

"I'm from New Jersey," laughs Hamil.

"Oh, then you must've been drawn to the news. During the presidential election. It was a war among politicians like I'd never seen.

"I was gone for a few years."

"Lisandra, I didn't see it. Alil definitely did.

"Everyone is. It's just a source of comedy for those with political inclinations. Especially to those who have seen it tumble from the heights of virtue."

What brought me to the helm, Gideon and his son Huxley are two unbearably greedy creatures walking on this planet.

They are the consequence of a fetish for more.

"There are two types of people. Those who are I'm willing to work hard and hurt themselves for wealth and then are those willing to hurt others, and see it as a noble act."

"You all don't remember the elections of four years ago?"

Huxley, the son of the extremely wealthy Gideon Athens, was someone I first met at one of my galleries.

Athens likely inherited his cutthroat financial ethical values from his father Gideon, who from the moment of conception taught him to be a champion coin chaser.

Gideon instilled in his son the belief that the world belonged to

the Athens family, dismissing traditional historical truths. Revising history, saying that his blood was tied somehow to the wealthiest in the world. Nothing of which could be proved. Though I'm not saying it's impossible, we will never know because genetic testing is an affront. The Blood of Athens remains only within him.

Superstitious, Athens viewed an invisible hand as his divine guide, contrasting sharply with critics who dismissed his beliefs. While he used terms like "faith" to justify his decisions, his opponents never exploited this angle against him, because all things invisible are sacred.

"Typically, at that time liberty was the pinnacle thirst. It is the "ancient lust for liberty," Luca says, how many centuries have passed with the word liberty being promised? Liberty in society is impossible—a contradiction. "The closer you are to absolute liberty the further you are from society. Voting for liberty or freedom is a contradiction like a dog begging its master to loosen its collar."

"You," he hissed, recognizing him as a wealthy landowner. A

ruthless deal unfolded. Athens offered to "save" the church in exchange for Bartholomew's prime properties – a blatant exploitation of his grief. Bartholomew, emotionally shattered by Emilia's sacrifice, agreed.

The news trumpeted Athens as the hero, while Bartholomew faded into obscurity. The true cost, however, gnawed at Bartholomew's soul. He became a haunted man, forever marked by the memory of Emilia's blood staining the ground.

"Show me a man who works for free and I will show you the wounds of his lashings."

Emilia's life with the. Her beauty, her emerald eyes and maple hair, now a horrifying mask of blood and dust. As she was dragged away, a primal scream ripped through Bartholomew, echoing the collective grief of the onlookers.

Bartholomew sought out Emilia's family. They were poor refugees, living in a small shack. Tears streamed down his face as he stood before them. He poured out his heart, offering them a grand portion of his wealth – a gesture to ease their suffering and a recognition of Emilia's sacrifice.

He promised to keep her memory alive. In the church cemetery, he vowed to create a memorial unlike any other, a testament to her beauty and spirit. And as he returned to the church, his eyes fell on a lone figure gazing up at the edifice. It was a new chapter, a chance to find purpose amidst the ruins of the past



## Cuts - One To Rule Them All

Undressing the protagonist is more difficult to find if there is any truth at all. Not to say there is a lack of truth in common fiction, but that in many occasions pure fiction it's better to avoid beautiful truth for the sake of enchantment. Lying where one must be honest becomes a common practice. It's like trying to quell a misbehaving child, there is a lie in there.

A home for coexistence where the God of the Monotheists and Polytheists become one. A place where all religions and philosophies coexist seamlessly. To escape it would be a complete desecration of the spirit, akin to denying the essence of one's soul.

I was never meant to be.

As they pondered this, they realized that Lavarenti's work had the potential to either usher in a new era of peace or trigger an unprecedented crisis. Without a clear path, their ambitious project risked falling into chaos. Yet, the hope of finding a way to unite all

people kept them moving forward, despite the doubts and dangers that lay ahead. This was designed years ago, with Lavarenti's leadership it was to change the world.

This is what you were all doing. If we had one religion for all, what inane squabbles would there be to cause so much stupid suffering in the world?

Nationalism, writing a history of the world and its people with rights bestowed upon them by the power of this steeple. Constitutions based on liberty and justice spanning philosophical values over the centuries.

As much as it is most inspiring to create a religion that will unite the world, it was missing the element that would ultimately make all necessarily change.

God on Earth? The second coming?

What is it? Lisandra and Hamil listen.

Moshiach, The Second Coming of Christ, The Mehdi.

"Well, Lavarenti kept it here.  
And just as Di Mirandola was  
persecuted for this work,"

What cave he speaks, I can  
only imagine he speaks of the caves  
of man's thoughts, but to imagine  
he speaks of a real cure. One to  
cure all the problems of humanity is  
without a doubt a type of madness.  
All of it I'm sure,

To bring the dead back to life,  
you need the blood of a being that  
cannot die. Then infuse it in others.

Those who were meant to  
rule the world of gods, well, there  
are, they are just hidden.

He told us, there was one  
missing piece, the final piece of the  
Corpus was not a book or  
document but a creature.

For Lavarenti to bring this all  
together, he may quite possibly  
launch an end of times, as opposed  
to a peace of all times.

Precisely for this vision here.

Without the map, there is no  
finding anything on the island, One  
will die without reaching the length  
of the.

People thought he was losing  
his mind and finally did. Took all his  
work to the grave.

The nonbelievers are also  
believers in the sense that they  
prefer to stay true to the earth.

In this small so what's  
missing here? That was it, a man  
with wings, a woman, and a temple  
for all the gods.

The non-believers who are  
not compelled by anything here,  
but the art, and not the holiness we  
feel.

When Lavarenti said he  
wanted to unite all people under  
this religion, he also meant atheists  
and agnostics on the earth.

What is most important to a  
non-believer? He is the last person  
on earth who requires a physical  
solution.

Here Oxygen, Carbon,  
Hydrogen, and Nitrogen are, above  
all the statues of forged thesis,  
philosophy, and science.

Luca

A prophet. One final to prove  
in divinity.

That no one can deny  
because he can be touched.

"Luca, Lisandra, and Hamil  
stare at the temple, with awe, the  
large hand-written religious books  
mixed up together are absolutely  
genius.

"Holy Shit, This is the most  
blasphemous place on the planet. I  
love it and mourn its doom.  
Christmas, Diwali, Eid, Passover,  
Vesak in one symphony of knit  
again, by those. Universal Divinity,  
Ethical Living, Spiritual practices,  
Sacred texts, Interfaith, Churches,  
Temples, and Mosques all under  
one.

The mother of all temples  
here in NY.

Luca laughs in disbelief,  
while I am enthusiastic about this  
project, it sounds like the most  
blasphemous idea on the planet.

Where will you find someone  
as close to divinity as it comes?

He wished to find at last, a  
creature who fulfilled all of the  
qualities of a human being and  
fused it with his own beliefs, such  
that it created a new creature who

could walk the planet as a savior,  
but he had no one but himself.

The Mehdi, Mosiach, and the  
Second coming of Christ. It took  
years. Lavarenti, it was believed.

Please tell me what you see  
here. Lavarenti and I spent years  
building and forging together works  
of philosophers and scientists.

"The greatest thing about me  
is that I was born an Atheist. I can  
jump in and out of madness without  
going overboard. What would it  
take for someone like me to go  
overboard? Nearly impossible.  
Nothing rivals the thrill of  
descending into an abyss,  
navigating its depths, and emerging  
unscathed, chipping a fingernail to  
show the journey. Diving in and out  
of darkness. While many individuals  
harbor a fear of the abyss."

### Emilia The Protester

Emilia, a young woman barely  
out of her teens. With a defiant  
glint in her eyes, she snatched the  
officer's hat and flung it a few feet  
from his toes. The crowd cheered  
her on, but a demon possessed him.

They say the policeman's pupils dilated wrapping around his entire eye, his face turned maniacal grimace.

The officer lunged at Emilia seizing her and slamming her face-first into the pavement. A sickening crack echoed through the square, then to slow as blood, the color of death, stained the concrete. The crowd, many witnessing their first act of such brutality, froze in horror.

"In the richness of Greek mythology, there exists a tale of wisdom and strategic cunning that played a pivotal role in the great battle between Zeus and the Mighty Titans. It is the story of Metis, the daughter of Oceanos, whose ingenuity and resourcefulness forever changed the course of history."

In a world of fear, just like a dead man's soul is a ghost, time is the haunting ghost of wealth. Thus, we create ghosts for all sorts of matter that exist in our life. To dead matter, there is a ghost. To wealth, it is time.

\*\*\*"When I reflect on Annabelle's fate, I easily blame her intellect for the collapse. She was

the perfect student, an outstanding academic, and a scientist. I'd never heard of an obstacle she failed in her career. It was somewhere in that brilliance, that infallibility late in her life, that ultimately conquered her spirit. If she had only failed enough in life, she'd know how to cope with failure. At bottom, I don't blame Annabelle, I blame the inhumanity of forging a person like a knife. The inhumanity of becoming a purely singular type."

"As a doctor, the aim has always been to move forward. Leave the past behind. Look at new research. Start as far from the end as possible. But when there is no treatment with all of the modern tools, perhaps, somewhere down the line a fundamental error might be the mistake. This I was taught by a wise professor. We face a corrupt paradigm. How far back can the error be? Back to the first few pages of recorded history. Yet, with all of this, what moved me was my daughter who inspired me with only one word: curse."

"One can only go so far before destroying everything and starting life from scratch."

"But I did."

I attempted one last time  
before I completely quit though if I  
were to quit would mean the end of  
me.

“How far back do I feel I  
should go? As far as a time when  
people believed in ghosts because  
that’s what this sickness feels. It  
feels like a demon’s curse when  
ghosts roamed the earth most.  
When they were as real as water.”

“Luckily, I found something  
written by the father of history. In  
one of the first books of History.”

“Herodutus” says Alil.

“That’s right. Says Hamil.

“The nearest thing to  
understanding this damnation is in  
an old book called Histories. As a  
man of science I am embarrassed to  
mention it, but that’s the truth.”

The Umbrahael villagers  
rushed out in horror to witness  
Ipzil relentlessly pounding the  
Vicoose stone, and like a giant drum,  
it resonated in the caves, and when  
at last it fractured, the sickness  
unleashed a plague of grotesque  
beasts upon them. They descended  
upon the helpless villagers, their  
insatiable hunger for flesh evident

as they tore into the sccondimon,  
leaving a trail of carnage and terror  
in their wake.

Our mind is the only invisible  
substance in our body that we 100  
percent control of, and it needs to  
feed more often than our bellies.  
Talking of the mind is of course  
neurological from my point of view,  
and yet, the only thing worth writing  
or saying is best left for the heart.

## Chapter 4

"THE WOMAN TAKES Dr. Elsy by the hand and leads him to a corridor filled with unlit white candles.

She snaps a twig from a small bush and ignites the tip with her thumb and pointer fingers. The flame leaps from candle to candle, slowly illuminating the corridor, unraveling a golden statue.

"You are the one who feels this sickness, so you will always know more of its treachery than I, but I know the secrets of treachery itself."

The Woman grasps Dr. Elsy by the hand and leads him to a corridor filled with white candles. Polished cherrywood is a bed to the unused wax of the room.

With the grace of respect at her heels, she steps lightly over to a statue and caresses its hands.

Dr. Elsy steps lightly into the long corridor, marveling at the small green clouds of smoke flooding the room. It holds a scent of charred sandalwood and enters his lungs"

"With the grace of respect at her heels, she steps lightly over to a statue and caresses its hands.

Dr. Elsy steps lightly into the long corridor, marveling at the small green clouds of smoke flooding the room. It holds a scent of charred sandalwood and enters his lungs as a purifying mist of mint.

"These were blessings for humanity, desecrated by him, protected and treasured."

"In the story of the world, the more one gives to man, the more he desecrates. Humanity suffers from the acts of the thankless."

Hamil interrupts the Woman, who shows reluctance in her speech.

"The typical crimes of man, I am not the one to commit. I fear and respect you, and I assure you, my will is noble."

The Woman glances at the Doctor's necklace and smiles at him.

"Saving this small tear is the greatest testament of your goodwill."

The Woman places a golden bowl under the statue. A red oil drips down from its hands.

"What is that?" Asks Dr. Elsy.

"This is an oil made from an old extinct flower once bountiful as the green grass."

"Imagine what joy for man to dance under the crystals."

"ground on which you slipped, Annabelle's love may never have been. Memories of Adeline are also tied to the cold snow. With the memory of the cold released, so shall sentimental moments of the cold."

Dr. Elsy remembers the cold snow that rushed Annabelle into his life.

"Any lingering image of Adeline is a treasure, no matter the sickness that befell her. Every atom of Adeline is precious to me."

"Among the forgotten will be Adeline's cold hand to say goodbye." Said the Woman, reminding him again of the oil's."

"At the end of my mission, my daughter's wish is done,

and the future will be more beautiful than the past." Dr. Elsy said confidently. The Woman pulls Dr. Elsy close and undresses him. She dips her hands in the oil and rubs it into his skin. It seems a melody guides her fingers as she rubs the oil through every crevice of the Doctor's body. Once she reaches his ears, she seductively whispers to him.

"Your body is very hairy, hard and spongy. Perfect."

"I'm sorry?"

"One of the most beautiful works I've ever seen."

The Doctor's skin forms goose-bumps again.

She grabs a chalice[...]"

"Never before in my life was there a moment of peace looking at this scarred body."

The Woman walks up beside the Doctor with a melon hanging from a tree. She bites the fruit with her jaw, tearing a hole into the melon.

"Drink from this fruit until you feel a bubbling within your stomach. This water will stay in your body for one human year."

The Doctor raises the melon over his face. Sweet dew drops trickle down his throat.

"Delicious." Said Dr.Elsy sucking the liquid from the melon and gulping it down his throat.

The Woman packs a bag full of trinkets for the Doctor, including the Doctor's satchel.

"This I'll keep. Music must never be forgotten." Said the Woman, carefully hanging from a cabinet."

"Forgotten?"

If there is one thing I love of your kind is the ear for melody. Melody can be lost. If you only knew how many masterpieces are forgotten and ignored.

The Woman plays a small note with the lyre, then rests it by a statue." She takes a deep breath and heaves out,

"It's time to go, Doctor."



## Chapter 10

A small crash with a tree bark on the river wakes the Doctor. He finds himself floating under a corridor of ivory white laburnum trees. Fuzzy pollen-like plumes drop from the long branches onto the Doctor's eyelashes.

"They float around so gracefully."

"This trip down the river will take some time, and it is a great opportunity to hear the revelation that led you to my temple." She said, interrupting the Doctor's joyful gaze.

"The Doctor looks at the almost endless tunnel of the white trees."

"Yes, of course."

The Doctor clears his throat.

"As you know, the hunt began with my daughter's tears. Embracing the tear as a transcendental substance was the first step. It meant dispelling my scientific prejudice for the sake of seeing the world differently. I had three items as evidence for the supernatural origin of the sacred illness. This tear

wrapped around my neck, the self-realization that came with this tear, and of course, the visions."

"I suppose Anabelle had a head start in realizing our illness was invisible under a microscope. But how hastily she assented to the religious route as a solution. One problem with Anabelle is that she chose a route as an end. The most one can get via religion is a route, but how many dangerous marauders steer men on a route that never ends, even after you die.

"I knew my plight was delicate. Were I to plunge into the celestial world for an answer, I'd likely lose my instinct as a doctor and plunge into pure madness or dogmatism. But were I to abandon the spiritual path and return to pure science and materialism, I'd suffer from hopelessness and never be closer to my daughter's wishes."

"When the conversion was underway I had to manipulate myself with language puzzles, metaphysical mind games, and self-abnegation. Also, my knowledge of the present was deeper than in the past. I had to pile the past onto me and"

"absorb it like a sponge. I had to explore temples, immerse myself

in difficult classical literature, and learn Latin and Greek as quickly as possible. I kept myself imbibing the spiritual as true instead of philosophical until, at last, I was born again."

I needed to become The Father of Medicine, to be like Hippocrates. When I studied him, it was almost instant that I found the truth of my illness. He mentioned the Sacred Illness as something with no divine origin in his writings. Naturally, I would have accepted this as true, but I asked myself, from whence did rumors of its divinity originate? Why was it so important to dispel the disease as sacred, natural, and not divine? And how far back can I learn about this divinity?"

"One of the earliest accounts of the illness as something of."

"For What! Hamil laughs.

What do you mean for what? It looks like I got hit by a tree covered in blades, thorns, hammers."

Alil laughs,

"I believe you will be fine."

"Oh Really? I'll be fine. I don't know where the fuck I am. How I got here. I reckon this could be a severe concussion, perhaps the most severe of them all."

### Impossible Heroism Cuts

"When the voice in my head is the first sense to greet me, I know it's because I suffered a vicious blow to the head. One of those brutal knocks that leaves the mind and body in a twisted paralysis. I wonder about the consequences soon before my great, for while the memory fails the pain does not. Part of my memories there is pain."

"Damn it again! I forbade myself questions in this dark chasm for the trillionth time. What good can come of chit-chat with a floating voice in pitch-black nothing?"

The sound of waves crashing.

The words are cut short.

Just stop. The answer to your next question is inevitable, no further musings are required. When the fluttering pixies appear and

disappear like fireworks, I will know  
without a desire to summon wicked  
thoughts—wicked, sick thoughts.

Just sit back and enjoy this  
ballet of glitter, then to the exit  
doors I go.

But what if I'd rather stay  
here? Might it be safer to lay here  
until the end of my life with the  
voice in this dark chamber? How  
many times has this voice mutilated  
and scarred me? Truly, none that I  
remember—then again, I can't  
remember—especially now. If I did  
remember I'd promise never to do  
whatever it is that led me here. But  
alas, I don't remember, so surely I'll  
do it again, thus, to promise myself  
anything is a foolish thing—a foolish,  
stupid, thing.

“To them I say, the reason is  
in the blood.”

Does that not make you a liar?

How far I've decayed. You  
should see me now. Father, I cover  
my face with this bushy beard as a  
means of hiding from flashbacks of  
my own father on his deathbed. So  
morbid is the case that even a  
poorly cloaked reflection in the  
mirror can summon a fleshy  
phantom of him gazing at me with

dead eyes. What will be of my sanity  
without hiding?

The devilish voices you told  
me to ignore speak louder than ever  
now. The visions are clearer but  
darker too.

Or slightly blasphemous.

Of course the answer lies  
somewhere in another question:  
How often can someone see  
themselves as a lurching sag of doom  
before becoming one.

But things could be worse.  
Luckily I inherited my mother's  
eyes, nose, and lips. This makes  
confronting the mirror much less  
painful as I have never witnessed  
my father donning a beard. Surely,  
he could grow a powerful curly  
beard— the ones babylonian artists  
chiseled into statues alongside the  
powerful strong as the muscle  
holding the sword to holding the  
sword and the shield—but instead  
always on being clean-shaven.  
Thus, with a full beard, I mostly see  
my mother's eyes peeking out of a  
lush primal thicket. Vitality and  
bloom dwell in this bush despite it  
sprouting white weeds of old age.

Hah! What a digression. It all  
seems cowardly. Why can't I just

overcome my sorrow like most humanity? Coarsen into something stronger. The frailest among men seem better equipped to overcome a broken heart."

"I have wept invisible tears over and over again because of this destiny, with the only consolation that I am not the only one and not the most damned among the doomed. For what I've seen makes me feel that I deserve no pity.

To the children of suffering, those abducted. Yet, almost none of those who truly suffer sits on a throne. The true consequence, of course, would be an absolute undressing of the duplicitous liars. Like you

Hamil slams his pockets, anxious to find his phone. As he dips in to pull it out of his pocket, he finds it shattered.

"Fuck!" He slams his phone to the floor, smashing it into greater bits.

Hamil scans the room, lets out a sigh and turns to the Apparition.

"I need a phone." Says Hamil.

"A phone for what?" asks Alil

"To take care of this." Said Hamil.

"For What! Hamil laughs.

"I believe you will be fine."

"Oh Really? I'll be fine. I don't know where the fuck I am. How I got here. I reckon this could be a severe concussion, perhaps the most severe of them all."

"Calm down and trust me." Says The Apparition.

Please do not call the police or ambulance.

Hamil starts hyperventilating

"But is that not the root of the problem too? Why not submit to divine injustice rather than stand opposed like the holy books preach?"

## Intro Cuts

What you read here is a romantic struggle—to reconcile the vast inheritance of centuries of thought from all around the world. with the immediacy of personal suffering. To stitch together the ruins of theology and the ruins of family. It is a history, yes, but one experienced inwardly.

Fiction serves a clarifying function. The characters carry unresolved dilemmas, live out the problems philosophy alone cannot touch. Their tragedies, both ancient and modern, echo the same underlying wound, repeated across eras, dressed in shifting symbols.

In my heart, I hope too that this feels like the last warm breeze before winter's piercing cold, and the memory of that breeze before summer cinders spring.

The gods, the structures of ancient belief, the veins of sacred illness, the pulse of

metaphysics—each forms part of the foundation

My goal is to nourish the reader, just as I've spent my own time nourishing these words with knowledge, ideas, and emotions.

Your text is passionate, complex, and full of philosophical ambition—and its tone is both sincere and appropriately challenging. To improve it while remaining faithful to Schopenhauer's *Art of Literature* and your own Wildean aesthetics, I'll refine it for clarity, rhythm, precision of thought, and literary strength, trimming repetition, smoothing transitions, and slightly reordering sections to deepen its emotional and philosophical crescendo.

In this book I attempt what I believe all literature must strive for: a message within a message—at once clear and obscure, arriving precisely when and where it must. My aim is not to amuse, but to nourish—just as I have nourished these pages with knowledge, with affliction, and with

the silent emotions that outlast even memory.

The books most worth reading are those that reach the human spirit where it lies most suffocated—crushed in the narrow compartments of modern life: the pigeonholes of routine, the breathless rooms of obligation, the press of buses, the dead light of cities. In these spaces, thirst, hunger, and fatigue merge into a single hum of dread—and it is there, amid exhaustion, that the soul sometimes sees itself more clearly than it does in solitude.

This book contains sacrilege. For some, it will feel like desecration—an affront to sacred beliefs. But desecration is sometimes required to cleanse the temple. Many of us still kneel before tyrannical gods of thought—gods long dead, gods born of fear—and we require a new Perseus to enter our temples and break their image. If there is blasphemy here, it is the kind born of longing, not cruelty.

This is not a book of idle dreams, nor merely a story. It is the distillation of long reflection—of fact and fiction fused by inner necessity. It holds truths: historical, philosophical, theological. The names of forgotten gods, the old architectures of belief, the sacred illnesses that once afflicted saints and madmen—these are not metaphors here; they are the very beams of the house.

I draw not only from what I've read but from what I've endured. The cardiocentric philosophy of Aristotle, the mysticism of Egypt, the metaphysics of Greece—they have passed through the crucible of my own suffering and emerged transformed, not as footnotes, but as living tissue. Herodotus, Plato, Goethe—they do not adorn this work; they inhabit it.

Religion is not spared. Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and even atheism—all are examined, questioned, sometimes disassembled. I write not to provoke, but because the questions demand it. These pages carry criticisms of gods, prophets, institutions—not from contempt, but

from the agony of having thought too much for too long.

Fiction enters not to distract but to unveil. The characters are masks worn by my own contradictions, my own unsolved dilemmas. They suffer through ancient tragedies and modern griefs because those sufferings share one wound, dressed in different customs.

This is not a work of entertainment, but of instruction—though instruction hidden in myth and blood. It is a romantic effort to reconcile the ruins of European thought with the fresh wreckage of personal life. A stitching-together of theology and family, of books and bruises. It is a history—yes—but one lived inwardly.

I include modern thought not because I revere it, but because it surrounds me. Consciousness, behavior, ideologies that parade as salvation—some I believe, most I do not. But all inhabit my waking thoughts like uninvited mourners at a funeral.

Invention, too, was necessary—to bridge myth and reality, to let ancient breath pass through the lungs of modern narrative. But even invention here is earnest. It serves a single truth: that man is not an argument, not a diagram, but a suffering animal who sometimes sings.

At its root, this is a book about union—not unity imposed from without, but unity wrested from the fight between heart and mind. It is in that friction that meaning begins to glow.

A warning: This is not for those who seek tranquil reading before sleep. These pages may agitate, unnerve, and summon voices you believed long buried. But do not tremble—I am both the creator and the destroyer, the knight who swears to slay the very beast he himself conjured. But the creature dies only if you reach the final page. So reach the final page.

Though melancholy cloaks much of this journey, there are moments—brief, perhaps

accidental—where laughter stirs, where innocence peeks through the fog, where an old man's mutterings resemble wisdom, and a child's coo calls back spring from beneath the ash of memory.

And in my heart, I hope this book feels like the last warm breeze before winter's teeth arrive—and the memory of that breeze before summer's fire consumes spring's tender green.

This is my attempt. My philosophy. My offering. My first book.

We come face to face with the soul's posture. And to escape that quiet suffocation, we must rise—not with force, but with metaphor. For metaphors are angels dressed in language, wings folded into syllables. They lift us toward an invisible sanctum, where the spirit can stretch, rest, and remember its original shape. Heaven, then, is not above, but within—summoned by the right words at the right time.

Often at odds, they quarrel over the course, yet together they

keep the vessel of the self afloat. Even as the winds of misfortune blow with neither aim nor mercy, they steer—not toward certainty, but toward meaning, which is the truer compass.

This book is overdue. I often tell my brothers and sisters, hungry to taste this work, that I'd rather not poison them with something raw and undercooked, but as time ticks forward, rot seems to be the expected dish. It breaks my heart, but there is a solution. It is to treat this book like old wine over raw poultry. Wine can be invigorating in moderation, intoxicating in great gulps, and, in cases of excess, poisonous to the grave.

I've tried to abandon this book a few paragraphs into the work. But no matter how hard I try to abandon this one, I will never find the heart.

Also I want from this book to have something to teach even though it's on a platform unintended for inspiring truth. To teach others but also teach myself. I want the reader to absorb some knowledge,



an inspiration of the type Dan Brown is known in his books.

The most entertaining books in my library have been those aiming to enchant the reader with philosophical truth rather than raw fantasy. Examine my own personal questions that seem unanswerable. Perhaps my imagination isn't as mature as most others, or as profound as a child to be so creative, but here is man confronted by a world, with answers belonging in the ethereal.

At last when I am done with this work it will live in a new aisle. An aisle of fact and fiction, no place for a library, left in the middle of some aisle with an irreparable flickering lightbulb. Somewhere between fact and fiction. A healthy balance of the art of lying as Mark Twain wrote in an essay.

He has fallen in love with these twin captains steering us in opposite directions on opposite ends of a ship.

Lovers of perspicuity will flinch from time to time, but fear not

dear lovers of concision, the sum of the content will unite all parts in a harmony of the mind and heart. Two often diametrically opposed captains of our life choices.

This book offers what thoughtful readers desire and true writers strive to achieve: a message within a message, as clear and obscure as it needs to be precisely where it needs to be. To those who love clarity, the mist may seem unwelcome—but it is rain, not sun alone, that nourishes the roots beneath. Each shadow cast upon these pages belongs to a design that seeks not simple brightness, but harmony between the rational and the irrational, between intellect and intuition. This is an ode to the twin helmsmen of our inner life—mind and heart—often in conflict, yet bound to steer the same vessel. They dwell within us, awaiting the wind's call, ready to take the tiller in both light and dark, each guiding the spirit toward a deeper unity.

They dwell within us, awaiting the wind's call, ready to take the tiller in both light and dark, each

guiding the spirit toward a deeper unity.

n this book I attempt what readers and writers both appreciate: a message within a message, as clear and obscure as it needs to be, precisely where it needs to be. Lovers of clarity will shutter in the foggy mist, but do not fear dear lovers of a clear bright truth. Cloudy rain feeds the flowers growing on the earth of this story. much as the sun carrying that feeds the sum of the content will unite all parts in a harmony of rational and irrational.

I come to banish those who have abducted the word to make the word suffering seem noble. All those successful, often claiming they suffered for their success, may know of temporary pain, but nothing of pure suffering. Anyone who truly suffers and bears their successes to the world, should be the kings of the universe. Yet, almost none of those who truly suffer sits on a throne. The true consequence, of course, would be an absolute undressing of the duplicitous liars.

Hamil, Lisandra, and Luca, stare at the wing, seemingly torn, from the back of the creature, it came. The end of this wing, that was ripped off,

emerge from the upper back, anchored to the scapula, scapula and spine for maximum support. The wingspan would require an extensive muscular system—vast extensions of the pectoralis major and deltoids, along with new, specialized muscles layered over the trapezius and latissimus dorsi—to generate enough power for lift and sustained flight.

The skeletal structure would include elongated versions of the arm bones: a reinforced humerus, radius, and ulna forming the wing's main support, much like a bird's. Finger bones metacarpals and phalanges would be fused or extended to support the wing's framework, stretched taut with layers of muscle, sinew, and feathers or membrane.

For balance, the human pelvis and legs might evolve to be lighter, or the tailbone elongate into a stabilizing rudder. Lungs and the cardiovascular system were significantly larger and more

efficient to supply the oxygen demands of flight. Overall, a winged human would be broader, lighter-boned, and built more like a living glider, blending power and grace with dramatic anatomical adaptation. Collectively, these components ensure the wing's grace and power in flight.

“This, dear guests,” the teacher began, gesturing “is the severed wing of a Umbrahael.”

Each shadow cast upon these pages belongs to a design that seeks not simple brightness, but harmony between

This is also an ode to the twin captains of our inner life. Those twin captains dwell within, keeping us afloat, each awaiting their shift in the light and in the dark.

This is an ode to the captains of the ship of our lives—mind and heart—often in conflict, nonetheless keeping us afloat, and settling in the right direction, even as the winds of misfortune blow us in neither direction.





## To the children of suffering

I come to banish those who have abducted the word to make the word suffering seem noble. All those successful, often claiming they suffered for their success, may know of temporary pain, but nothing of pure suffering. Anyone who truly suffers and bears their successes to the world, should be the kings of the universe. Yet, almost none of those who truly suffer sits on a throne. The true consequence, of course, would be an absolute undressing of the duplicitous liars.

## Second monk cuts.

. A reinforced humerus, elongated radius and ulna—these form the scaffold of the wing, not unlike the anatomy of birds. The finger bones—metacarpals and phalanges—are fused or extended, forming the spars over which the membrane or feathers stretch, a living architecture of tension and strength.”



## Her Silhouette

He pauses in the doorway, and something ancient moves down his spine—a cold bloom, not of winter’s bite or fever’s warning, but a chill older than weather, older even than flesh. It is the kind of cold that lingers in stone after the gods have left, the quiet ache found in ruins where no prayers are spoken anymore. It clings to him like a memory he cannot place. At the far end of the corridor, a figure wavers—The Woman. Her outline is obscured by shadow, her back turned, but he feels her attention like a blade unsheathed in the dark. A presence, sharp and undeniable.

“I thought I wasn’t supposed to feel cold anymore,” he whispers to the silence, ashamed of how human the confession sounds. In his own ears, it echoes like a trespass. As if admitting to sensation, to something as basic as discomfort, is a regression. A man who has suffered enough should be beyond such things—beyond the body. But pain, he knows now, does not elevate. It roots. It rewrites. His body has

already been made new by it—etched and opened by suffering, by knowledge too large to contain.

The reply is quiet but cuts through him. “The shiver isn’t in your flesh, Doctor. It’s in your thoughts.” Her voice is not cruel, but it is not kind either. It’s like wind passing through gauze—insistent, intimate, invisible. He wants to correct her—say it’s Dr. Elsy, to retreat behind titles and science, to armor himself in sterile vocabulary. But the words die in his mouth. That man, the one who clung to clean logic and clinical language, is no longer here. He died with the last breath of a small girl in a hospital bed, with no gods to save her.

“You’re afraid,” he says, though he does not know to whom the words are addressed. The hallway seems to react, the shadows tightening, the walls bending inward slightly, as though listening. Fear no longer feels like something to overcome—it feels like a companion, something woven into his blood.

As they walk, the corridor stretches beyond reason, its architecture defying physics. Time seems to unravel behind their steps. The stone walls begin to crack with

light—not daylight, but the soft, gold illumination of memory. A warmth not felt on the skin, but in the marrow. They pass alcoves grown from the stone like tumors. In one, he sees books: ancient, thick with moisture, their spines pulsing faintly. These are not books meant to be read. They are meant to be remembered. Or perhaps to remember him.

He reaches for one, almost without choice. The binding is soft, disturbingly so—organic. Alive. He opens it, and the image strikes him like a vision: a sea folding in on itself, then rising in the form of a man, cruciform, his mouth open not in praise but in shock. Beneath him, blood blooms in the unmistakable shape of a question. The Woman speaks again. “This one’s older than your language,” she says, closer now. “But I’ll teach you how to see.”

She begins to chant in a language that’s foreign and yet familiar, as though etched into the bone. The words land heavily in his chest, like a second heart beginning to beat:

River, sea, and the drop of rain—  
To the red within a human

vein.

Sand and soil, fog and mist—  
And you exist.”

He closes the book, terrified that to continue would unravel what little is left of his identity. They move deeper, into a room that feels smaller than its dimensions suggest—as though it was carved not from space, but from secrecy. A basin is carved into the stone. He turns a dial beside it and water begins to flow, not with the hiss of plumbing but with the softness of memory. The sound reminds him of childhood baths, of his daughter’s laughter when water still held magic, not sorrow.

“This,” the Woman says, gesturing to a canvas half-consumed by shadow, “was the first vision.” It appears black at first, empty. Then white flecks emerge—stars, ash, bone fragments. He steps closer. It doesn’t unfold visually, but somatically. The sensation creeps across his skin, through his nerves, until meaning blooms in the blood. “Water in all things,” he breathes, and the words feel older than his mouth. “This is where inspiration began,” she says. “You get one. Only one. Use it wrong and you lose it. Forever.”

He wants to respond with something profound, something worthy. What escapes is: "Beautiful." But the word breaks in his mouth. Because what he feels is not beauty—it is awe, it is terror. He understands now: the vision wasn't gifted. It was inherited. And all inheritance comes with debt.

He flips through his notebook—names spiral like constellations. Some blur. One glows. The patient's name he could not save. The one who mattered most. "This was the first," he says. "Wasn't it?" She says nothing. Only opens another door.

The air shifts—thickens with the scent of old blood and copper. The next room houses a statue: a blind man, arms outstretched. Not pleading. Reaching. As if what he once saw destroyed him, and now he seeks ignorance like a refuge. "Where is immortality?" Elsy asks, voice low. "The real kind." The Woman's reply is simple. "In vision. The kind that arrives in seizures and dream-riddled fevers. The kind that splits the skull. But only those who suffer long enough learn to see."

"And love?" he asks.

"Love is the price. Pain is the dialect."

Now he sees the truth of what surrounds him—paintings of prophets collapsed beneath divine weight, anatomical sketches of brains cracked like eggs, sacred illnesses confused for madness. "What do the gods want?" he asks.

"Not worship," she replies, touching the fresco. "Not belief. Only witness."

He laughs, bitter and dry. "Then why hide?"

"We're not hiding. We're waiting—for your kind to look back."

He walks again. A final door. More glyphs, pulsing like old wounds. He touches one and tastes his own childhood. Another, and he remembers her—his daughter's voice, soft and feverish: Will it hurt, Papa?

"Yes," he wants to say now. "But only what hurts can be holy."

A book lies waiting. He opens it.

"The cure of me is the cure of the world. My daughter loved humanity too much.

She asked me to save them. And then, she died.”

Something breaks inside him—old and fossilized. A howl rises, a sound no longer bound to the present or the past. “All illnesses have a father,” he says. She whispers, “You are not the first. But vision remembers its children.”

He looks at her, trembling. “Why do you fear us?”

“We don’t,” she says. “We envy you. Only what breaks can love. Only what dies can worship. That’s why we chose your bloodline.”

The rage comes then—not fire, but grief sharpened into clarity. “You chose us. You gave us scraps of light and left us to murder each other in the dark.”

She reaches out, gently, and touches his cheek.

“There is one path left. Take hers. Finish it. Bring paradise.”

He stares at her. At the blade now in his hand—when had it appeared? He speaks of his final rebellion. “I’d rather burn heaven than beg for it.” And plunges the knife into his chest.

The blood flows. The world bends. Her voice follows him down. “No one can harm you now but yourself.”

He gasps. “Why did she die?”

She kneels beside him, mother-soft. “Because she believed in you. Even after you stopped.”

And so Dr. Elsy, who once believed reason could cure all wounds, bled beneath the indifferent gaze of gods who coveted his grief. The blade did not kill him. It unsealed him—opened the door between man and myth, between ache and awakening. His blood spread not across stone, but across time. In that crimson tide, the stars wrote their apology. And the Woman, never truly a woman but memory made flesh, kissed his brow with the pity of eternity.

He had not found paradise. He had become it. A garden of suffering, a cathedral of ache. Not peace, but something more truthful: beauty drawn from the mouth of pain. Somewhere far or long ago, a child’s voice rises in fevered laughter. “Will it hurt, Papa?” And now, finally, he answers:

“Yes, my love. But only what hurts can be holy.”

Above the place where he fell, the stars shudder. A new glyph burns in the sky—not a word, but a longing. My name: Elsy.

And the record is sealed. Not in scripture. Not in ink. But in the trembling hands of those who dare to love. And the shiver of minds that dare to see.

### Annabelle Sheen Young love

Anabelle Sheene’s fingers glide slowly over Hamil’s hands—rough, calloused, marked by years of unseen battles. Her touch is feather-light, trembling with a strange mixture of awe and tenderness.

*What violence have these hands seen?* she breathes softly to herself, as if afraid to disrupt the fragile silence around him.

His chest rises gently beneath her palm, the rhythmic beep of the monitor steady and reassuring. Tape clings to his thick, dark arms, wires looping like fragile lifelines connecting him to the world.

Hamil’s eyelids flutter open, revealing eyes hazy but searching. The faint movement makes her heart quicken.

Without thinking, Anabelle pulls her hands back from Hamil’s body, weaving into the thick dark hair at his temple. She strokes it with reverence—as if coaxing him back from the edge of something deep and shadowed.

He shivers under her touch.

Suddenly aware, Anabelle pulls back, a flush coloring her cheeks.

“Doctor—don’t move,” she warns softly. “The wires—be careful.”

He tries to sit up, limbs tangled in the mess of tubes.

“You slipped,” she explains, her voice low and steady, “fell on your head... went into shock.”

He exhales a ragged sigh. “Oh God.”

Her gaze is fixed on his face—tired, vulnerable—and a surge of something she cannot name rises inside her.

“I’m so sorry, Doctor Sheene,” he murmurs.

She shakes her head gently, smiling faintly. "This isn't your fault. No need to apologize."

His eyes darted to the watch on his wrist. "Seven hours... it's ten o'clock."

Her breath catches at the sight of him—fragile, human.

"Why were you in such a hurry to leave?" she asks, voice soft as a secret.

He bites his lip, hesitation pulling tight between them. "I was rushing to my car... to hide."

"Hide?" Her voice is almost a whisper.

He looks away. "From... nothing."

Anabelle wants to reach for him again—to brush the hair back from his forehead, to trace the line of his jaw. Her heart pounds like a frantic drum.

"How did you know I was in such a hurry?" he asks suddenly, eyes holding hers.

She blushes, looking down at her hands. "I followed you. Just a little."

"Why?"

A shy smile blooms on her lips. "Aren't you glad I did?"

He nods slowly, eyes warm. "Of course. I'm sorry, yes, I'm grateful. So grateful."

Her smile deepens, warmth flooding her chest. "It's not the first time I've saved a life... but maybe the first time I've wanted to save someone for myself."

The door opens. A nurse steps in with a clipboard.

"Vitals stable. No fractures. Just a laceration healing well. A few stitches and you'll be fine."

Anabelle grins, teasing gently, "Been taking your vitamins and minerals, Doctor?"

He smiles back, and for a moment, everything else falls away.

"We'll stitch you up, and you'll be alright."

She hesitates by the door, then turns once more.

"Before you go... did you see or hear anything before you fell?"

Her voice softens, vulnerable.

“I only saw you... slipping into the snow. Nothing else.”

Her eyes linger on his face, memorizing every curve, every breath. In the quiet room, something unspoken swells—a fragile hope, a secret promise whispered between two souls caught in the fragile light of recovery.

Something about you compels a person to touch you.

**\*\*My body does not belong to me alt. That much, I understand now. But you were only half-right, Father.\*\***

You told me to surrender, to lay myself at God's feet. To wear my suffering like a crown of thorns, and through that pain, find peace.

I searched for peace. I scraped my knees praying for it. I waited for it in silence.

But peace never came.

I wonder now—did you ever believe the words you spoke, or were they just another script? A role handed to you, like a priest in a play.

When I came to you—bloodied, broken—you told me I would find rest, if not in this life, then the next. You pointed skyward, to something unseen.

I looked up. I saw nothing.

How can the afterlife exist if I cannot die?

I should have gone by the cliffs, by the river.

I should have vanished on the frozen steps of the university.

Hell, I should have disappeared crossing the street.

Every step should have been my last. But no—scarred, brutalized, my soul refuses to let me go. It drags me forward, through nights too long and days too empty.

I came to confess.

That I never told you—never once—that I do not believe.

Not because I wanted it. Not because I chose it.

I wanted to believe. To feel certainty, relief, light. Who wouldn't?

But belief was never in me.

And what greater sin exists than a man who bows his head and lies?

So I never lied.

But it doesn't matter.

You called it a choice—this absence of faith.



But it was never a choice,  
Father.

If it were, I'd kneel like the  
Orthodox do. But I can't.

Because I was born this way.

Doomed from the first  
breath.

My body belongs to suffering.  
To pain, wherever it drags me next.

And yet, I have a purpose.

A purpose God never offered,  
never fulfilled.

To do what my daughter  
wanted.

She's gone. But her wish  
remains, burned into me like the  
scars on my skin.

No, my body does not belong  
to me. And it does not belong to  
God.

It belongs to something  
beyond Him.

And now, it is time for me to  
go.

Not toward salvation. Not  
toward hope.

Just forward, into the dark,  
because there's nowhere else to go.

Since the time of Eden's  
bloom—when golden laburnum and  
daffodils painted the world with  
innocence—there existed a force  
that guarded the fragile, invisible  
aspects of life: the dew, the dreams,  
the whispers of the unnoticed. This  
speaker, a guardian spirit of the  
overlooked and oppressed, mourns  
how humanity, in its pursuit of  
towering beauty and  
civilization—palaces, stones,  
mountains—trampled the small  
willows, the restless night-creatures,  
and the delicate ecosystems  
beneath. The great structures of the  
world might shine and impress, but  
they are born of a violence that  
forgets its debt to the dark wings  
that shelter it. Amid thunder, hail,  
fire, and storm, this being moves  
silently, bearing the burden of  
protection—an unseen hand behind  
life's fertility and fragility.

Yet time has ravaged the  
protector. Once radiant, their form is  
now decayed, tainted by the very  
earth they gave life to. The  
guardian's sorrow turns bitter:

beauty, they argue, should not come at the cost of corruption, nor should creation be poisoned by careless domination. They confront the arrogance of the powerful and remind the listener that true strength lies not in conquest but in the creation and preservation of life. As divine powers face each other on dark stone, an ancient feminine presence—a sensual enchantress—emerges, perhaps signaling a new force, one neither of destruction nor of blind creation, but of transformation.

When will there be a slighter peace, when the moon can play mother to children at night. When the sun serves to enlight.

## Grave goodbye 2

My body does not belong to me.  
I understand this now old priest  
But you were only half-right.

My body does not belong to me. I understand this now, old priest—but you were only ever half-right.

I wonder, Father—  
were you lying the whole time,  
or just too blind, to see the truth of what I am?

You told me to ignore it all, to offer myself to God.

To carry my torment like his crucified son—and through that agony, I will find happiness.

But how stupid was I Father.

To ever dream of happiness.

I wonder father, were you lying about all of this, or just naive about my damnation.

No—you had to know.

With all your years, you had to be wise enough to know.

That all your preaching

I wasn't meant for love.

and simply say what you are ordained to say?

When I went to you, bloodied, broken, you said, I will find peace, if not here then in the afterlife.

And you pointed to the skies.

When I looked up, I saw  
nothing.

With only my manners I smile.

But how is the afterlife  
possible if I can't die?

I should have died on the cliffs  
by the river,

or at the university, on those  
frozen staircases.

hell, even crossing the street  
to visit your grave.

Every single step is a step  
unto death but no.

Brutalized, in and out, scarred  
to the bone, and still by soul denies  
me peace.

I came to you, in angst hoping  
you would hear this last confession.

I came to confess.

That

I don't know if you noticed,  
that I never said.

That I am a non-believer.

I have always been a  
non-believer against my own  
wishes.

To see jubilation of the heart  
spawned by religious belief—

What a miraculous gift. How  
I've tried to walk the sacred steps of  
piety, but always trip where one  
must say—I believe. To say I believe  
would be an evil lie, and all juice  
spilling from that fruit would be the  
rotten dew of hypocrisy. And what  
greater crime exists in every holy  
book, in the essence of every faith  
than to be a hypocrite believer. At  
least there I hold my honor. A  
choice of suffering, you might say,  
But if it were a choice, and not a  
destiny, I'd fall to my knees like the  
orthodox do. But I was born a  
non-believer. Doomed from the  
moment of conception. My body  
belongs to suffering, bound to a  
note in my pocket—No, my body  
does not belong to me. But it does  
not belong to God either, as you  
insisted it must. It belongs to  
something beyond God.

Who would turn that down?

No one would forgo the joys  
of spiritual bliss once blessed with  
the gift.

How I've tried to walk the  
sacred steps of piety, but always  
trip where one must say—I believe.

I came to tell you how foolish I was,  
to look for happiness.

I came to you in hope.

You tried to help.

To say I believe would be an evil lie,

and all juice spilling from  
that fruit would be the rotten dew  
of hypocrisy.

And what greater crime  
exists in every holy book, in the  
essence of every faith than to be a  
hypocrite believer. —At least there I  
hold my honor.

So I came to say, much too  
late, that I never believed.

“A choice of damnation I  
never wanted, and you said it was a  
choice.

“But it is not a choice, dear  
father.”

“If it were only a choice, I'd  
fall to my knees like the orthodox  
do, but it's not a choice.

I was born like this.

I was born a non-believer.

“Doomed from the moment  
of conception.”

My body belongs to suffering  
bound to pain. Wherever it should  
take me. The true one.

I do have a purpose.

It is to do what God never  
could or never chose to do. To do  
what my daughter wants.

Even though she no longer  
lives, she left me with a purpose  
where my soul lives.

No, my body does not belong  
to me, but neither does it to God. As  
you often said I must.

My body belongs to something  
beyond God.

Now It's time for me to go. A  
mission that God cannot or chooses  
to do—with my pain as a compass.

To say I believe would be an  
evil lie.

And is there a greater sin, in  
any holy book,

How I tried to walk the  
sacred path,

wherever it may lead me.

The road may be fatal,

but it is the right one.

The only true one.

I do have a purpose:

To do what God could not—  
or chose not—to do.

Now it's time to go.

On a mission He will not—or  
cannot—undertake.

A compass has been placed in  
my hand.

It points clearly.

And this—

This is the choice that sends men to  
heaven or hell.

My body does not belong to  
me. I know this now, old priest. But  
you were only half-right. Why am I  
here? I came to tell you how foolish I  
was, to seek happiness. I came to  
you in hope. You tried to help. I was  
wrong to come, but I came to ask,  
much too late, to ask if you knew  
about my damnation. Were you lying  
or just as naïve as me? Part of me  
thinks: With all your years, you must  
have known that I was doomed. I  
remember one time, I came to you  
once, broken and bloodied. You said

peace would come—if not in this life,  
then in the next. But tell me father,  
how can I reach the afterlife—if I  
cannot die. I should have died on the  
cliffs by the river. Or on those frozen  
staircases. Hell, it could have been  
today, on the way to the grave. Each  
fucking step is a step toward death,  
and yet I live. It would have been  
better if I had died before it all. I have  
a secret, Father. Perhaps you sensed  
it, though I never said it aloud. That I  
am a non-believer. I have always been  
a non-believer against my own  
wishes. To see jubilation of the heart  
spawned by religious belief—what a  
miraculous gift. Who would forgo the  
joys of spiritual bliss once blessed  
with

I came to ask you, Father.  
Did you know? Did you know of my  
damnation before I did? Part of  
me thinks, with all your years  
and wisdom, you must have known  
the cards were stacked against  
me from the start, that my path  
was etched in stone, leading  
only to this. Wasting my time  
chasing a ghost called  
happiness. I remember one time,  
I crawled back to you, a mess of  
torn flesh and shattered hope.  
You said peace would come—if not  
in this life, then in the next.  
But tell me, father, how can I  
reach the afterlife if I can't  
die? I should have died on the  
river cliffs, where the wind  
howled like a banshee and the  
fall was a certainty. Or on

those godforsaken frozen staircases, each step a gamble with the Grim Reaper. Each goddamn step is a step closer to death, and yet I live. I have a secret. Maybe you sensed it, or maybe not. Deep within, I am a non-believer. I have always been a non-believer against my own wishes. To see jubilation spawned by God's power—what a miraculous gift. A gift I could only witness from the outside, like a beggar pressing his face against a bakery window. Who would forgo the joys of spiritual bliss once blessed with the gift? And how I've tried to climb the sacred steps, but always tripped where one must say: I believe. To say I believe would be an evil lie, the fruit of that lie dripping with the putrid juice of hypocrisy. And what greater crime exists in every holy book, in the essence of every faith, than to be a hypocrite believer? At least there I hold my honor. A choice of suffering... If you were alive, you'd say, if you really try with all your heart... But if it were a choice, and not a destiny, I'd fall to my knees like the orthodox do. But I was born a non-believer. Doomed from the moment of conception. And so it is. My body belongs to suffering, bound to a note in my pocket—No, my body does not belong to me. But it does not belong to God either, as you insisted it must. No. It belongs to suffering, the purpose of my life I often sought to escape.

The one you told me to escape. With a formula with nothing but skies above. Skies which you pointed and smiled. But when I looked above, I saw nothing.

## Quick Basic Plot Guide

Genesis

Chapter order fixed.

Anywhere it reads “Cuts” just skip, gloss, or ignore. I plan to cut most of it out and keep some ideas.

I will quickly run through the plot since the chapters are all fugged up.

A Grave Goodbye, New Journey- Hamil begins his journey, with a monologue, with a dead priest, who he once called wise, and often gave him a path to happiness.

Impossible Heroism→playful ideas on destiny, choice, good, evil, metaphysics. Duty.

On the Cliffs→ A poem Hamil unconsciously reads out of the edge of a cliff.

Here we go again→ Hamil finds himself trapped after falling off a cliff. He wakes up to an elderly man treating him like a patient.

Tea of Truth → Hamil and the old man have a philosophical discussion over a potent tea.

On Nightmares→ Hamil reveals his motives for becoming a doctor.

Pilgrimage→ Hamil and Alil Plan their Holy Journey.

The River→ Hamil and Alil share a rusty canoe and head towards Tripoli.

Into the Mediterranean→ Alil and Hamil swim from Tripoli to Isla Varen sharing another deep spiritual experience.

Princess Lisandra→ Alil and Hamil successfully reach the shore of Cyprus only to be met by police for illegal immigration. After being released they head towards Princess Lisandra who lives in a giant castle.

The Incident on Mount Hermon→ Alil reveals all to Lisandra.

Adopted from the Middle of the Sea & Tragedy of Adeline, → Lisandra has a long conversation with Hamil introducing herself and learning about Hamil’s tragic relationship with his wife and daughter.

Storm with No clouds→ Hamil sees a storm approaching no one else can see.

Grace lost in the flower garden→ After suffering a vision, Hamil wakes up in the middle of the night, and wanders over to a rose garden that caught his eye earlier in the day.

Marvelous Maledictions→ Alil and Lisandra learn Lucian Morcaria, an old acquaintance, wrote the definitive book on the Sacred Sickness, but when they attempt to order the book they find that only ½ of it was published.

New York City → Hamil and Lisandra head to NYC to visit Lucian Morcaria to learn about the Sacred Sickness. Afterwards they plan to visit Father Catalano at a Baptistry in New Jersey.

Luca the Blood Artist→ Hamil and Lisandra meet the eccentric Luca Morcaria to learn about his unpublished book.

The Walk of Truth→ Luca shares thoughts on his spiritual transformations and sneakily uncovers the mystery of the Sacred Sickness dwelling in Hamil.

The Divine Staff→ Luca provides a framework for finding a cure for the sacred sickness. Telling the story of Asclepius the God of Medicine and a Drug made to send Cronos to the underworld.

Gluck→ Hamil, Lisandra, and Luca head over to visit Catalano at the Baptistry in Jersey City. On the ride there the Captain tells them the story of the church later becoming the Baptistry.

The New Religion→ Once arriving at the baptistry, Catalano tells Hamil, Lisandra and Luca his plans to create a new Religion. A great syncretic to unite religious and non religious under one belief system.

The Umbrahael→ The crew learns about a race of people with wings like the ancient Sumerian Anunakki.

The Reaper→ The Umbrahael created their own society after being forced into the mountains by the ancient Egyptians. Their alleged extinction was the result of Ipzil DalCaver.



Ipzil & Cyra→ Ipzil runs into a beautiful girl.

Woozy with Hygea→ Luca feels sick after hearing the grisly story of the Umbrahael. He is ready to go home. Captain Meinhardt drops them at the Jersey City Docs. They head back to New York.

Motives→Luca suffers after finding all of his artistic endeavors shallow compared to the depth of the baptistry. He researches and finds Alil, Catalano, and Lavarenti are all descendants of Roman Empire royalty. He concludes with the help of Hamil and Lisandra they plan to reestablish the Roman Empire starting with America. The Ancient Egyptians were right to trap Umbrahael in the mountains.

University Files→ Hamil finds himself slowly falling in love with Lisandra. But flashbacks to his love life keep him in a state of fear. \*\*I might cut the University scenes out, but I feel like they'll eventually find a place\*\*.

Key ideas

Character guide

A little descendant of

\*\*Hamil is a descendant of Dorian and Asclepius. He is half god, half man.

63.3 % man, 33.3% god. 1.3% unknown.

Isla Varen is where the Umbrahael live. The island belongs to Lavarenti. Thus the name Isla Varen is a clue that Alil kept secret so only Hamil and Lisandra know by mouth.

Lavarenti is still under construction.

Luca continues to succumb to his madness, killing Damyan the same way Ipzil killed Senazul and Jenina to "Feel" Ipzil's pleasure as he felt Lisandra's pain. He connects with the crew and follows them as they all set sail towards Isla Varen.

Gluck crashes en route to Isla Varen. Killing Captain Meinhardt. \*At Last\*

### Incident on Mount Hermon cuts:

Destruction and reconstruction of emotional muscle—so that it grows stronger, even at old age. While told to walk, I say sprint. At the expense of a torn muscle. It will not say be gentle. After you have grown stronger, you will soon agree, desecrate, deconstruct, and reconstruct to grow stronger. This is the path to greater health. The closer the world moves to a more perfect body, means it must be desecrated, ripped apart, and sewn back together by its own hands.

## Rose Gardan Cuts

At night, it seemed a resting place for the sun with moonlight, beaming through from a giant glass arching copulas high above all, the grand halls of the great chateaux Di Roma.

## Lisandra Cuts

Lisandra shakes her head.  
"This world is much better suited for dinosaurs than humans. How dare those praise the earth as perfectly made by a perfect creator. They have never truly met the world as those who suffered its violence. "

Hamil laughs.

dancing stars appear. Which only appears after a violent knock on the head, the shadow of the neurons—visible only to those who didn't die after a knock to the head.

finishing, the more his hunger showed.

“Lavarenti's role was to be a Baptist priest of the new religion. Since he has gone missing, Alil was to absorb the role, but the difficulty for Alil is beyond his physical and mental capacity. How far, how long, must it take for him to absorb the amount of truth, how many hours was necessary for him to walk the sands. It makes sense to take on his role, or what would have been his role, had he not left.

### Umbrahael cuts

He found Ipzil crouched alone, Ipzil had formed a sharp cleaver. With the sharpest tip he'd ever seen. And every few minutes, Ipzil's eyes would wander—always toward the great Temple, to the sealed mouth that led into the heart of the Vicoose Stone. He stared too long, like a man mesmerized. As he worked, a thin line of saliva glistened at the corner of his mouth. The closer he came to

## The Tragedy of Adline Cuts

She wanted to go to school.  
Not for praise or prizes, but just to  
be there, among the others. She  
wanted the chatter, the pencils, the  
books, the smell of chalk. All of these  
items children took little heed to,  
she found oddly delightful. She had  
that kind of longing only children  
have—pure, and entirely  
unselfconscious.

But I knew what would  
happen. I'd seen her fits—how they  
came on without warning, how her  
limbs would twist, how her voice  
would break into those... sounds. Not  
words, not cries, just something  
primal. It scared people. Even adults.  
Children wouldn't understand.  
Teachers would look away. It would  
shame her, and terrify them.

People talk about empathy  
now as if it's a standard feature of  
the modern world—like plumbing or  
electricity. But when they're

In search of their spiritual  
aspirations they imagined what a  
god might be, all powerful, all  
beautiful, and all wealthy. And so,  
many anointed themselves gods.  
This was the beginning of envy.

confronted with something  
they can't explain, their empathy  
dries up like water on a hot stone.  
You'd think we'd outgrown  
superstition, but I swear it's only  
grown more absurd. They don't burn  
witches anymore; they just avoid  
them, politely. They speak of  
energies and demons, horoscopes,  
karma. It's the same fear, just with  
different names.

## Facts

In Hama, there is a temple that saw different faiths over centuries.

The Sacred Sickness is Mentioned in History.

Philosophical Claims of Ancient Egypt by Aristotle

Truth Artemis, her marriage with and Birth of Asclepius are all real appeals to historic.

Locations do exist. New York, New Jersey.

The river leading to the beaches is real.

Apollo and Princess Coronis

## Umbrabel cuts

But history does not vanish—it is archived in silence. And beneath the sediment of conquest, in sealed chambers of

It was the *sound* of her cries, the desperate, strangled gasps for air, the way her body convulsed with each agonizing breath. It was the way her eyes, wide with terror, pleaded with me, a silent plea that I knew I would never answer.

Stories for want of returning to that childhood sandbox are best left for a therapist." says Luca hyperventilating.earth and pressure, movement persisted.

## Poem

On the cliffs of a Mountain, in the holy land they say,

Lie remedies for the spirit in perilous decay.

But how far the journey in this faithful trance,

Can my body suffer the deadly chance

Of finding a cure to this dreadful curse

Banish the pain and let this evil disperse

So here, on the ledge of a deadly plateau,

How far on edge am I willing to go?

Of hope and healing, I've long paid the toll.

For a sensible meaning of an accursed soul.

A pilgrimage written in  
my daughter's embrace,

A quest for redemption, a trial  
of pure grace.

The truth of my spirit, the  
depth of my role,

And the mystery of a  
fractured soul.

Lavarenti is at the bottom of  
the cave waiting for the

“Hatshepsut, Thutmose III,  
Akhenaten, Tutankhamun, Ramses II.