

The Extra

By Samuel Alexander

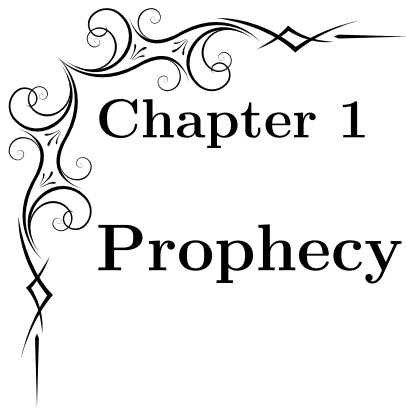


“Would you rather be Zeus for a single day, or see Zeus for the rest of your life, only you can’t tell anyone else you see him?”



Part I



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Chapter 1

Prophecy

“All arise!” All were eyes as the judge assumed the bench. The crowds took their seats as the stenographer read out the time: “Twenty four words.” Proceedings were in session.

The plaintiff was the National Library, suing for possession of an unpublished novel titled “The Extra”, written by the late Franz Kafka, who died of dehydration before he could finish it. The defendant was one Eva Koffe, daughter of Kafka’s secretary at the time of his death. Representing both sides in their absense was Max Brod, the friendless lawyer whose love of interest outweighed the conflict of interest. Max Brod was such a mean lawyer, he once evicted himself from his own house.

If Kafka had not been such a writer (the defense argued), the Library would never have bothered to sue. They would therefore base their defense on slandering “The Extra” and its talentless hack of an author. It was for this reason the proceedings began with the judge solemnly reading the book itself (organized best as possible from the author’s scattered scraps).

But before the judge could finish four paragraphs, a man in the audience stood up. “Your honor,” he announced uninvited, “there must be some mistake, this book is about me!” “Sit down!” the judge ordered. The man remained standing. “My name,” he explained, “is Joey Baloney. Same as the character in that passage you read. What’s more, I match him perfect. It must be some mistake I say again!”

“Who does this idiot think he is?!” cried the defense’s lawyer. “Does he know how to behave in court? Look at his outfit: talk about plain! Why are these riraff allowed in the city, much less in these halls? Oh judge, make him sit down!”

“Get your butt in that seat,” said the judge, unamused. “When you were born, this author was dead. I’ve heard of dying delusions, but we ain’t in one. It wouldn’t make sense, there are computers and cellphones. If your name is Baloney, it’s purely coincidence.” “He’s a liar,” said Brod, “you can’t trust his name.”

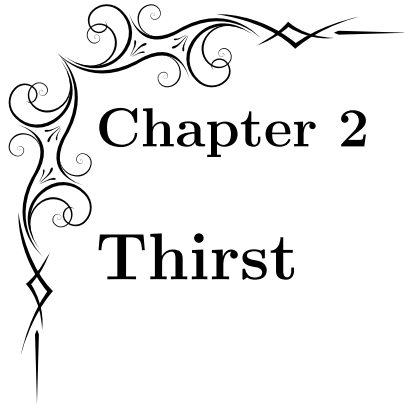
"I agree with Brod," said the judge. "I know your type, Joseph, if that's really your name. You rail against authority. You would protest your own parents, if they had any power. You're a lobbyist for people too lazy to pay you. You know, Joey, when an unemployed man sees another man working, he thinks he's doing it for money. When an employed man sees himself working, he knows he's doing it for a cause. Hippy! If you had your way, you'd turn our policemen to dust."

"I will not sit down," said the man in the stands. "I can prove what I say. I can prove it three times! In fact you've given me the fifth, because all those things you just said about me, you only know it cuz you read it in that book."

"Enough," said the judge, with a wave toward the sergeant. "See the gentleman out." "Wait, judge," said Baloney. "If you have me arrested, they'll check my ID, there'll be a paper trail proving I am who I am."

"He's right," said Max Brod. "Oh drag! Let's ignore him. His feet will wear out. Sergeant, see to it that Joey Baloney can't use the water fountains." (At this the judge giggled.) "It's a hot day; let him stand in a desert."

The judge flipped open his pocketwatch. It looked like he had a mirror in there, he was studying it and fixing his hair. Just then, everyone was distracted. Expert consultants were scheduled to make statements, and because their time was important, they would pop in, answer questions and leave, and not all at once, but spread through the week.

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Chapter 2

Thirst

One of the plaintiff's expert witnesses was a well-known professor. He'd begun in analytic philosophy, and he'd won lifelong tenure. But after being tenured, he had some sort of religious experience. He devoted all his research, his studies, and even his intro philosophy classes, entirely and single-mindedly to the subject of thirst.

This learned man had been summoned to stir up sympathy for Kafka (who died of dehydration so painfully before finishing his novels), and reduce the damage from the defense's slanderings. He sloshed his way in, wearing clogs full of water. On his head there was a beer helmet, retrofitted with water bottles. Whenever he wasn't talking he would sip and spit, but never quite swallow. "Good morning, professor," said Brod, "I want to ask, if it's in your power, to help this court understand, on a personal level, what it's like to die of thirst."

"Certainly, m'lord." The professor opened his briefcase and papers poured out like sand. "I have prepared a story, your honor, which will help the court understand."

"Read it."

The Professor's Story

You're riding through Death Valley in a crowded, stinking bus. You're going over the pass! The air conditioning is shot, and it's hot inside. Your companion has taken the final seat. You're obliged to stand the whole ride, leaning down to participate in a conversation which, for your companion's foreign accent, is full of strange idioms.

"Hey," you say, "isn't this bus rather crowded?"

"Ja," says your companion, "the crowd is like a river flooding into the bus."

"Beautiful sunset this morning," you change the subject.

"Ja," comes the reply, "happiness like a river flooding into my soul."

You wipe your brow, the sweat has clammied up. "I'm a bit thirsty. Aren't you thirsty?"

Sad eyes return your gaze. "Ja. Like a river flooding into my mouth."

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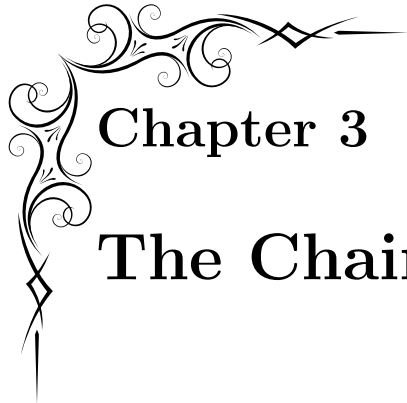
“By the way, judge,” said the professor departing. “Have you read my latest book, about dying in a desert and hallucinating you’re at home?”

“I have,” said the judge. “You’ll be happy to know my daughter adores it. She re-enacts it day and night. Wandering around the apartment making such a mess. Crying for water but refusing to drink!”

“How old is your daughter, sir?”

“Eleven months old.”

A cacophany flooded through the hallowed halls. The witness’s testimony had made the audience thirsty, but out of respect for the judge they refused to rise from their seats. One by one they scooted their chairs down side passages to the court drinking fountains, and the sergeant at arms checked every one to make sure it wasn’t Joey Baloney.



Chapter 3

The Chairs

The judge was reading from the manuscripts in a bored voice, like a little boy in front of class. “That *card* also represents a villain, and that villain is Joey Baloney.” The judge frowned, as if reminded of an overdue library book.

“Our chairs not good enough for you, then?” He turned his glare toward the Baloney in the stands. “Sergeant, have we any better seats in these chambers?”

“No, your honor, they’re the best we’ve got.”

“Well, the Senate’s nearby, fetch some of theirs.”

The sergeant marched out of court and the judge leveled his gaze on Joey. “Tell me again why you’re standing, sir?”

“There’s something amiss here,” said Joey, “that character in the book is me, and that’s quite impossible if it was really written by that author. Even if you overlook the temporal impossibility—I was born after he died—there’s the fact I never gave permission to use my likeness.”

“Well why didn’t you say so?” said the judge. “That’s a very reasonable complaint, we’ll address it straight away! Come, take a seat in the front, your issue is our highest concern.” The judge even went so far as to pat the seat of an empty chair beside him, a duplicate of his own.

Joey was too smart for that trap. “I ain’t falling for your tricks,” he said, “I’ll stand til my complaint is addressed.”

The judge was outraged. He’d have sentenced Joey to the electric chair, but he was afraid of a papertrail proving his name. “You’re worse than Hitler’s evil twin,” he said, “you’re worse than Genghis Khan in a thong!” He was going to shout some other mean things, when the sergeant returned to the courtroom.

“Here your honor, one of the best seats they got. Seat of the Senate majority leader.” It was a giant seat, emblazoned with seals and surrounded by desks and podiums, lesser seats for lesser senators.

“I will not sit,” Joey said, turning his nose up at the furnishings.

“Alright, go get something better,” said the judge. The sergeant left again. For a second, the judge wished he had a ‘Fasten Seatbelts’ button. Or failing that, a sudden burst of turbulence. Or failing that, an iceberg. Would Joey sit

on a lifeboat seat?

The judge tilted his seat back, plopped his feet on the podium, stretched his legs luxuriously. He kicked off his shoes to get more comfy, his socks were speckled with mud. But Joey wasn't seduced, and Joey still stood standing.

The sergeant returned an hour later with a twisted silver chair, cold to touch. It hissed and slithered like the beams were snakes. Carved in back was a hammer-and-sickle crossed-out with an X. "Hard to beat this one," said Sarge, "the chair of no less man than Senator McCarthy!"

"Won't sit, won't sit!" Joey stuck out his tongue.

"Sergeant, stop playing around!" cried the judge. "What other chairs did you find there?"

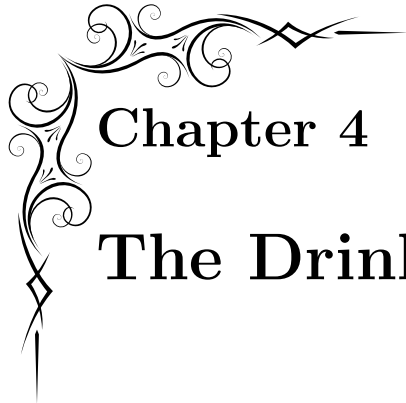
"Let's see," the sergeant started counting his fingers. "There was a chair made of fractals, a chair of rubber ice. A chair made of words, but it was copyrighted. There was a chair forged in Vietnam, many veterans died to do it. There was a water-chair, like a waterbed in chair form. A chair carved out from one huge diamond. There was a chair made of hair, but it needed a haircut. Chaircut? There was an astronaut's chair, but it was upside-down. There was a rocking chair sat in by the Beatles."

"None of those will do," said the judge. "Don't come back til you've found the finest chair in the Senate!" The judge was almost ready to order a seat assembled around Joey where he stood.

At long length the sergeant returned. He bore the chair Barack Obama sat in before ascending on high. It was crusted with gems and opals, some big enough to be decked with smaller jewels. It was draped in purple silk.

"Dear sir," said judge to Joey, "this throne is yours, please accept your coronation. All you've got to do is sit in it!"

But Joey would not sit, even in that golden throne. In despair, the judge had it melted down for scrap.



Chapter 4

The Drink

A dozen witnesses had come, ignoring Joey Baloney like a statue. The judge needed a break. He declared a long recess. Together with his lawyer, stenographer, and sergeant at arms, he walked out of the chambers. They reappeared through a little window looking out on the playground.

Joey was thirsty, but gave no sign of wavering.

In front of him there sat a young beauty. If Joey was in a desert, her beauty was his oasis. She was almost perfect. The only flaw was she'd slept wrong and a strand of hair stood up awkwardly. She was so lovely, a gentleman once gave her a gift of goldfish heels: with little fish swimming 'round in the heels, they were the world's most impractical shoes.

She turned in her seat and smiled. "I'm on your side," she offered. "I can't believe the injustice you're suffering. The punishments the judge has heaped on you. What awful and lowly things the lawyers have said about you all day."

"If I'm an awful and lowly man," Joey said, "it's because I've stepped on the toes of giants. I'm not resentful."

"The defense attacked you so viciously," she said. "And you're innocent. You're only trying to defend your likeness. You're doing them a favor letting them know something's wrong."

"I am not resentful," Joey said. "I'm happy about it, it gave me the chance to meet you. What's your number?" It was a little forward of him to say that, but Joey always believed that in a land where love is forbidden, you have to smuggle it in.

The young lady giggled, fingers playing with her hair. A golden ring glinted in the light. "My phone isn't on me, sir! I do like you though. I'm not just saying it to avoid exchanging digits."

"I'd give you mine," Joey said, "but the judge would say it's copyrighted."

His partner smiled, offered her hand. "You're funny, Joey. It's alright if I call you that? Is Joseph better?"

"Joey is best," said Joey, alchemizing the handshake into something tender.

"Joey is best," she repeated. Then she laughed. Joey broke the handshake

moments before she herself was going to. "Talking with you makes me happy," she said, "there's something playful about you."

"Playfulness is in my genes," Joey said.

"I can't believe I'm saying this," she said, "but you make the hairs stand up on my arms."

"Stand with me, we'll defy these tyrants together," offered Joey.

"I'm not as bold as you sir. The only reason you're outside bars is they're scared of proving your name. My own is unimportant, they'd throw me in jail for the both of us."

"Stand by me, we'll live happily ever after," Joey haggled.

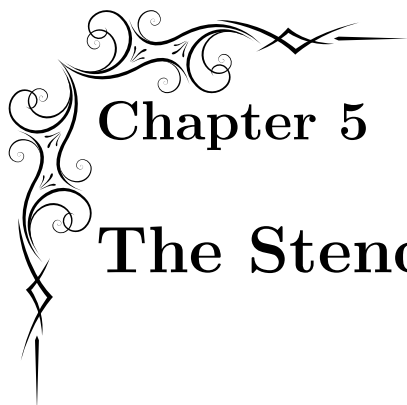
"Let's sit down together!" she said. Then in a suggestive register, "I'll sit on your lap."

Now Joey understood all. "Off, whore!" His demeanor changed. "I see what you are. The court prostitute! How much is the judge paying to sit me down?"

Tears welled in her eyes. She liked Joey (he had a resemblance to her father, and it was growing stronger). If he'd put her on his lap, she'd have given him everything, would have sworn her heart and soul to him, right hand on the bible. Instead he held her in contempt. His judgment crushed her like a death sentence. She appealed with her eyes, but found no leniency.

"Then, I'll give you a present, for what might have been." She cupped her hands, she caught her tears, she lifted them toward him from her seat. Joey paused, caution versus thirst. Caution down, he took her cupped fingers to his lips. He drank up her tears. They were delicious. He swallowed and his thirst was cured.

When no more tears would come, the maiden fled. Out of respect for the judge, she crawled out on all fours.



Chapter 5

The Stenographer

“Did Kafka get his ideas by digging in graves?”

The defense attorney was deep in the throes of slandering the deceased. He was skipping about, dancing and singing the words. “Kafka said he was Dostoevsky’s blood brother. If that’s the case then who was the father?”

“Maybe they were half-brothers,” the judge giggled. “A Russian and a German, *someone* was digging around!” This drew childish laughter from the audience, which pleased the judge tremendously. Joey Baloney stood, refusing to break his solemn filibuster.

“You’re right, judge,” laughed Brod. “Could explain where ’evsky got Smerdyakov. I always thought he looked the part.”

“If that’s the case,” chortled Judge, “Kafka should’ve hanged himself. Preferably before writing this retarded book!”

“Next, your honor, I call the court’s attention to Kafka’s name. What kind of name is Kafka? It sounds like something you’d buy at Starbucks. ‘A Kafka-latte.’”

“Objection,” said the court stenographer.

“Explain yourself!” said the judge. He wasn’t used to objections in his court.

“Well,” said the stenographer, “I feel rather silly bringing it up, you know, but I’d rather the kind Mr. Esquire wouldn’t bash Kafka’s name.”

“Why not?!” asked Brod, casting a hateful look on the poor typist as if it were Joey Baloney himself.

“The thing is,” said the stenographer, “it’s my name too. Just a coincidence, I assure you, no relation to the author. I just don’t think it’s considerate of you. Maybe someone in the audience is named Kafka too.”

“Is there a Kafka on board?” boomed the judge. “Maybe you, mischief-maker?” He looked now at Joey, as if Joey was an unwelcome bill at a restaurant. “Still standing, are you? How impolite I’ve been to my guest. Have a seat, have a seat! My wife will bring you snacks and a beer. Maybe you’d like a table to put your feet on? Care to watch the telly?”

“No Kafkas today, sir,” piped the sergeant at arms. “I’d know, sir, they’re all regulars. All but him I mean,” with a nod at Baloney.

“Say, stenog,” began the judge, “Joey Baloney says he’s in ‘The Extra’. Does the manuscript say how to make that character sit the hell down?”

“I wouldn’t know, Judge. I haven’t read a lot of Kafka. Actually nothing but the *Metamorphoses*, sir, and that was ninth grade, sir. You know they keep me too busy to read, sir. I’m here doing my one-year duty to pay off writing school debts, they don’t give me a moment’s rest, sir.”

“Don’t like your job then?” asked the judge.

“Not exactly sir,” said the stenographer. “I always thought I’d like writing, I wanted to be a great author, but now I’m doing it, it’s not for me. All day I write down these bureaucratic proceedings. Word after word. Sometimes I ask myself: how many words ’til a man can be free? To be honest sir, I only come in any more to put bread on the table. (My father calls it a *Brodberuf*; that’s German, sir, for *bread job*.) So when the kind lawyer makes fun of my name, sir, it’s insult added to injury, sir.”

The stenographer didn’t know how true ‘insult added to injury’ was. Believe it or not, there already was a great author in the room, but it was the judge. The previous stenographer had done all the work. He’d writ a great story and published anonymously, with a cypher to prove his name later. When he saw how popular his story’d got, he gave the judge two weeks’ notice, told him he was author of the famous book, and showed him the keys to prove it. The judge stole the keys and stole the credit, and the former stenographer died poor and obscure.

“Man, I’m sorry, I had no idea,” Brod apologized. He crossed the floor and embraced the stenographer, showing his sincerity.

“And it especially hurts,” the stenographer went on through the embrace, voice cracking a little. “Because recently I want nothing more than to be a lawyer like you, Max. The truth is, I have a great admiration for you, you’ve even inspired me to study law in my free time.” Brod was genuinely touched. It was a rare bonding moment, and the audience (all but Joey) were moved. Court historians would look back for decades to come: the year Max Brod made his first friend.

Of course, the problem with being both a writer and a lawyer is that no-one can understand all of your work.

As for Max, he was so moved he indulged in a fantasy. He imagined they could all start a rockband. The stenographer would play keyboard, of course. The sergeant, with his wicked rifle, would make a great guitarist. The lawyer would do lyrics, rapping about right and wrong, and the judge would be on drums, banging with his gavel and rubber stamp.

The stenographer went on. “I hate to toot my own flute, but I’ve gained enough lawyer’s intuition I could say a thing or three about this Baloney case.”

“You don’t speak much,” the judge said. “But when you do it’s insightful. Tell us about Baloney.”

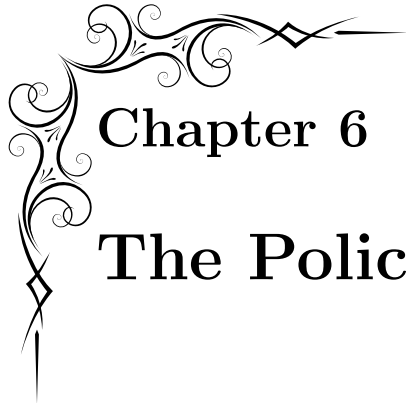
The stenographer sized Joey up and down. It took longer than usual, there was more ‘up and down’ to Joey than his seated peers. “Well sir, contempt me

if I'm wrong. This man's the worst kind of anarchist. Eats granola bars and protests polar bears. He's an awful hipster, sir. He's a communist sympathizer, but put him on the wall's other side and he'd sympathize capitalist. He—"

He was cut short by the judge's laughter. "You rascally little devil!" the judge declared. "Sergeant! See to it the stenographer gets a \$20 bonus!"

"Thank you sir, but I don't know what you mean," said the typist.

"Don't know what I mean!" The judge slapped his knees with the gavel. "You've read *The Extra*, you've read it three times!"



Chapter 6

The Policeman

The judge looked upon the rotting manuscripts, and drew his eyes away. He looked upon the rotting court, and there stood Joey Baloney.

The next expert witness was Chief of Police. The defense wanted his opinion on a certain joke in “The Extra”. The assumption was that by getting the police to ridicule the work, it would be slandered in the eyes of patriots. As he entered, the Chief shot a glare at the sergeant at arms, they were bitter rivals.

“Good afternoon chief, so glad you could make it,” said Brod.

“Glad to be here, Brod,” said the chief.

“You know, Clete,” the judge said to the chief, “I can’t help but wish we didn’t have to spend all our time on garbage like this book here.”

“Come on, now, we don’t have it that bad,” said the chief. “You should hear what my brother has to deal with. There’s an ancient Greek baby named Cryossus (his name is a joke on Colossus, but has since been taken into everyday language with solemn and dignified meaning). Somehow some fingerpaintings of his have survived to the present day, and there are these academics just devoting their whole lives to studying them! But they’re just fingerpaintings from when he was less than one year old, and nothing else is known about the man himself.”

Brod cleared his throat loudly. “I understand you wanted to hear my opinion on a certain piece of some book?”, said chief.

“That’s right,” said Brod, “but first I believe you had something to tell us about jokes in general?”

“Oh right!” said the officer, remembering his coaching. “Listen judge. You can’t trust jokes. They’re like mafia fronts. The mafia runs all these stores, and they sell you good stuff, but the goods aren’t the purpose. There’s sinister things done behind those stores. It doesn’t even matter if they sell you anything at all. Same thing with jokes. Authors use them to hide things. So it doesn’t even matter if the joke makes you laugh. It doesn’t even matter if it’s funny. There’s sinister things done behind it, and that’s the joke’s purpose.”

“Thanks,” said the judge, “I’ll keep it in mind.”

“Now, chief,” Brod directed, “This unpublished book contains the following

joke. Tell us if it should see the light of daylight.”

The Joke

Knock knock. The apartment’s got couches, but the intruder ain’t here to sit.

It’s a policeman. He’s thin, in the bad way. Tall like a stick. Looks unhappy to be there. Miserable, even. You can tell he’d rather be anywhere in all the world than at this apartment. He’d pay any price to just get away.

“Sir,” he says, “We’ve received a complaint from your wife, says you’re not having enough fun.”

Just then there’s a crash down the hall. The policeman’s wife has arrived. She’s ugly and mean: who would ever marry her? She’s berating the poor cop, shouting at him for harassing the poor man, for being such a wet blanket.

* * *

“Stop!” cried the chief, boiling with rage. “Never have I heard such damnable garbage. I’ve heard quite enough! This Kafka fellow, why, he just ain’t American.”

He spun toward the stenographer and suddenly demanded: “How much longer is the stupid thing anyway?” Caught off guard, the stenographer was struck dumb.

An idea occurred to the chief. “Yo, judge, here’s what you should do. Make this damned *Extra* be the Book of Jafar.”

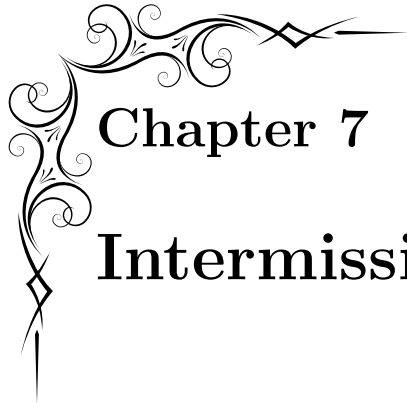
“The Book of Jafar?” asked the judge, eyebrow raised.

“You don’t know it?” said Chief. “Oh, you’ll like it, I’m sure! Once upon a time, there was a wizard named Jafar. Jafar was great, every book he wrote sold wide. Jafar got fed up. He hated that fame. Used all his arts, and used all his powers, and crafted a magical book of obscurity. A book enchanted with spells so that no-one would read it, or even know it existed. And you know what? It worked.”

There was a crash in the hall. The police chief’s wife had arrived. The stenographer finally recovered and answered the question: “The chapter’s unfinished.”

“You know,” said the judge to the stenographer. “You have to be careful as a writer. There once was a writer who died just as he wrote the last verse of a poem on paper. Nobody knew his password, so the beginning verses were lost. It became an example of a great poem with an end but no beginning.”

The stenographer reflected on the judge's words. It occurred to him that the way the chapter went on after appearing unfinished was an example of a literary optical illusion. The stupid sergeant at arms merely wondered why anyone would write a poem about paper.



Chapter 7

Intermission

Many words had been exchanged in the court, and it was late. Or maybe early: hard to say without studying the transcripts. Around the bleachers, jurists slept in their seats. Some had brought sleeping bags, and were sprawled out in the aisles, but no-one dared stand, no-one but Joey. An amorous purr drifted from somewhere in back of the hall. Joey yawned and rubbed his eyes.

An old man on the balcony was eating a bag of chips, and his crumbs flittered into the stands. Crusty particles burned Joey's eyes and he nodded off, dozing on his feet.

In an uneasy nap the words of the court were mixed up and scrambled, and Joey dreamt two dreams, interdependent opposites woven like a rope of snakes.

Joey's Two Dreams

I was right in the middle of my speech. "The joker card represents villains because of its random, chaotic, unpredictable nature. But imagine opening a deck and instead of finding a joker card, there's a dead rat: weeks old, oozing with infection and crawling with maggots. That *card* also represents a villain, and that villain is Joey Baloney. I met him in a glass elevator, the only other occupants were a little boy and his mother. Joey whipped it out of his pants and began pissing in the corner. He was raving like a lunatic, informing the boy, in quick and feverish narratives, where babies come from."

Among my audience I saw worried glances and confusion. I'd been invited to this renowned conference to present my research. And here I was, telling them about Joey Baloney. Instead of sterile academia, I was unveiling a grander truth, forbidden, the world was not ready for it. A speech that would see me in jail or dead by night's end.

"Joey Baloney's words rushed out in breathless rapidity, he was struggling to tell the boy everything he could about human reproduction before I could stop him. I was a policeman back then. Used to dealing with crazies on the elevators, but nothing like Baloney. I stood gaping for a few seconds. Precious time for Joey Baloney to continue his shpiel."

I saw the looks turning to panic. Famous gatekeepers of knowledge wondering if I'd lost my marbles. I'd have to hurry if I were to deliver this truth before the front row would rush and tackle me.

"The mother shrieked for help. My ears rang, with trembling hands I leveled the tazer, I fired. Joey Baloney fell to the ground, lay in his own steaming urine, and yet his monologue continued!"

Women were fainting now in the audience, cries of panic in the back. Colleagues were rushing to them, make room make room!, pleas falling on deaf ears as distinguished professors sat transfixed. The first to rush me was a war veteran, a Harvard dean who'd killed twenty Germans with his bare hands. He stumbled, fell.

"The boy was sobbing, unprepared for the vulgar knowledge. I threw the tazer aside, grabbed my firearm, whipped it out of my pants, shot Baloney in the head! The elevator shattered."

I shouted into the mic to subdue the rising protests. Career suicide, that's for sure, but more than that, it was real suicide. There are truths which must not be spoken to those who do not know them. Truths that shatter innocence, that complicate the carefree world. I know things that'd make your mother cover your ears. Things so astounding they'd put me to death. And here I was, shouting them: to a man like me, truth is more important than breath. A giant in the world of womens' studies threw herself at me. I brandished the mic, I thrust it into her crotch, I stamped on her toes. Don't stop me now!

"Joey Baloney has gone by many names. Genghis Khan; Hitler." I kicked a Fields medalist as he lunged for the mic. Our fathers died for freedom, a few ivory towerists can take a kick for truth. You see, some truths are so forbidden, even if you want to tell them you can't. You have to tell something else instead, something silly or obvious or both, a stand-in. Those in the know will understand. Sign of solidarity, reinforce the besieged truth.

"The ancients referred to him as Loki, great trickster." I ducked just in time to dodge the first hail of bullets. Amazing how the authorities rush when the status quo is really threatened. "He's the type who invents new kinds of crimes just for the novelty. Like take someone else's writing, pass it off as his own, and make it public domain, just to cause trouble."

A dozen SWAT commandos tackled the podium. An assault rifle blasted my brains all over the conference hall. And yet with labored breaths I went on. (It's funny, I felt no pain, only thirst.) Only the riot police heard me any more, but that's alright, because you hear me, and you will hear me to the end, even if your mother doesn't want you to. No-one will deny you this fruit of the tree. "I was unconscious briefly after we fell from the elevator. When I came to, Joey Baloney was whispering to the boy with labored breaths, though only I could hear him anymore."

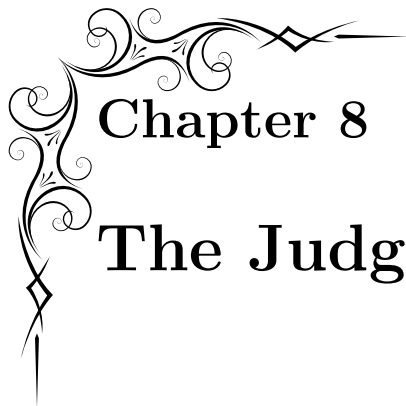
"For years, people would imitate Joey Baloney, exposing themselves to children and shouting unwelcome biology. Like Joey, they'd always introduce themselves: Ladies and Gentlemen, Joey Baloney! It got so bad the government built hemlock drones to shoot whoever said that phrase."

"But after time, thanks to the drones, people forgot what was even supposed

to come after the Ladies and Gentlemen, Joey Baloney. It was a conundrum, the whole point was to stop the transmission of that forbidden knowledge, now that no-one remembered it, was it still legal for the drones to shoot them? In the end it became a crime punishable by death to even imagine what Joey said after his introduction. But what the imposters were supposed to say, what Joey Baloney said after his introduction, went like this. . .”

I’m too weak to speak aloud now, no time to finish. No time to present my proof that Joey was there at the start: He whipped a rib out of Adam’s pants, he stuck it in Eve, and that’s where babies come from. The important thing is, I know. Remember that if you know nothing else about me: I know.

“A hush came over the conference as the speaker lay in his own steaming blood. By sheer force of habit, the organizer picked up the microphone and uttered the outro.” Ladies and Gentlemen, Joey Baloney.



Chapter 8

The Judge's Speech

"How many words will it take, before our policemen turn to dust?"

The judge was infinitely exasperated at Joey Baloney's stand, charging his speech with feeling.

"How many words will it take before old men bow down to the wisdom of boys? How many words until schools let out early, and teachers make a decent wage? How many words 'til lambs lie down with lions?"

"How many words will it take before unemployment protestors are laid off? How many words until the meek demand their inheritance? How many sentences must this court deliver before this court's sentences are obsolete?"

"How many words will it take, til every dissenter assents? How many words will it take, to replace warfare with wars of words? Fold swords into pens? How many words til green fields and rivers blossom in Death Valley? How many words will it take 'til colonies are uprooted and native kings restored? 'Til pharmacies are replaced by shamans? 'Til propaganda is dragged through the mud? How many words will it take?"

"How many words, Joey, if that is your name, until capitalists pay for their greed? How many words must you steal from this court, Joey, before man stops stealing from man? How many words must the courts print before the chains of copyright come off? How many words til cars turn into bikes and soldiers return home?"

Elder statesmen wept and young activists trembled. "How many words must this battle go on? How many words will it take to satisfy people who demand to be offended? How many Kumbaya's 'til every Baptist is Buddhist, 'til Muslims join Womens' Lib? How many words must we trade before stock markets turn to farmers markets? How many words before the weapons that end wars will end?"

A tear gathered in the corner of the judge's eye, growing until the gravity of his words loosed it. It caught a holy ray of light in its fall, bending every lawyer in the court to weep openly. Every woman covered her face. And still the judge's speech went on, the light in his eye blinding every clerk.

“How many words til civil wars become civilized? How many words til history’s wrongs are righted and its rights distributed equally? How many words until high school students read willingly, and Satan ceases his ceaseless sieges on God?”

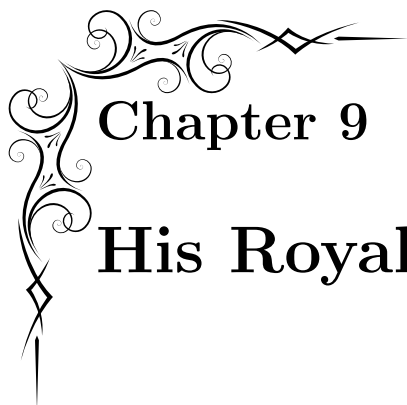
The courthouse shook. The universe paused its weary acceleration, a moment of respectful silence in the cosmic background radiation. The judge lifted his gavel, he pounded the dais, damn the protocols, use it just for emphasis. The gavel’s head broke off, the judge tossed the handle and raised a fist to heaven. “How many words, ‘til our policemen turn to dust?”

Joey sat.



Part II



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Chapter 9

His Royal Judgesty

The judge's apartment was cramped and dirty. It was the very smallest apartment in the whole city limits. You couldn't open the door full way, because it would hit the foot of the bunkbed, so instead you'd have to squeeze in sideways, pulling your groceries behind you. A gallon of milk wouldn't fit through, you'd have to buy halves.

The judge slept on topbunk, his wife underneath. The bed was too short, the judge's feet would touch the door if he stretched out his legs. A chandelier with very sharp claws took up the rest of the overhead. It had ripped up many a suit. Portable cookware and dishes, fit for a campground, were scattered around the floor. Boxes of cereal and half-used spaghetti stuck out from under the mattresses. At least there was a garbage disposal, so the judge could throw away keys.

"You're an idiot!" the landlord had cackled as soon as the lease was signed. "A sucker born every word! Take the place, and every lawsuit it comes with!"

But it wasn't that slumlord's persuasion that sold it. It was the only place that met Your Honor's regulations. See, sometimes a judge likes to piss in the dark. And sometimes a judge likes to piss window open. This apartment had two bathrooms, one windowed, one without. The judge would've gladly paid double!

The apartment was plagued by a premature rooster. Every morning it crowed at three o'clock sharp. It was so bad the judge gave up and made bedtime three thirty. They were too cheap to pay for electricity, so in the Winter time, they'd fill buckets of hot water to soak their feet in, day out and day in. If their hands got cold, they'd have to stoop down awkwardly where they sat.

His secret shame was his piss-bottles. Now and then, when some high official came with a warrant, he'd catch the judge right in the middle of pissing in a bottle. This was entirely out of sloth, it would have only taken a minute to climb out of bed and into either toilet. Every night not at court, judge and Mrs. would fight, screaming and throwing things at the walls. She insisted the

bottles were an insult to her, he insisted she was an insult to herself.

In response to their shouting, the elephant trainers upstairs would *Clomp! Clomp!* One time the roof caved in, the elephant fell into the room, still the judge and his better half shouted. The trainers followed, sliding down on greased ropes, swinging scimitars, finally managed (with the help of their tigers) to shoo the 'phant out, and through it all the judge hadn't even deigned to consider the least of her arguments.

The only thing that could break up their fighting was when Joy, their eleven-months' daughter, would scream out her lung. No I don't mean that figuratively, it was a medical condition. The wife would shout: "Fine! Have your bottles, drink them for all I care!" She'd ring up the hospital, who had them on caller ID. Then: "How can you neglect her like that? Can a baby get by, scrounging around for dust and thumbtacks to eat?"

The judge by now would have picked up the babe, rocking and trying to comfort her. She wasn't even two yet, and she was already in her terrible twos. "Dammit woman, I lived forty years on dust and thumbtacks! Is this stupid baby entitled to better than the 'Law of the Land'?" (That's what he called himself sometimes, in the private of his home, he especially insisted during conjugal visits.)

Then the wife's dogs would rush in, the whole pack of 'em. Not to defend wife, not to defend baby, but to snatch at the lung. The judge would hop around on one foot, shrieking baby in both hands, kicking dogs away from the screamed-out organ. "Out of here, Rex!" he'd cry. "Git out of here, King! You too, Prince, and you as well Duke!" The dogs would snarl, forgetting the lung and going for shins. The hospital always knew to send *two* surgeons when they got the judge's call.

You might blame the judge for not training his dogs better. The truth is, they were trained like Spartans. Domestic violence was so predictable here, they'd learned like Pavlov's dogs.



Chapter 10

The Stenographer's Notebook

The stenographer kept a little notebook where he'd jot random poems and things. It was a throwback to what he'd always dreamed of being. Here's one of the pages from the stenographer's notebook.

Great Authors

- ★ There once was an artist so bad at humility that he praised himself shamelessly. His very existence was proof that his maker was the greatest artist in the world.
- ★ One author was so famous that when people studied his unpublished drafts, they even studied the conference notes he wrote on the other side.
- ★ A great author is the same as a poor one: every line he writes is a joke.
- ★ It's tragic when a bad author doesn't think about grammar; or when a good author does.
- ★ There once was a novelist so famous, they presented papers about his literature at biology conferences.
- ★ There once was an author so good, they let him get away with a murder for every novel he wrote.
- ★ There was once an author so tragic that not only he died of hunger, but his whole entire family too.
- ★ Things you don't want to hear in a courtroom: 'Stenographer's gone crazy.'
- ★ There once was a stenographer who went crazy in court. They took his ravings and rantings and made them into law.
- ★ A good author devotes himself to convincing a sane and free government to throw him in jail for life.
- ★ By on the laws of probability, every author ought to repeatedly risk death to increase the value of his work.
- ★ By the law of tragedy, every author ought to burn exactly half his best works. Ask Gogol, he "knows".

★ An amateur quits his job to take up writing full time. He fantasizes about inviting his boss to the Nobel Prize ceremonies. Instead he dies in poverty & obscurity.

★ A novel so deep it requires a lifeguard.

★ Once upon a time, there was a man who so loved scriptures, he permanently changed his own handwriting to resemble the Dead Sea Scrolls.

★ Once upon a time, there was an author who so loved literature, he permanently changed his own handwriting to resemble The Brothers Karamozov.

★ An ode to Kafka: He died of hunger half way up his apartment stairs, and because there was no protocol for staircase corpses, he's still there to this day.

★ There once was a literary magazine that rejected every author's first submission on principle. Sure enough, when the great new prodigy came along, that magazine was his only rejection. In exchange, once he was famous, he donated generously to every editor and every reader who ever touched that mag.

★ An author drinks a potion that will make him the best writer in the world for one hour, then kill him. As he writes, his tears fall on the pages, he is sad that he'll never get to read it.

★ The author of this book is anonymous. If he ever wishes to prove his identity, he will factor the following number into primes:

73	897	156	067	403	508	131	992	561
	964	010	797	488	623	510	811	411
	465	963	096	756	553	187	673	674
	242	192	208	052	907	140	882	508
	921	992	930	897	316	344	188	467
	202	522	254	786	303	935	865	880
	767	877	211	225	678	168	284	320
	446	607	858	490	555	306	354	934
	819	445	999	851	584	475	980	430
	310	449	242	090	867	019	155	825
	594	779	128	355	380	774	995	049
	124	533	408	341	373	887	572	343

★ There once was an author so famous, they searched satellite photos for writings of his.

★ There once was an author so famous, they treated what he wrote in his thirties like he'd written it in his twenties.

★ A man works all his life to get the big job. The very day he gets it, he suddenly decides to quit and become an author.

★ I am engaging in a type of writing invented by B. Pascal.

★ A story about a poor African peasant boy. When they discovered he was a literary genius of the level of Dostoevsky, they were terrified of the changes he'd bring to the status quo.

★ The failed writer: he spends so much time deciding which piece to put where, he never writes them in the first place.

★ In order to convince the suspect of sympathy, the judge admits his own ghastly crime. In order to convict the suspect of sympathy, the judge admits his own ghastly guilt.

★ There once was an author so great, they re-launched the Salem Witch Trials just to hang him for witchcraft.

★ There once was an author so famous, they fined him for riding second class.

★ There once was an author so great, they had Abe Lincoln assassinated just to increase his inspiration.

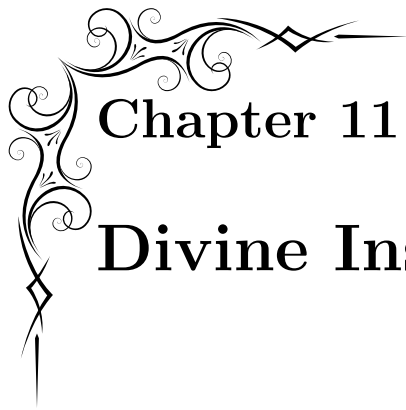
★ There once was an author so great, people read his writings in tiny letters just so they could stand it.

★ There once was a singer so great, when he whistled in the shower, a huge crowd would gather in the bathroom.

★ Genre fiction can never be great, because to write a great story takes so much attention, there's no room left for pretend.

★ There once was a lawyer so mean, he evicted himself from his own house.

★ There once was an author so great, they thought nothing could ever soil his writings. So they used them to clean up the sewers.



Chapter 11

Divine Inspiration

One day Joy was crying so bad the judge and his wife thought she'd scream out two lungs. Neither judge or judgette wanted to take care of her, and they got in a bitter fight over it. "Am I her fucking keeper?" said the wife. The judge went so far as to throw one of his bottles at the old nag. She dodged wildly (the baby got whiplash), the bottle shattered on the bedframe, contents bursting everywhere.

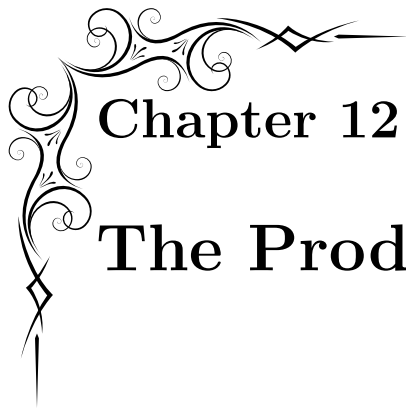
Then the judge got one of his 'divine inspirations'. He lifted his mattress (a TV dinner fell out incidentally), he dug around in the filth, finally drew out his jeweled saber. It was a symbol of high magisterial office, and it also cut well.

"Lis'n'up woman. I'm settling this once and for all. I'll cut this baby in half, I'll take care of one half, you take the other. Feeding and diapers, it sounds fair to me." He swung the sword around to emphasize his words. It was sharper than he thought, it cut the bedframe like butter. Then right in the baby's face: "I've come to bring peace with a sword!" In a whisper: "He who cries by it dies by it."

"No!" she shouted. "You're insane. If there were any other judge, I'd divorce you three times. Give her here, I'll take care of her!"

The judge wasn't listening, he was already tying the baby down. His wife grabbed his wrist, she stayed his hand like an angel. "Idiot, do it here and the dogs'll smell her lungs!"

The judge realized the truth of her words, and he hugged her in a sobbing embrace. The sword clattered out of his hands. As if the floor were made of water, the blade went through, the sword vanished into the center of the earth.



Chapter 12

The Prodigal Sister

The judge had a sister, his sister had a past. One day she told daddy: “Give me all your money, I’m running away!” He gave her money and away she ran.

She partied it up in the city, in lavish apartments. She slept with every man she met. Not only slept with, even gave them daddy’s money. She’d get in ruinous fights with her rivals, fight over who’d get knocked up by the latest handsome Joey.

She kept this lifestyle, strung in and strung out, til the clock struck fourty and her hair turned to dust and thumbtacks. She crawled home on all fours (this made the judge feel honored). She addressed her ancient father.

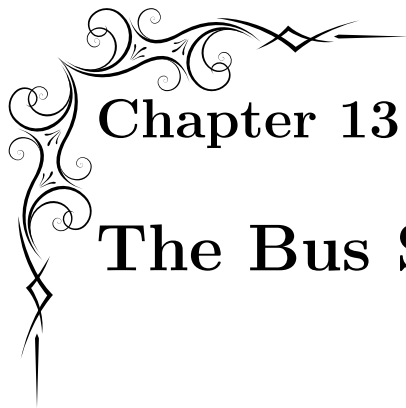
“Daddy, it’s awful, the things I had to do. I know I’m not worth the least of your servants. I know I’m not worth the shit in your can. But please, I beg you. Give me some more money!”

Her father rose, up out of his wheelchair: he hadn’t stood in fourty years! “Get out of my house. I renounce you! You say you’re not worth the least of my servants. But you’re worth so much less, that even now I am signing their last salaries. Yes I’m canning them because you named them! As for you, get out, I disown you three times. Git! You can be one of the judge’s wife’s dogs.”

But the judge jumped between them. “I’ll take her in,” he said. “It’s true the apartment ain’t much, but at least she’ll get along with my wife.”

Their father snarled. It was the first he’d ever been defied. He sat in his wheelchair, he went to his room, locked the door, and that night, he died.

It was not out of brotherly love that he did it. The judge had a secret second only to his bottles. His sister was really his half-sister, and was his daughter to boost. Their mother was none the wiser, it was a sordid affair. And so the Biblical story of the prodigal son came true, in a certain sense. Let it never be said that the judge hasn’t done a good deed!

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Chapter 13

The Bus Stop

It was hours before the verdict in that case about ‘The Extra’. The judge was standing at a bus stop. It was pouring rain, and he’d left his umbrella home. The bus was late.

It was the day the judge called Jxesday. This arose from him misreading his own handwriting, and no-one had the guts to correct him.

The judge turned to size up his companion. He hoped by some sly word to coax out an umbrella. He was disappointed. The other rider was the lowliest beggar. As a matter of fact, he’d come from India, where he was literally a member of the untouchable caste. He was kicked out for stealing food from sacred cows. Here in America, he’d go to the park and steal the bread children feed to birds. He had on nothing but a filthy old loincloth. He hugged himself shivering with arms like a skeleton’s. Every now and then he would stick out his tongue to catch a raindrop, but by sheer luck the very raindrops themselves fell in a pattern unfortunate to him.

“Hey, friend,” the homeless man said to the judge. “Are you getting a transfer?”

“No,” said the judge, “it’s a direct ride for me.”

“You should take mine,” said the untouchable. “It’s only good til noon, I need to buy another one anyway. It’ll save you two dollars.”

The man rummaged in his loincloth and produced a faded bus transfer. It would get the judge to his courthouse.

“Thanks,” said the judge. “I’ll remember it if you need a character reference.”

“By the way,” said the beggar. “Could you spare fifty cents? I haven’t had a bite to eat since the last time you went hungry.”

“Fifty cents?” said the judge, shocked by the impudence. “You’re trying to rob me! If I went around handing out charity, there’d be no need for welfare. Look, you’ve scratched my back, I’ll scratch your loincloth. Here’s my number, give me a call and I’ll connect you with my lawyer. Max Brod, he does

bankruptcy, debt resolution, any service you can name. They say he's never made a friend, and that's the mark of a great lawyer."

The judge handed the beggar one of Max Brod's business cards. (He and Max shared the same number, to save a little on phone bills.)

"Thank you, kind sirrah!" said the beggar, slipping the card under his cloth. "In return I will tell you a story. It's better than a movie—not as good as a curse."

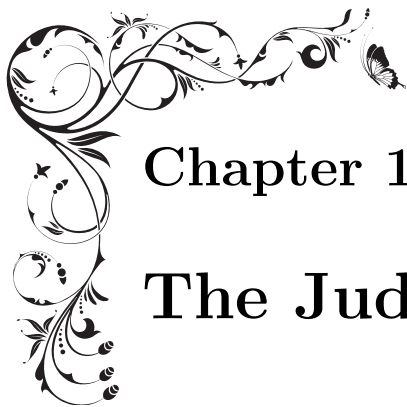
The Beggar's Story

In the country I come from, we believe the rain has a holy purpose. At the end of every downpour, the monkey rain god comes out. The monkey rain god moves really fast. Darts in and out so not a drop is wasted. With dizzying speed, he catches the raindrops. He catches long drops like arrows, he twists them into a ring. He catches round drops like bullets, he uses them like jewels. He drapes his creation across the sky. It's a beautiful necklace in the sunlight. It shows any color you can name.

* * *

"What are you going on about?" said the judge. "You're a joker. Is that supposed to be some kind of jinx? Listen close, I've got a story for you. Once upon a time there was an imperial family who never touched dirt. From birth to death, they avoided touching the tiniest particle of it. Even when they died they were buried in immaculate tombs, encased in sterile graveyards. And here's the moral. I'm the emperor, and you're the dirt. So shut up, here comes the bus."

The bus was absolutely crammed. It visibly sagged in the middle. The beggar snuck past the judge and stole the last seat. The judge felt vindicated for denying his ransom. He hardened his heart. The judge had never used a transfer ticket before, and wasn't sure how they worked. First he tried putting it in where dollars go. The bus driver, a jolly old lady, playfully slapped his hand away. He tried putting it where coins go, but it clearly wouldn't fit. Finally he saw the slot for transfer tickets. He stuck the ticket in, and started to go down the aisle. The bus driver grabbed him by the leg, pointed at the slot. The transfer had come back out, afterall it was still good til noon. The way the transfer went in and out, in and out, was symbolic (the judge thought) of something impolite.



Chapter 14

The Judge's Dream

As he rode on the bus, fidgeting nervously with his transfer, the judge thought about his dreams that morning. The pouring rain must have done something to make them more profound, he mused. He'd rung up Brod upon waking, hoping to get an explanation. (A judge's dreams are law, so it takes a lawyer to interpret.) He got Brod's assistant Danny instead. "The little green men are a device," Danny'd said. "Sometimes we dream things that could be the perfect ending. Yours was one of those, except the little green men got in the way. If it weren't for them, the dream could have capped a story beautiful. It would have all been very nice. The fact the dream was polluted like that is a sign of bad things to come." The judge had slammed the phone down angrily. Now, sitting on the bus, he went over the dream one more time. Try as he might, he couldn't imagine the green men away, they were an integral part of it.

The Judge's Dream

"All arise!" The command sounded strangely like the judge's wife said it, and was accompanied by a noise like an alarm clock. The judge looked around angrily to see what had set off the alarm. It was Joey Baloney, sitting there in his seat, without a care in hell.

"On your feet, worm!" the judge said. "Didn't you hear 'all arise'? Look, even the little green men stood up!" It was true, the little green men were dancing here and there, ruining a perfect scene.

But Joey wouldn't stand. "Your honor," he said, "I thought after last time, my standing was the last thing you'd want. I thought you'd be overjoyed. Besides, you still haven't addressed our little *Extra* problem. That book's about me, sir, and that's why I'll sit!"

The judge saw Joey touch the girl's hand in front of him. She looked around nervously, shooting Joey a look that said, 'Not right now! Can't you see everyone's standing?'

"We went over this before," said the judge. "The book ain't about you, and if I'm wrong, may God judge me right here. The author died before you were

born. I've heard of dying dreams, but we aren't in one. It wouldn't make sense, there are computers and cellphones."

"He's a joker," said the police chief, "you can't trust his game."

"I agree," said the judge. "Very well, Joey, sit if you want, but until you stand up, no-one else can sit, I don't care if the whole court faints!" So the entire court stayed on their feet, knees growing weary. Strong men held up women who would've passed out. It was as if everyone was standing in a desert. At the judge's insistence, court waiters brought Joey snacks where he sat. They dined him and wined him while everyone stared.

The plaintiff's lawyer, Max Brod, was arguing that Kafka was such a great author, his books belonged to the world. In order to pull this off, he had conspired with the judge ahead of time. By secret agreement, the judge would keep interrupting the lawyer's arguments with all kinds of inappropriate objections, ordering him to stand here and there, to present his evidence backwards and upside down, to call remote witnesses in obscure occupations. It was all so brilliant, but those damn little green men ruined everything. Dancing around, they distracted everyone from the lawyer's neat references.

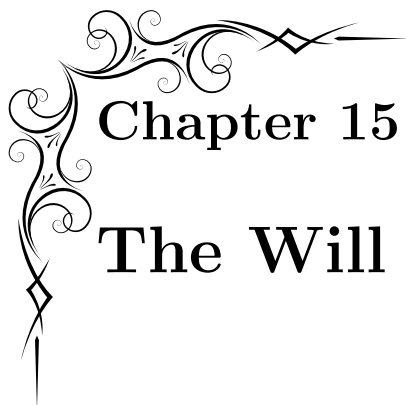
To top it all off, the judge couldn't concentrate, seeing Joey sitting there, refusing proper respects to the 'Law of the Land'. At last the judge cut the lawyer off mid-sentence. "It was a brilliant play," he said to the lawyer, "and it would have worked, if only you could've gotten them to stand when I entered. Joey's sit-in has ruined my day."

Then the judge got one of his 'divine inspirations', or so it seemed in the logic of dreams. A condemnation occurred to him, so profound, so deep and aloof, it would move any man. The judge laughed, it was all so simple in the calculus of dreamscapes. He brandished the handle of his broken gavel. He smacked it on the podium and somehow that fixed it, its beautiful head new and shining. "How many words will it take," he said, looking at Joey and grinning at the beauty of his own coup d'etat, "before our policemen turn to dust?"

And that did it. Joey stood—at last all arose. The judge saw him clearly now, his feet were clay, his head was gold. A great cheer went up all around the court, hats flew in the air, strangers leapt into each others' arms. All were filled with joy, and it was all the judge's doing. They took up a song, singing the judge's praises. The only thing marring it was those bloody green men, they got in front of everything.

Joey and the girl embraced with a kiss; the judge felt like he himself was kissing her. Then Joey snapped his fingers and the courthouse faded away, they were all in a beautiful desert, words could not render the breath-taking splendor. And to think it was marred by those little green men.

Then the judge woke up.

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Chapter 15

The Will o' Wisp

The judge was walking through the slums around his courthouse. He was looking for a place to throw away his bus transfer. He found a dumpster behind the police station. He opened it, and discovered it was filled with police uniforms. "They look brand new," said the judge to himself. "Badges, nametags and all." There wasn't even room for a faded old transfer. He took one of the badges and pinned it on his own chest, that freed up some room. "Wait til the sergeant sees this," he said, rubbing the insignia with a chuckle. He buried the transfer so no-one could take a free ride.

Further on, our 'tagonist passed a row of shops, one was boarded up with a sign saying "Danger, construction." A board was loose and he peaked inside. The construction went deep, as if the judge were peering into a cave system. In the distance somewhere in there, he made out a glint. Thinking it might be a coin, the judge pried the boards open and entered.

The first step, he sank knee deep in muck. It flooded into his shoes, he had to abandon them to make any progress. The judge cringed at the thought of someone finding the shoes, he resolved to call his muckraker friends. Wading into those depths was hard work. The mud was the kind that creeps up your pants inch by inch. The judge was grateful he wore socks that day, fighting this filth barefoot would be too much to take.

The glimmer was further than he'd thought, and the judge had to stop to catch his breath. Exhausted, he sat in the grime. It was thick enough he could rest for half a minute before his rear end would sink in too far to be comfortable. Then he'd have to readjust his position, groping for leverage, dirty handprints all over his 'law suit'. Foul-smelling droplets kept dripping down from whatever building was above. To get some physical relief the judge hocked a loogie, but then his childish imagination got the better of him and he thought that maybe this wasn't mud at all, but the collective snot of all the bums in this no good town. The thought did not appeal to him, and he decided he'd better get this over with. Groaning he got back to his feet and plunged onward.

It was too dark to see his watch, and he wondered how long he'd been

slogging around. Without his stenographer it was hard to count the words. He held the watch to his ear, but mud had got into the gears (he thought), and the *tick, tock* seemed slow and distant. He realized he could hear better if he opened it, but he was reluctant because he didn't want to dirty the picture inside. It was a gift from his law school partners, a pocket watch with a picture of himself, capped and gowned with graduation regalia. He wiped his hands on his pants, trying to clean them but they only got dirtier. He gave up and snapped the watch open. There was no danger of dirtying the picture: it was missing (he could tell even in this lukelight). The judge wondered where the picture had gotten, he sincerely hoped it had not slipped out in this grungy place.

For a moment the judge thought he saw a person beside him. It gave him quite a start, and he fell backward in the mud. It was only his shadow, he realized, getting up and trying to wipe the mud from his hair, only managing to get more in it. "And to think that bitch drove me into the shower so urgently last night," he growled under his breath. "Am I jinxed? The victim of elaborate curses?" Then there really was someone beside him, the sound was unmistakable, except it wasn't a someone but a something. The judge felt with his hands, and found a fat pig wallowing around with him. The pig had a little sausage in its mouth, about the size of the judge's left pinky. "Don't mind if I do," said the judge, and started wrestling the pig violently for the snack. But she bit him on the left pinky, and he shrieked like a girl. The pig ran away while the judge sucked his finger. He kicked mud angrily after the animal, then stumbled deeper toward the glint.

There came a fork in the path, and the judge heard voices off to the left. He took a long time deciding whether to investigate them or go on with his treasure hunt. With great reluctance, he turned aside to check out the voices, he felt that as a magistrate of this city it was partly his duty to investigate the weirdo goings on in it.

Following the voices, the judge came to a door that seemed familiar even in the dim. He opened the door and got half blinded by the burst of light. To his astonishment, he was staring into his sixth grade homeroom (he felt like a little boy again). Then he remembered where he'd seen the door. There'd always been this door in the classroom, and he'd always wondered what was on the other side. Mrs. Butchwald was always there to slap his fingers with her ruler every time he'd reach for the doorknob. Some days he'd go crying home to mother, fingers almost cut to the bone. "What did I tell you about that door," his mother would scold him, then she'd rub vinegar in the wound and send him to bed with nothing but dust and thumbtacks for dinner. The judge couldn't help smiling a muddy smile: if mommy could see me now!

What was most remarkable was that the people in the classroom were the same old classmates the judge knew and loved. They were a lot older now, but he'd recognize them anywhere. He looked at his old crush, the years had been bad to her, the judge enjoyed a moment of gleeful pleasure comparing himself to her. Mrs. Butchwald was long dead, but her portraits still hung on the walls as they always had.

"Look, it's him!" said a kid. "Get out of here, no-one likes you!" "Get out,

monkey fart!" said a girl. "Close the door, idiot!" the judge recognized his childhood friend. This old friend brandished Ms. Butchwald's ruler and waved it at the judge. The judge stepped sideways dodging, at the same time closing the door with his foot. He heard it lock and wondered when a lock was installed. (He didn't remember authorizing any lock warrants for this classroom.)

"The problem with you," said the class president, with that same smug look on a face decades older, "is you're stupid and you don't even care!" Someone threw a crumpled piece of paper and it hit the judge. "You don't fit in, and you don't even care! We don't mind weirdos, but you don't even care if you are one!"

"Now wait just one minute!" said the judge, fighting for the front, where he felt he could better assert authority. "I'm a high judge, you can't treat me this way. Besides, I'm not a weirdo."

"Oh, he's a judge, is he," said the friend. "So 'The Law of the Land' is too good for us now!" The old crush gave a *humph!* and stuck her nose up at her muddy suitor. "You're only proving our point, you know! You're a weirdo, and you defend yourself. Weirdos shouldn't defend themselves." Then the friend cursed the judge, saying: "The water's as still as glass, so why don't you go cut yourself on it."

"You're in contempt!" said the judge, the mud on his face turning red. "I'll have this place torn down! I'll lock you up and throw out the key! I'll teach you who's your maker!"

"That's what you said last time," laughed the class president. "Have you forgotten already? Why do you think you came here? You were chasing that glint, weren't you," here the entire class laughed at the judge's expense. "That was the key, you idiot!"

Then everyone stood up and with finger and thumb they signalled an *L*, and they chanted: "Loser! Loser!" The judge could do nothing, because they were right about the glint, and he felt deeply ashamed at it. He couldn't stand to let them see him crying, and so to hide his face he retreated on all fours, suffering the rain of tomatos and eggshells. Anonymous rivals kicked him in the rear as he crawled toward the school hallway, in his fright he pissed his pants. Then he stood, surrounded by staring children, and ran wailing from the school toward his courthouse.

Chapter 16

The Extra

Despite it all, the judge arrived early. His muddy outfit didn't raise any eyebrows, they were used to his shenanigans. There was another trial in session, and he decided to wait in there. He pushed the big courtroom door open, leaving a handprint. He stepped into the stands and looked on the proceedings.

"Even fifty cents?" the presiding judge was saying. But something was amiss. The presiding judge was *the* judge, there could be no mistaking it. The judge rubbed his eyes, wondering if the sergeant at arms had installed a mirror as a prank. It was no mirror, the judge's twin was presiding, and doing a better job than ever.

The judge stood gaping for a minute 'til his rival gave a sigh from the podium. "You there, in the mud! Have a seat, why don't you! This is a courtshow, not a peepshow." The judge refused to sit. "There's something amiss here, your honor," he said. "I know it's hard to see with all this mud, but you are me! You match me perfect, there's no doubt about it. And that's impossible, there's only one judge!" "Get your butt in that seat," came the reply, unamused. The judge stood defiant.

"I know what you're up to," said the unmuddied judge. "You think you're the first one to impersonate Baloney? You're not the first, you might be the worst. You didn't even do the introduction!"

"I'm not Joey," our hero said, "I'm the judge! I hate Joey!"

"If you're the judge, where's your gavel?" Then the judge knew he was screwed. He'd broken his gavel yelling at Joey. He felt a twinge of rage, a premonition Joey'd had it all planned. He felt himself losing it, needed to gather his thoughts. Besides, this would all be alright if he could just wash his face. He stepped toward the fountains, the sergeant shot him a threatening glare. "No water, remember?" said the presiding judge. "If you're gonna 'impersonate' Joey, may as well 'salivate' like Joey! I'll give you one chance. If you're really me, tell me something only I'd know!"

There was only one possible answer, and that was the bottles. But the judge couldn't say it. It was a secret shame, he'd die if it was discovered. As he held his tongue he felt he was choking on his own poor judgment. He feebly tried

something else, already knew it would fail. "Last night you took a piss window open."

"Hah!" said his image. "Last night I took a piss in the dark. Now there's no doubt, I see you like unclouded water. I'd have you arrested, but I know what you'd say. 'A paper trail proving I am who I am.' Save it, we've heard it thrice. And I won't sit you with some big speech, either. I'll keep my gavel, thank you!" He brandished it to show it, it was a silver hammer.

"No," he continued, "I've had enough with you Joey doppelgangers. That's why I called this trial today. You've answered my summons, like it or not."

"Summons?" said the judge. "No-one summoned me here."

"Is that so?" said the other. "Did you not read the bus transfer?" Just then a man snickered in the witness stand. It was the bus stop Indian. He sat cross-legged, mocking the judge with his levity. 'Bastard!' the judge thought. 'He wasn't trying to rob me, he had a deeper plan!'

There was a clack of thunder outside. "The monkey rain god is coming," said the holy man with a grin. The judge wasn't sure if he was talking to him or his double.

Because he knew himself so well, the judge knew what was coming. He trembled in fear. "This court has heard quite enough," said the Presiding. "Law of the Land', you're the worst. You're a hypocrite. You're nothing but a monkey fart. You're a weirdo with the nerve to defend himself. You're petty and mean. Nobody likes you, why are you here? You betrayed your own father. Yes, I know all your secrets! You can hide nothing from me." Then with a ridiculous wild west accent: "I sentence you t' hang 'til ye're dead." He pushed a button and a trapdoor opened up in the roof, the noose tumbled down, tightened automatically around the judge's neck. "Say yer last words."

"I know I can't move you," said the judge, fists all atrembling. Through the trapdoor in the roof, cold rain fell on him alone. "I beg you one last favor. If I'm to be sentenced like this, then let me sentence myself. I'll sentence same as you, I promise. Let me have one last ceremony!"

"Never," said the Presiding. "You're unworthy of sentencing. You were unworthy in the womb."

The judge sobbed and screamed. "Mommy!" he said. "They won't even let me sentence myself! They'll kill me and they won't even let me sentence myself!" The floor opened beneath him, and he danced for awhile.