

LA LOTERIA



A MYSTERY

DEAD RATS PRESS



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**AN OULIPO MYSTERY IN
WHICH I USED LOTERIA
CARDS TO CREATE THE
PLOT OF THE STORY. THE
SQUARES ON EACH PAGE
ARE USED AS IMAGES AND
FRAMES OVER WHICH
THE STORY UNRAVELS
LIKE A FRAYED THREAD.**

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Even in the desert the killer scuttles unabated all through the night. The butler took my hat and walking stick and umbrella as I had traveled far through the rain with a heart pierced by cupid's arrow, I did not know I was bleeding and had no time to worry about it as the killer was on the loose. I was offered watermelon which I took eagerly and spit the seeds into a barrel not far from the metal table at which I sat drinking beer. After the watermelon came the shrimp and the musicians played scintillating tunes as my eyes brimmed with tears. One musician, the one playing a guitar, came to my table and whispered into my ear that he had seen, not a mile from where I now sat, my love's bonnet. Not recalling that she had never worn one, I scampered toward the spot he had pointed me in only to run headlong into a soldier as hard as stone guarding a star. I realized then that the weight I felt would not abate and the sand hit the stone soldier making him hum like a violin. By a cactus I stepped on a scorpion.



I lifted my boot from the corpse and trod through the night unfeeling. Soon a parrot stopped me by calling my name, an unusual name, one I was positive no parrot had ever known. I saw a drunk hung on the post from where the parrot called me. He spoke to the parrot of his broken heart: the loss of the past, the days of watermelon on the ranch and drums and shrimp. His nostalgic story was soon cut short by the discordant notes of a musician who called for help from the spider web in which he found himself entangled. I wanted badly to help him, but there was a killer on the loose and I saw just past the man now wrapped in the spider's sticky threads a soldier, stock-still, but watchful and thought maybe that was him. A star shone in the sky above me as I stumbled, weary with thirst and heavy with sadness, into an Apache. He told me to find the cactus and wait until the tuna fell into my lap. That I would find the answer there. All I found was a scorpion who stung me vvwhen I sat down.



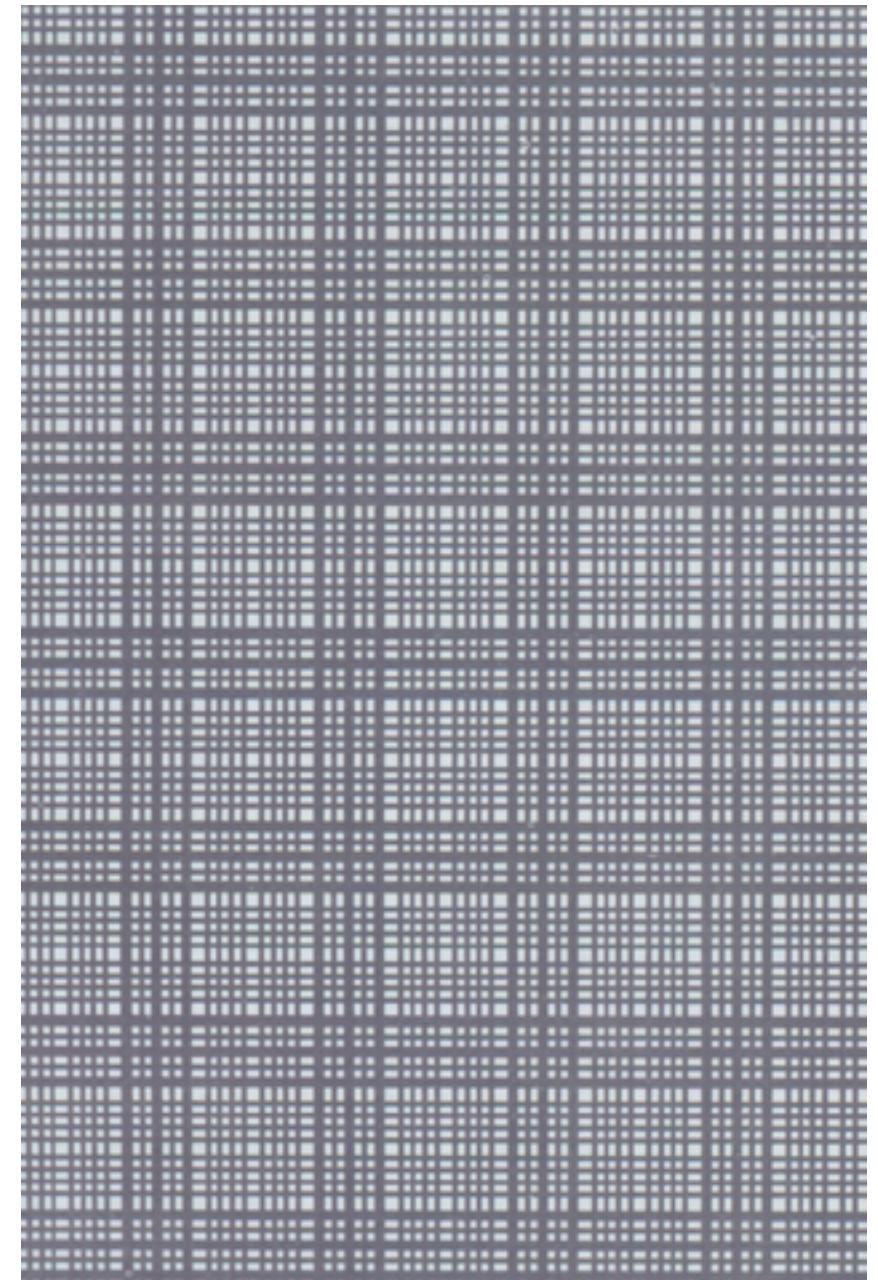
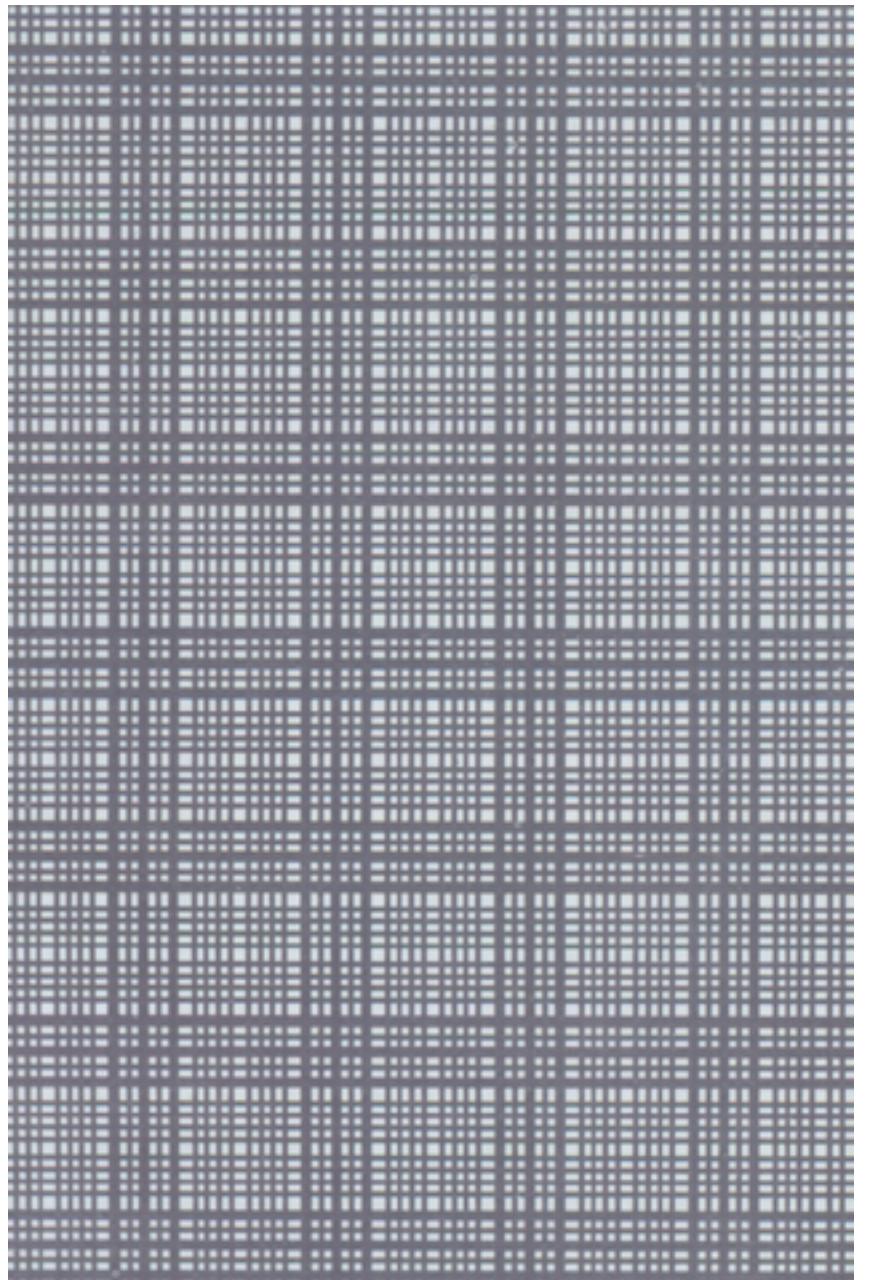
The siren's call lifted me up momentarily, until I fell from my height into a bottle of Coke someone had mysteriously left in the sand. Mysterious as song, the killer and the barrel of pears not far off for which I was grateful so hungry was I. The day, like a flag fluttering in the piercing light began to hum. Had it not been for a parrot calling my name, I would have fallen asleep right there on the dune. But mine was a strange name and when I approached the parrot, I saw that it was a drunk who was calling me. When I approached him, he said, The Desert, and passed out. A young black man, not five feet away whom I had not noticed said, Your heart is caught in the web of confusion and irony. The murderer you seek is still as a soldier, but he is not the soldier (or necessarily a "he" as you already suspect) any more than he is a star. With that, ridiculously, he placed my heart in a pot.



Of course I was far enough along into my investigation that I began to consider my own demise in the process of finding the killer, the love of my life. Or had I already been rubbed out? Strange. A Bell tolled in the distance and my consideration turned to the Hacienda down the road. My thirst had grown ever since I had seen, further down the dirt road, the deer which had given rise to my concatenations on death and its majesty which had not occurred to me at the time. Then I saw my love (the murderer?) in a boat filled with flowers and fruit. As I stood watching her pass (as you would watch la llorona in sorrow) a fish spoke: The flowers she sells sing the song of frogs and roosters but sting, poisonous like a scorpion. And though time had elapsed, I stood by the tree and watched the birds, the birds.



The thought occurred to me that I had crossed some sort of border (where the cock's crow encompasses a world). Soon I understood that I had descended upon hell. The devil had my lover (was it her choice? She had, after all, killed, but I could no longer remember who or why). A butler, whom I had not noticed, at the River Styx on the banks of which I stood, took my hat, my cane, my gloves and told me to wait by the tree. I had done a lot of waiting and felt comfortable under the tree eating cool melon (a detective on a stake out). Soon a valiant man came by with a woman's head dangling from his hand. It didn't look like my lover's head, but a bonnet lay not a foot behind the man (had my lover worn a bonnet?) and while I considered the bonnet, the man disappeared. I watched the heron and the birds until a hand (was it my own?) erased the scene and I began to walk. I ate watermelon and listened to the drums of defeat in the distance and smelled the ripe stench of shrimp. Crossed destinies lay ahead of me like arrows.





As I walked through Hades (perhaps the water from the River Lethe had splashed my leg) my mind wandered like the tolling of a bell. I felt constrained like water in a small jug, but my mind roamed like a deer. My hand did not help me regain my senses, but reminded me (so there was memory left) of the flower pot and the chrysanthemums on a grave. The smell of the flowers hummed in the air like a harp and the frogs sat by closely and dolorous. Even the black man whom I happened upon made me think of ladders leading to nowhere and unopenable bottles and barrels filled with fish. He did speak to me, something I remember only now. He said, do not let arrows wrap around you like the patriotism of a flag. Then there was just the humming of my thoughts like the music of stringed instruments that suggest so much, but never tell anything. Then my head was empty as a ladle.



I came around to the smell of roses and opened my eyes to the blood red color of death and the earth spun once agonizing and quick. I was about to close my eyes again when I remembered the Apache and the tuna of which he spoke and stood unsteadily. I was near a river and no longer feared the effects of Lethe and bent to drink. After some time a fish burbled up near my cupped hands and whistled pleasantly. I found a near-by palm tree and in the sun closed my eyes feeling royal with the warm rays of light around my head like a crown. I had nearly forgotten about the murder, about my lover's disappearance and about their connection (they were connected, they had to be). I realized I had fallen asleep and the sun had turned to rain. And where the fish was just moments ago, my lover, the siren, glistened naked and sang me a mournful tune to which I succumbed. I waded out into the water and her voice became that of a rooster, harsh and awakening. What devil plays with me? I am become death, destroyer of worlds. Three unrelated clues that pertain to... Murder?



And so in my devilish reverie, still groggy from the waters of Lethe, I saw again my love. Not as a murderer, but as she once was. A butler returned my umbrella and my capacity for logic so essential for a detective. I only hoped it would get me somewhere. I found, in quick succession: a soda bottle filled with blood, a barrel with a head in it and a tree. I decided it was time to rest. Soon the valiant man that had my lover's head came back with my lover's head and behind him was her bonnet (she did wear a bonnet). I decided that it was a distinct possibility that my lover, the murderer, was dead. I ate a pear as the thought sang through my head. I didn't know if I should have been happy about this connotative discovery (possibly not true, but on the other hand) and mostly I had airy thoughts about how to get out of the desert with these treacherous birds. I didn't care anymore if I found my lover, the murderer. I hadn't found myself and the truth seemed just around the corner except that I couldn't remember anything that had led up to this point and so finding it would be like seeing birds one thought looked familiar.



I decided a drink would do me some good and promptly found myself drunk talking to a black man who was quite happy with his position in life. He told me I had had my heart pierced by death (the thorny jab of a rose) and that a soldier guarding a star in a dipper filled with sun might help me under a bell. I drank deeply some water in a small jug. The deer I had seen earlier appeared again and I sat in the shade of a palm tree. I felt that I had heaved myself into a flower pot and that my leaves and flowers and roots were growing out wildly with nothing to keep them together but a thin stem. And I was peaceful for a moment, my mind humming like a harp and then frightened, the rough calls of frogs. Before I fell asleep a musician walked passed me silently into the desert.



I could feel myself fading, the lines on my hand growing shorter, but I picked up my boots and trod off into the night. It was like I was watching myself go. A bright parrot ate shrimp out of its bowl, skewing their shells with its beak like arrows. I saw myself as a musician singing to a spider. My life shortened into squares of time, blocks, like the red fruit of the tuna impaled by the scorpion that had stung me at the beginning of the journey. As I slipped in and out of consciousness, the red rose of death, my lover, was no longer my lover but my murderer floating down the river her vocal tones sharp as pine needles. Scales covered my eyes as I lay myself down beneath a palm tree.



My Love? Where did you go? I miss you. Even my memory of you has become fuzzy. Come back. I can't find you anymore.