

“Constantine XI”

by Nick Katsafanas

I would rather see a Turkish turban in the City than the Latin mitre.

Loukas Notaras

There is no narrator, writes Constantine XI (Palaiologos), there's no such thing as narrator, there is no narrator, no such thing as narrator, narrators are fictional ideas that actually make no sense, we've discarded this idea of plot yet we still cling to this insipid idea of narrator. The first problem is music. Listening to it. While writing? It's no good. I've done it, put in my ten thousand hours and I've wasted it, which makes me wonder what someone like Michael Psellos would think of it. The second problem is commas. There are too many of them. The entire idea of punctuation is probably the third problem. But that's enough about problems. The ideas must flow like something-something from that play by Euripides, or was it Sophocles, something something Oedipus, Aristophanes, The Frogs?—funny play, up to and including references to Socrates (a pedophile). A wooden desk given to me by a man by the name of Basil VIII now holds a ballpoint pen I stole or borrowed from a regency I may or may not work at. A description. Something unedited. Tea tea tea tea tea tea tea I enjoy drinking it. Tea tea tea

tea tea tea tea tea tea tea I like when it has that charcoal grey kind of taste. A bit of a spice! Spice is nice! Tea tea tea tea tea tea tea tea tea tea tea tea tea. What's not to like. The other night, it was a Sunday night, I sat somewhat silently at a table with six to eight other people who discussed a variety of topics in a highly circular fashion. I should say somewhat silently with reticence because I really wasn't that silent, or at least I was silent only at *that* point in the night having taken both mushrooms, a very small amount, and drank an amount of beers that I lost count of. I brought twelve cans of beer over to my friend George Sphrantzes's mom's house, but I found it hard to believe I'd drank all twelve when I opened the cooler and found none of my beers left. My guess would be someone else drank a few of my beers but I'm not about to speculate who. At this table where I remained somewhat silent my friend George Sphrantzes said *I'm fine, I'm happy, don't worry about me*, which only confirmed my suspicions that he was utterly miserable, that his life was probably to some extent spiraling out of control, that he was entrapping himself in a relationship that was no good for anybody, least of all himself. But it's so easy to entrap yourself in a less ideal relationship that it's impossible to blame anyone for finding themselves entrapped in one. In fact, the other conversation, the conversation George Sphrantzes was commenting on when he claimed to be happy, was regarding one of our friends who wasn't sure if he was ready to have his concubine move into his house. The conversation proceeded in a circular fashion. We were all inebriated and our opinions were sincere if not accurate from a sober

standpoint. Isabella was having trouble meeting a decent guy at a tavern, given all the Venetians around. Isaac was finding plenty of women, but he didn't want to settle down with anyone. I wasn't sure if I cared about any of it. There is no narrator, narrators are fictional constructs, there is no narrator, the difference between first person and third person narratives are entirely negligible and probably fictional too, maybe everything is fictional. The problem is keeping the emotions in check. Eventually someone is going to read this fucking shit. Fuck man. You know what I mean? Christ Almighty. Am I right. The story actually starts about six years ago to the date. At my second cousin Nicomedia's bachelor party, which was located in a travelling harem. George Sphrantzes shouted the phrases *Look at those pepperonis!* as a girl danced on the stage by Nicomedia and I. It was rude. But also completely absurd, because George Sphrantzes was barely in the vicinity of the stage so the reasoning behind shouting the phrase *Look at those pepperonis!* was actually comically inane. There just couldn't be any point to it. But then again even if he was closer to the stage I'm not sure what the point would be, what's the point of insulting a harem girl who's doing nothing besides her job of gyrating exotically, especially when you voluntarily entered the so-called travelling harem? The harem girl probably heard him, but she's probably heard worse, and I don't have anything against pepperoni nipples myself, and to be honest with you I doubt George Sphrantzes does either, because a pepperoni nipple on a female really isn't a big deal whereas a pepperoni nipple on a male is actually embarrassing. I remember growing up with a

kid named Gemistus who had major pepperoni nipples. He was a guy who liked to crack a lot of jokes, put people down, myself included, but it was difficult to stay mad about it for long because you knew he had those straight up pepperoni nipples. At it again I see. Where to begin. Drinking coffee in a closet it's hot. The story begins watching a ecumenical council at Sophia, it was terrible, the thing with ecumenical councils and/or schisms is we don't even have to discuss them, people complain about platforms and or applications like ecumenical councils or schisms but you don't have to interact with them, this idea that you can't live without engaging in these so-called theological platforms is just flat ridiculous, if you have friends and a decently trained pigeon to deliver letters you can keep in touch with people and to pass the time, assuming you have time to pass, just read a book. But people like complaining. Everything is always either going south or things are progressing beautifully. Maybe nothing changes although with all of these *theological advances* who would possibly argue that, that seems utterly ridiculous. The story begins in a car with myself Nicomedia and George Sphrantzes, and George Sphrantzes informs Nicomedia and I that he's probably getting divorced, we park downtown, the same downtown I still go to that has my memories folded into it, maybe a decade or more folded into, whenever I walk the streets, and I like to walk the streets of downtown. There's something about a downtown that can draw you in for reasons you can't comprehend, I feel at home when downtown, I enjoy being downtown despite the fact there are a plethora of other streets I could or maybe even

should feel at home at that I don't feel at home at. No commas. The closet is fucking hot! Downtowns have that character, especially cozy downtowns, sometimes I just want to squeeze this downtown until all my memories shit out of it and then go back downtown and make more memories. Then you have home ownership. Home ownership kills downtowns except for only the most opulent among us, everyone I know who's succumbed to home ownership has subsequently decreased their time downtown if not completely abandoned downtown. Owning a home is an attempt maybe to make your own downtown, but you can't make a home into a downtown, which is inevitably what people find out when they attempt to make a home, which is why they acquire the habit of calling you up saying Come on, come over, come over my house, wanna come over my house, if you want you can come over my house, I have a house, which you appreciate, it's not that you don't love their house or the fact they have a house, but the thing is you still have downtown and a house can never be a downtown. A breath of fresh air. The story begins when I met a young girl named Maddalena, not downtown, but in a so-called bad section of Constantinople, but like so many bad sections this bad section is in the process of being gentrified, which is an interesting term because it more or less seems to mean that Europeans begin to move into areas where Romans used to live, but how does this change the nature of the section of town, we could argue that the nature of the Latin versus the Orthodox dictates behavior, but it seems more likely that Europeans tend to have more money so when they move into a section of town the section the

town becomes more wealthy, and people who are wealthy with money tend to have less reason to commit crimes, which makes Europeans feel safe. A generalization perhaps. It was a bar with a half-dressed mannequin in its lobby, and if you didn't know it was there you'd have no idea the bar existed behind the black curtain, with this mannequin standing next to it. Yet a bar did exist there, and I met Maddalena there, although she kept walking past the damn place, despite the fact she told me she'd been there before, and eventually I just left the place and found her walking side to side outside and said *Maddalena! It's in here!* We went inside and bought rounds of drinks for some time until the bouncer, a portly yet still muscular Turkish fellow, came in and said Hey! Can you keep it down! in reference to my voice not Maddalena's, and I said Sure, although at the time I hated him, and especially the owner, who I knew made this mandate of Keeping Quiet inside his taverns. His taverns were supposed to be like libraries. I saw him driving through downtown the other Sunday, and I almost considered saying hi or pulling him over in his used Neoplatonic 8 Series and blowing a fart into his open passenger window, the little prick. But he has a right to run his business how he wants of course, and who am I to make the rules for myself in another guy's tavern, yet it still rubbed me the wrong way, but Maddalena didn't mind, if anything she found it amusing, and in a way so did I. It isn't that I would have quote-unquote *blown a fart* into this tavern owner's car when I saw him drive by, as I sat at the corner at Yoleni's drinking a Mythos beer that I found so refreshing, because quote-unquote *blowing a fart*

into someone's car is not only a mean thing to do, but it's also entirely unrealistic, it's probably impossible, although there was one time myself sister was tying her sneaker on a stairway about two steps up and I just happened to lift my leg and fart right in her face, a loud fart too. But in any case. But in any case quote-unquote. The story begins the first time I met Maddalena, and we went to this bar with the big bouncer, with the owner who was my mortal enemy, and we had a good time, but the problem is the start of the story has so many prologues. Let's talk about love, baby girl. No commas. Quote-unquote baby girl. Love as it seems to me is a completely nonsensical thing, of course people need companionship and it's really impossible to try and estimate another person's level of sexual need or urge, so really love is a non-starter. In Constantinople, we've become obsessed with speculating about love—as the most economically and culturally dominant city of the past one thousand years it's our right to do so. There are so many philosophies on love. But in one thousand years the people of the future will look at us speculating on love in the same way we look at the Ancient Greeks, speculating on so-called Platonic Ideas via man-boy love. Or maybe not. You see quote-unquote. Let's begin quote-unquote. The narrator is a fiction, fictions are narrators, narration is necessary, but there isn't necessarily a narrator, we've discarded this notion of plot but pointlessly cling to this idea of a *narrator*. This closet is hot! What was discussed earlier regarding gentrification, there needs to be an addendum there because it's come to my attention, it's come to my attention this idea needs to be edited, a corollary needs to be added,

an addendum tacked on so to speak, this idea of gentrification and Europeans and Romans and ecumenical schisms, the idea of Europeans now having more money, there are systemic factors that have helped create this situation. We could begin to discuss the Fourth Crusade. We should acknowledge this shouldn't we. That the barbarians of Europe and the Latin church sacked our city in a manner that would make even the most vile of Turks shake his head in disgust, that would be completely out of the question to any of the Saracens, that the Europeans, while claiming our common Christian heritage, in fact view us hardly any differently than they view the Turks and the Saracens, that in fact they view us as a necessary buffer to the Orient and nothing more, that true intent of their so-called Crusades was plunder, not only of our former Roman territories in Asia Minor and the Levant but of Constantinople itself. But what are you going to do. This isn't the juncture so to speak at length on this issue quote-unquote. Protecting the integrity of the Christian population. That's a good one. The story begins with this. We sat at the table ordering drink after drink after drink after drink, the only two people in this bar, excepting of course the bartender who was definitely present making drink after drink after drink after drink after drink. But the story doesn't start here. Because, despite my first date with Maddalena, there are a plethora of previous dates, and perhaps you could even say relationships that informed and made possible this first date with Maddalena. This much we must be sure of. If we're going to perform a proper examination of love so to speak, the history must not only be accurate but it must be

consulted. Accurately. We could begin ten years ago in a condominium on the north west end of Constantinople, off of Smith Street where there was a party. Ten years ago a variety of events occurred that I could reminisce upon as a tenth anniversary reminiscence thinking that Wow a decade has passed, maybe this is profound! But it's not profound! The idea that ten years makes a decade, and a decade somehow lends profundity to past events is a notion we must get out of our heads. Enough. We can go back to the table with the circular topics with my friend George Sphrantzes. George Sphrantzes says something to the effect of *Oh yeah! I'm good, I'm fine, I'm perfectly happy*, and for some reason this makes us think *Wow, this guy is utterly miserable, I actually feel bad for this guy, this guy is literally saying aloud to people that He's Happy*. Commenting upon your happiness is only done by the near suicidal. No one existing in a happy state or even a near happy state does anything of the sort, the last thing that crosses any of these peoples' minds is stating how happy they are, to the extent the literal definition of happiness could easily read *Refraining from mentioning how happy one is*. Now we could go into an exegesis on the speculated source of George Sphrantzes's suspected unhappiness which is simple. What often tears two people apart who have become companions is *difference in necessary opinions*. There's no doubt that two people under any circumstance will almost never share all opinions, in fact even on most opinions any two people will almost certainly, if not disagree, then not agree completely, however, in a relationship there are *necessary opinions* aka opinions where they

must be agree, otherwise there will just be non-stop tumult. For example, to take an extreme example, at one point in my life I was somewhat deeply involved with a woman who was married, however, while I felt as though she should *not* be married, she was ambivalent as to whether or not she should be married and that—whether or not she should have been married—is a great example of *necessary opinion*. You see, the fact we fundamentally failed to see eye to eye on whether or not she should be married became quite the issue, it caused nearly endless tumult, but as it would so happen I wasn't even sure why I thought she should *not* be married. I was in no position to take care of her in the way she most likely would expect a man to take care of her, yet for some reason I felt as though the fact she was married to a man who, regardless of his ability to take care of her, desperately wanted to take care of her was affront to myself, a person who was almost positive he could not take care of her and, because of this, didn't even really want to try to take care of her. Having said that, as I said to her that maybe I didn't want her to be married, not to be with me, but maybe just because if she was that miserable being married that she should try to be with someone else, even if it wasn't me, fuck my feelings. Fuck my feelings quote-unquote. The fact that she's no longer married and I no longer talk to her could lend credence to a theory that maybe we both were right. The story does not begin there, but it's a prologue, yet as far as George Sphrantzes goes if we assume he is indeed miserable—which I'm almost positive is a factual statement—then I would be confident in postulating *that* to be the reason for his misery. He and his loved

one simply do not see eye to eye on *necessary opinions*. Maddalena and I tend to see eye to eye on so much, which makes our relationship all the more easier, but that's also why the story simply cannot begin here, because any story must begin with a difference in *necessary opinion*. You see. My thighs are sweaty. In a very literal sense. I'm just wearing boxers in this closet and it's actually really hot! So now my thighs which are propping up my papyrus which I'm writing on are becoming increasingly sweaty. This is the problem. In a literal sense. Precisely. There needs to be another paragraph. This is the problem. Rather than drinking tea I'm drinking coffee at the moment and it feels jubilant, I love coffee, coffee to me is probably one of the best drugs. One of the worst drugs is alcohol. Let's discuss alcohol for a moment. Alcohol is in many ways where the story begins. At my second cousin Nicomedia's ecumenical graduation party I thought it was a good idea brought a partially empty jug of unwatered down wine that was maybe one quarter full to his party, although my mom most likely had plenty of wine, and I probably could have drank that, I instead brought this jug of unwatered down wine, feeling it to be somewhat nice. A gesture of sorts. Of course buying a new jug of wine would probably have been the appropriate gesture, but I brought the partially empty jug of unwatered down wine. At the time I was on what some might deem a quote-unquote *wine bender*, and with that in mind I drank what remained of this jug of unwatered down wine at a rapid pace. Perhaps an inadvisably rapid pace. And I got extremely drunk, to the extent where one of my most vivid memories was of my mom's cousin talking to me about

the current state of the chalice, my attempt at a cogent response coming off as just totally slurred drivel, even to myself, despite the fact I was 8/10ths in the bag. Then I jumped over a fence that had a handle you could open, I fell on my face in a bed of ornate rocks, so to speak, and sprinted off running to my carriage, whipping my new mule off to the closest tavern I could find. That's a problem. Coffee is a much better drug than alcohol, actually alcohol is probably one of the worst drugs you could do, despite it being the least frowned upon, everybody has a drink. Ay, Basel is here let's pour him a drink huh! This is fun! But alcohol does serious damage. In a serious way. Mushrooms are a drug that are not only less dangerous but incalculably healthier than alcohol, but I'm not going into mushrooms at this juncture. Because let's get back to George Sphrantzes. George Sphrantzes and I have been so-called drinking pals for some time, although we've drifted perhaps due to his new relationship requiring more sobriety of him and myself looking in the mirror and demanding more sobriety of myself. We're also getting fucking old. Sobriety is a good thing, and I find that when I manage to pull an extended stretch of sobriety out of myself I enjoy it, and I look at inebriation with disdain. The biggest problem with sobriety is that, at some point in your life, you find yourself around people you simply can't be sober around. And it becomes an issue, because you look at yourself and you say Wow, I could totally be sober—if I could just relax by myself all day, but then you find yourself, via various arcane social machinations, surrounded by people, people you can't stand, people that you need to immediately

become inebriated around, and it's almost impossible to figure out how to extricate yourself from this situation. Even people you like to some extent you may be unable to be sober around. Social life in essence kills sobriety. Drugs or friends. Often they're entwined in ways that can't be disentangled. I met Maddalena at a bar with a mannequin, it was fine, I loved it, a great night, and within a week I knew she was in all likelihood the girl for me but this story doesn't start there. Mann. Are you kidding me right now. The story it just doesn't begin there, although, sure, it was a great night, we discussed her job in Antioch, her mother, the importance of her family, and I stated the primacy of my so-called art, how it was so important to me, and wow she wrote an ecumenical treatise, everything was great. But what about ten years ago? Ten years equals a decade, and a decade lends importance to events, what was I doing a decade ago, and what about George Sphrantzes should we discuss his life one decade ago, would that be fun. There's this idea in writing that we should draw from experiences especially emotional ones, and sure I could quote a litany of embarrassing things I did ten years ago when I was quote-unquote romantically involved with someone that clearly it didn't work out with, but in many ways I've already forgotten those days. Those days feel like eons ago, it's only this symbol of the decade that brings them back to me. Perhaps I find it asinine because there's so much about two people in romantic relationships, but really, in reality, there are only *one and one* person *there is no two*, not in a romantic relationship, or at least not in most romantic relationships that we base literature and music on. Let me

explain. Allow me to explain. My previous romantic relationships were only about me. And to the females I was involved with they were only about them. But not in the sense they involved two narcissists, simply in the sense that when two people meet and they get along and they mutually decide to enter into a relationship and they're happy, then they truly join together, but there is no story there, what a story presupposes is a difference in necessary opinion, and when a difference of necessary opinion occurs each of the one and one person to some extent is aware of it, so the relationship is not about each person wrestling with each, but each person wrestling with themselves about a situation that clearly does not work. Ten years ago I wrestled with myself over more or less what I've wrestled over in all of my failed relationships—foolishly attempting to think a physical connection and mental disconnection can meld into one healthy connection. As a young man I was too vain to enter in a relationship with a female who I hated having sex with, or that I didn't find physically attractive, so wrestling for me was usually about that the physical connection of oh man I love having sex with this person, and mental disconnection of oh geez I'm not really materialistic, I believe in the chastity of St Sophia, and she wants only the finest purple robes and belly button rings made from palladium, is it possible this could work with both of us being happy. That's the core of romantic relationships that have stories, there's something irreconcilable that people desperately want to imagine being reconciled, and the fact that it never seems to reconcile makes them question their ability to perceive events rationally. It was a

Friday evening, and I invited both George Sphrantzes and my friend Isabella over for a few drinks and to possibly even go out, this was just a few short weeks before the dysentery outbreak shut everything down for a period of time, and I'd just been shopping at a discount liquor store that afternoon where I picked up a bottle of Ouzo for 399.99. A great deal! I thought to myself and I intended to drink it that night, which I did when Isabella, George, and Maddalena all came over and oh were we having some drinks. When we went out Maddalena immediately passed out on the table and remained passed out until we left, which was two full bottles of wine later, just between me and George Sphrantzes, but even that wasn't before George Sphrantzes and I opened a bottle of Greek wine and drank the whole thing, only then did we leave my flat. Yum! Then we had two more bottles of wine at the bar! But then we decided that paying the bill would be, for a reason we were unsure of, totally asinine, and we decided that the last thing we would be doing after drinking these subsequent two bottles of wine was *paying the bill*. The bill was out of line, even though it was totally reasonable given what we drank. In the end we were convinced by so-called cooler heads to pay the bill, people we weren't with asked Maddalena if she was ok, when she woke up these people we were with convinced us to pay the damn bill, but in protest I left no tip like a total asshole. What a total asshole I am, I thought the next morning, leaving a poor bartender and or waitress no tip, a true asshole move. It still puzzles me to this day what it was about that bill that George Sphrantzes and I found so egregious, because there was actually nothing egregious about the

bill at all, the bill was totally reasonable, yet we steadfastly refused to pay the damn thing, and then I didn't leave a tip. A true crumb move on my part. It goes without saying I can't show my face in that bar again for at least, I would say, two years until it's reasonably safe to assume the staff has turned over at least fifty percent. I'll probably never go in there again. The bar has lost my business due to my own crumb behavior. How fair is that. Yet I feel I have no choice in the matter. Well, well, well, *look* who it is! This was what a homeless man who I didn't know once exclaimed to me as I took a bend with Maddalena downtown, actually not too far from where I saw this bar owner I hate. This homeless man apparently approached me, actually I know he did, because after the fact I remembered him, he approached me the night previous as I was leaving a bar downtown and asked me if I had any cash to spare, and I told him Sorry, but that I didn't have any cash, and he challenged my claim. This homeless man believed that I was lying about not having any cash on me, that I actually in fact had plenty of cash on me, that I just wanted to make an excuse to not give *him* any cash. I told him that was ridiculous and we exchanged a few heated words then went our separate ways. The next night Maddalena and I walked through downtown and were approached by two homeless men, one looking for some cash so he could buy a pill, the other asking for nothing but forgiveness, coming up to us and saying that he knew he did us wrong and crying even as we walked away, then when we turned the bend from Chapel St to where Yoleni's is located on Westminster I heard a voice call out *Well, well, well. Look who it is!* I gave him five

bucks and asked him to leave me alone next time he saw me. I haven't seen him since. Ah, Maddalena. That's where the story starts you know. In that gentrified neighborhood, or the neighborhood on the precipice of gentrification. It seems to me that Constantinople, maybe more than any other city, has a real problem in seeing anything outside of the context of *East* and *West*. A quote that I read from a mystic musician made me think of this recently, she said, and I paraphrase, In Europe although they take a keen interest in other cultures, so to speak, they remain remiss in understanding the Oriental cultures, which include Greek cultures. Think about the fact that over Four Crusades spanning multiple centuries the Europeans have been at war with our non-Christian populations, yet you would be hard pressed to find *any* so-called European philosopher or scholar, not even a minor scholar, devote any time to informing Europeans on the differences between these Saracens and Turks, the Persians and the Bulgars. These Europeans declare war on so-called non-Christians, yet they've never made a deal with any of these people over the last one thousand years! Our entire history in Alexandria, Antioch, Aleppo is apparently for not to these Catholics, the history and the scholars of the Eastern Orthodox—it's all essentially erased until we're all Latin Europeans and eventually we look at so-called future Greek culture with quizzical looks on our faces. *We'll* be the so-called Oriental ones to these Europeans. They'll pluck what suits them from our literature and art and then toss the rest into what they call the Orient. Anything that comes off a tad *too Oriental* will never be assimilated into this so-called European

culture. This idea that cultures flourished on the borders of Europe, Africa, and Asia while Western Europe was in a prolonged intellectual dark age is an inconvenient narrative for these Europeans. Music. I love music! But you can't write to music. There's a simple reason for this. Because you don't necessarily read to music, at least not extremely emotional music, it's funny how these things work—by the way when I say you what I really mean is either I or me. By listening to extremely emotional music or music that places one in an emotional state you corrupt the writing. The writing, in my case, has always been corrupt because it's been under the influence of music. Music is perhaps a drug. But I'm not going to go into drugs any further at this juncture, except for perhaps reiterating my love of coffee. I love coffee. Even the double *ff* double *ee* ending of *coffee* I love. It's funny you hardly ever see two consecutive letters used consecutively like that. Two f's followed by two e's. This is good. It's not a problem. One of my first memories of George Sphrantzes was going to see an experimental lyra performance, so-called experimental lyra performance, at a place called The Living Room, which was located right behind The Venetian Wine Factory, which was an actual Venetian Wine factory. He was wearing I think a Zeus robe and thick glasses, and he came off intimidating to me, but like so many people and things that I found intimidating in my early twenties I find George Sphrantzes far from intimidating now, but that's not to say I don't respect George Sphrantzes because I do, but I just don't find him to be intimidating in the sense of ... well I don't know. Intimidating in the sense of imminent danger? If I felt that

way in my early twenties that would have been odd. What cause did George Sphrantzes have to hurt me, a person he barely knew. It was possible that in my early twenties I had some sort of complex where I attributed motives to people and things that didn't exist, it's very possible I was a lot more narcissistic then, in the sense that people who believe everyone is out to hurt them are incredibly self-centered. As you age, or at least as you become decreasingly narcissistic, you realize that the majority of people you come across either never notice you in the first place, or immediately forget you, and your life is much improved for it. Those that assume all eyes are on them all the time are prone to miserable lives. Even our most famous citizens, despite having many eyes on them all the time, probably misinterpreted this phenomenon, that even if all eyes are on you quite a bit that doesn't mean anyone really cares about you. Even someone like *Constantine I* may in fact have driven himself insane thinking everyone was always thinking about him all the time, but the reality is even the people who did and do think about him most likely just thought and think about him in the extreme abstract, *Constantine I* is just a topic of conversation that relates to people in very unique ways, in their own unique ways that really, in the end, have little to nothing to do with the actual *Constantine I*. It's a nice thing to think about, everyone always thinking about you, but the reality is even if they do think about you, it's probably not in the way you imagine. Let it go. In any case, you can't write to music. Or at least I can't. I'm not a fan of analogies, but if I were I would say it's like writing a poem to one lyra composition but then singing the

same poem over another lyra composition, it's just off. But analogies are kind of useless, I think at least. Here's the problem. Maddalena's in the other room, and I enter the other room for a reason unknown then I realize I have to pee, and I go to the bathroom, but I don't close the door, not even partially, and as I'm peeing I realize all that I can hear is my urine violently hitting the water of our pee bucket, it's tremendously loud, a total mule pee, and I remember that Maddalena's shouting out the window to her third cousin, maybe fifteen feet away from me. I close the bathroom door while peeing. That's not the start of the story. It damn well might be the end. You kidding me. Fucking crazy man. Sixty six point six percent of the letters in coffee are duplicates. These are facts that exist in the world so to speak. Quote-unquote. But enough preamble, it's time we get to where the story begins, a brief history of a life from the years of 1430 through 1435, all history is probably to some extent hagiography, and I suppose this history will in the end be no different. First, I should introduce myself, non-narrator as I am, because of course, first and foremost, I'm as much of a fiction as a plot is, we need to stop thinking of these subjects and predicates as anything more than codependents. Having said that, my name is Constantine Palaiologos. Having said that, a subject cannot exist outside a predicate, this has been established for some time, even the Neoplatonists knew this, so we should treat it as such here. From a young age, as so many of us in Constantinople do, I guess you could say I had somewhat of a predilection for contemplating things that belong to the spiritual realm. It was only much later in my life that I

began to teach myself and interact with what we call more *concrete phenomena*. As a child I was only concerned with my daydreams, with imaginings, with the so-called spiritual realm. It goes without saying that anyone with these preoccupations will invariably find death a preoccupation as well. In our era perhaps more than any other death should be our primary preoccupation. This consciousness which creates these dream worlds will eventually end, and then where will it go. Being told by religious authorities that you could go to either heaven or hell can cause some stress. Especially because, in my mind, the outline of what caused heaven or hell as a destination seemed a little vague, at least in Sunday school. Having said all of this I wasn't dressed like a Visigoth, or a would-be priest, or some wanna-be Pope, I was to all outward appearances a somewhat normal adolescent, I played sports and excelled at athletics to an extent but not to an extent where athletics was a career-path, I excelled in certain scholarly studies but never to an extent where the monastery was a career-path, I was social enough but never had a social life that *was* my life, I had some reciprocated interest in females but was never particularly involved in any adolescent dating scene. My youth is in many ways a mystery. What defined me as an adolescent were my imaginings, my dream states, which I eventually began translating into lyrics. Perhaps music could have been what defined me as an adolescent, and to some extent maybe it did, but again my complete lack of interest in what we call concepts of the concrete mitigated my success in music, because, being caught up in my dream-states for hours on end, I never

allowed myself to indulge in the particulars of musical theory. To me music was something that was supposed to magically occur. In fact this was how I viewed most things. Being an inveterate dreamer I foolishly began to believe that everything in actual life should take after my waking dreams—that is they should just occur. The idea of concrete cause and effect eluded me. In fact to some extent I can credibly say that I'm only approximately six years old, as I never truly left these extended waking dream-state until just a handful of years ago. Only then, once removed from these lucid dreams, could I begin to interact with human beings and human concepts as they actually existed in the world. In any case by the year of 1430 when this history begins so-called quote-unquote I was still just an embryo. I didn't exist in the sense most of us mean it as a human being with tangible concerns. Of course I had regular human urges, I enjoyed eating food and drinking alcohol and wanted to have sex with females and even occasionally succeeded in doing so, always consensually I'm happy to admit. But I existed only in these lucid dreams even into my twenties. So when I say I quote-unquote fell in love it's difficult to say whether or not that's actually true. It may have seemed so at the time, but what things seemed at the time no longer exist, and I have to rely solely on my memory, and in referencing this memory of mine I have to put what was occurring at the time in a historical context, and when this historical context is reconstructed it actually seems to me that I was, in fact, not in love at all. I enjoyed this young lady's company, we had some great times together, but my sorrow was more rooted in not wanting our good

times to end *right then* more than being truly in love, and since my life consisted more or less entirely of my lucid dreams when I couldn't control things I became a huge baby. I was a big baby. In many ways I still am a big baby. But that's what happens when you spend an inordinate amount of time in your own mind. Should we go into particulars here. Probably not. Is it necessary. Again, what is it with us, we who are derisively called Oriental Romans behind our backs, and these love stories. Of course we all gravitate to them, but once you've heard a few or three or a hundred you've essentially heard them all. My so-called love in this instance was really quite simple. We had great times together, we enjoyed each other's company, we had sexual relations that were pleasing, if I do say so, for both parties, but we differed on necessary opinion. Her mother wanted nothing but the material best for her, and I, barely a despot, in a minor territory, in a dwindling empire, wasn't the man to provide any of that, and she wanted to be materially pleased and it was obvious I—as a lucid dreamer par excellence—had no interest or ability in that. There were of course other complications. She had a boyfriend, or was on a break with her boyfriend, or it switched week to week depending on how she felt about me, I still don't know exactly to this day. Young love. Puppy love. She's married with kids now, and I'm writing this five year history as a purported six year old. I think everything's worked out just fine. I remember working at my friend George Sphrantzes's stepdad's construction company in Glarentza one afternoon, I have little to no recollection of what we did there, I remember moving some goats and some rocks and

actually having a pretty good time, we met at a coffee shop called Brewed Awakenings early in the morning and rather than wearing workman's gloves I had winter gloves which were the only gloves I had at the time. I'm somewhat of a minimalist by nature. There were a few of us, and it may have been the first time I ever met George Sphrantzes's stepdad, yet I've spent quite a bit of time with him over the ensuing ten years. Later that night the group of us went to a bar called Balls on the west end of Glarentza, where they had wine pong tournaments, a pretty nice bar, and the 1430 Ecumenical Finals on the TV. It was Thessaloniki versus Constantinople in Debate 7. What an epic rivalry. Well my friend, who I wasn't in love with, was there and I have no recollection of what we talked about, I only recall the effervescence of our conversations, but I remember simultaneously telling another friend of mine that I couldn't see myself remaining in this city for a second longer and also thinking this is really nice. I like this companionship. This idea of having a good friend who you could laugh with but also have cool sex with was really intriguing. I'd never experienced it before. In some vague way I felt complete in a way that my lucid dreams kept me wanting. I liked this. On the one hand I found the culture of this city decadent and reprehensible, on the other hand I felt a form of euphoria I'd never felt before and wanted it to continue for as long as possible. Caring about another person is an intoxicant of sorts. You always want those good times to last. And being in an intoxicated state it's more difficult than it would normally be to make yourself recognize why these good times have an expiration date. A problem common to heterosexual good times

are marriage and children. As much euphoria as you may find being young and drinking wine at a bar called Balls these times can only last so long. Because most normal people want to have a wedding and then they want children in addition, usually, to a piece of property of some sort. And then you need successful so-called career paths to pay for all of this. From what I've heard that's not as much fun. When and if these events should occur in a shared life is by most accounts a *necessary opinion* that ideally will be shared by both parties. The person I wasn't in love with, I'll give her credit, saw me clearly enough to know I wasn't a person who was even technically born yet, never mind a person who would succeed in these types of events—wedding, property, children, etc. It was Debate 7, and I vaguely recall some sort of so-called bullshit being pulled, and Thessaloniki ended up winning and, being in Glarentza, most of us were sad or more accurately indignant. Something went terribly wrong.

A history of a man. A history of a man neither fully European or so-called Oriental. This, of course, is utter nonsense. The year 1430, one decade ago, was an interesting one, it was a year where perhaps my friendship with George Sphrantzes blossomed in a way that it hadn't previously, perhaps partially because of my so-called distress with this so-called love interest I had. Paternity is a difficult thing. It almost always occurs at least once in a man's life that the veracity of his paternity is placed into question, which can be difficult to absorb as a human being. George, should I just call him George moving

forward, understood this, George understood me in a way, a way that perhaps was partially bullshit, but was perhaps soothing bullshit nonetheless. Bullshit can be extremely soothing. Which is why there's so much of it. When faced with rough truths and soothing bullshit people will almost always choose the bullshit, and why shouldn't they. What good is found in truth. The truth-sayers of generations, what have they accomplished, how did they feel at the end of the day. Who were they. Socrates certainly claimed to be one, but he liked little boys, and we all know this, how did he deal with this. He certainly found no real issue with it, but how can we then say Socrates was a great truth-sayer, seeker, and finder—yet loved molesting little boys. Soothing bullshit has its place no doubt. It was in 1430 that George and I perhaps *truly* became friends. Galentza was in many ways terrible but also incredibly soothing. It was perhaps my true home despite the fact I didn't grow up there, maybe I was in some sense born there despite still being, as I've stated, essentially an embryo, overly preoccupied with my own lucid dreams. Of course reality when you take a hard look at it shares some traits with dreams, lucid or otherwise. George and I would spend a few nights a week at various taverns speculating on a variety of topics, ecumenical and otherwise. George, of course, would get divorced eventually as well, but that isn't the beginning of this story. In some ways all stories are perpetually caught in the middle of themselves, never beginning or ending. What's a good beginning. What's a good ending. If anyone knows it's certainly not any person of our species. Beginnings and endings are first and foremost

fictions, maybe even more so than narrators are. I'm myself a lucid dream, there's no doubt of that, in fact even as I've gradually become more acquainted with these concrete concepts as we call them my sense of being a lucid dream hasn't, I would say, decreased in any major way. After all, how I could even call this my life when allegedly my first so-called true love, who wasn't even my love necessarily, is a jumble of memories I can barely recall. I recall being in a smokeshop with this love of mine, sitting at the table where the four of us sat at and thinking to myself I'm losing my mind, I'm truly losing my mind, and then writing my so-called love a note that read I'm going insane, and we both laughed at it. Later this love smacked me multiple times and tried to persuade me to direct my mule into a body of water we could drown in, and I wasn't completely opposed to the idea! Yes there are memories, but so fragmented! How could you call this a life. All these autobiographies are fictions of the worst kind. Even autobiographies that claim to be fictions, oh they're maybe the worst. There's one from a so-called saint who wrote about a so-called saint-like female figure and the entire monograph purports to expound upon some chastity, some monastic chastity that is supposedly holy. Only when this so-called saint died were his notes released, where he writes to a friend about this monograph, he writes *What I left out of course is that I went back to her den one night and I nailed her!* Oh *very* nice. But that's autobiographical fiction for you. The worst types of lies. There is no narrator, narrators are fiction, we've disposed of this pesky plot, yet still cling to this insipid idea of *narrator*. So I remember this fake love. I remember it in very

piecemeal ways and even those pieces have begun to irrevocably fade just ten years after the fact. Memories, we must postulate, have some sort of physical character. They decay, which is a physical characteristic. They perhaps can even be replaced, which is definitely a physical characteristic. Yet where these physical memories reside we don't know, and even if we did know it's highly suspect that we would have access. As much as I'd love to have access! Of course we should probably at some point discuss Theodora, the original Theodora who first made her name in the brothels of, I believe it was Morea, where she was widely regarded as perhaps the most sexually voracious female of her time. Theodora actually publicly yearned for larger nipple orifices after exhausting the traditional three orifice roller coaster. Nothing, no amount of men, according to legend, could satiate this woman. She wanted to be penetrated via the nipple, both nipples at that. Five hole intercourse. And eventually Justinian became so enraptured by her he married her, and they stayed married, and Theodora was actually a very important part of Justinian's reign. It could very easily be argued—it has been argued—that Justinian's success was largely due to Theodora's influence. Of course many of us would object to such a marriage implicitly, without thinking we'd think Wow this lady has probably, not only seen, but fornicated with more penises in just one of her regular nights than we may be comfortable with a married woman seeing over the course of a lifetime. There's no doubt Theodora fornicated with quite a few phalluses, but in the end perhaps this view that a vagina is a sacred orifice, one that should only be

penetrated x amount of times, or by x amount of men, is a fallible view. Perhaps this notion is absurd. Perhaps the female vagina should be viewed as an actual organ rather than as a tissue or piece of toilet paper. After all, we wouldn't look at an asshole—also an orifice that can and is penetrated (ask Theodora)—and say Oh, this asshole should only have shat x many times in x many toilets otherwise it's irrevocably corrupted. Or a mouth (again...), we would never say of a mouth that should only have been quote-unquote penetrated by food x many times. Yet there is this popular notion of the so-called ragged nature of the promiscuous vagina. Well I'm not taking sides necessarily, although I will say I will admit to having accustomed myself to a harem or two of Murad II, in fact there was even one female in one of these harems that took a particular liking to me and I to her! Imagine, an actual liking to one another! But again, I urge you to look to Justinian, to look to Theodora, is there not precedent for this type of courtship. Certainly we could say that the relationship between Justinian and Theodora was rare, perhaps even far-fetched, but couldn't we say that about nearly any successful union between two partners. Is not all successful love a stretch and outlier, nearly mythical by its very nature. In any case, George Sphrantzes and Nicomedia and I found ourselves in Glarentza one night imbibing quite a bit of the complimentary sweet wine at a party of one of Nicomedia's cousin's, or distant cousin's, or minor acquaintance's, and we happened upon one of Murad II's travelling harems. Of course this was before I'd heard the story of Theodora, but one particular female in this harem struck me with her

chandelier-like nipple rings, I'd never seen anything quite like it and her demeanor as well. She seemed to have been *completely* unconcerned with any of us, with the scene as a whole. I remember turning to George and Nicomedia and exclaiming my unfettered joy at the sight of this female—she almost reminded me of a girl I went to school with who I had a major crush on but never asked out. It was an almost spiritual experience, I would say it was a spiritual, almost mystical experience if it didn't involved three young men gazing jaws dropped at a series of nearly fully nude women all of whom most likely were having sex for money. Take someone like George. Now if I were to relay this anecdote to George he would have a completely different recollection of the night. He would probably say something about all of the girls in that harem being *complete* whores, and they didn't even deserve a single coin from his pocket. And they were trash. And you couldn't trust them. Yet if you were to compare the litany of George's relationships to that of Justinian it's not even a comparison, and Justinian's wife's main lament in her early life was that her nipple holes were insufficiently large to fit a male erection into. I actually wonder how that would feel. It seems unorthodox to say the least to me, I'm not sure, even as a man, if I would be interested in penetrating an areola. I'm sure at some point in the future mankind will find a way to make five hole intercourse a reality. In any case, George *I'm totally fine, I'm completely happy, I love my life* Sphrantzes would disagree with me in my assessment of this girl, who went by the name Kyra by the way. The fact is I spent a fair amount of time with this Kyra and frankly why shouldn't have I,

in Galentza I wasn't necessarily all that happy, I'd fallen out of love, or so I thought, and I needed companionship if nothing else. And to me the whole concubine thing never bothered me all that much but maybe I'm weird in that regard. Of course many of us would say But Constantine you can't have a *genuine* connection with a concubine, yet Murad II was the son of a concubine himself. But enough about concubines, I'm not going to go into great detail about any of my concubines at this juncture. What I will say is around the time of my time spent with this so-called concubine my friend George Sphrantzes was newly single, and I'd like to detail that for a little bit, as I believe there are some worthwhile speculative inferences we can garner from a selection of his encounters. George, a female acquaintance, and I, at one time, were travelling through Galentza, probably on our way to a tavern somewhere, when George exclaimed *I don't know what I did to offend that girl so badly!* to which our female acquaintance bluntly replied George you went up to her and physically slapped her tit! She's married, you know. This was Galentza in a nutshell. An unsolicited slapping of a tit. I had no recollection of George doing this, and neither did George, but neither one of us had any doubt that it occurred. Sometimes you just need to drink things off. Much like the pepperoni comment at my cousin's Nicomedia's party, this slap of the breast muscle is wholly illogical, what man approaches a female he does not know, who's married nonetheless, and takes a swing at a nipple. George Sphrantzes apparently, but probably not many others, yet George's inherent contradictions, while perhaps more pronounced, or manifesting

themselves in unique ways, aren't all that different from the rest of humanity's, in my opinion. We're all balls of contradictions and inveterate hypocrites if we choose to examine ourselves closely enough. With George, at times, the examination perhaps doesn't need to be as closely performed, but the end result I would argue is little changed. George was involved with a female who was not involved in any harem, who wasn't a concubine, who told him that she'd never let a man quote-unquote finish inside her until he finished inside her quote-unquote, and George Sprhantzes took this as gospel, so when he found out not more than two weeks later that this female was two-timing him, that she was seeing another man behind his back he was deeply perplexed. How is this possible?! he said repeatedly. She never let anyone quote-unquote finish inside her, according to her, so how could she then turn around deceive this person who she apparently let do something so significant. Of course we know there are three possibilities or at least three main possibilities. The first and most charitable is that perhaps this act of significance, if we can call it that, scared the girl, and out of fear she sought the company of another man as some kind of insurance policy of sorts. That her feelings for George were so strong that the thought of losing him was too much to bear and she sought the company of another man as insurance, or possibly as a form of self-sabotage, losing a man you can't lose of your own volition is better than losing him of his own volition. What we'll call possibility 1A is that this person always finds herself insecure of her position and always seeks this type of insurance policy regardless of her

feelings. Possibility number two is that this female was simply lying about this act of significance, that it was just something she said, and she never had any real interest in George, that perhaps by telling this lie, which may have been a spontaneous act, she realized she was out of her depth so to speak and then immediately sought an exit plan, the company of this other man. The third possibility is she was insane. So there are three to four possibilities, but to George none of these possibilities seemed remotely possible. Because to George, like so many of us, this idea that someone could not only *not* like him but *lie* about liking him to his face seemed, if not an utter impossibility, than a possibility that could be too crushing to his ego to seriously consider. And it's a valid point, who not only doesn't like someone, but actually lies to someone about liking them when they in fact actually don't like them? It seems absurd. But if we examine this possibility it doesn't seem quite as absurd in practice as it seems in the abstract. People are overcome with enthusiasm all the time and say all types of things in a totally spontaneous fashion, and while it's easy to, say, commit to going to a party in a spontaneous fashion then regret the commitment and back out last minute (but even this can be tough), imagine spontaneously overstating your feelings for someone in a bout of jubilation—how can you walk that back. Why would she tell me that if she was fucking another guy, George said apoplectic. When there was doubt whether or not this female was seeing another guy, who was actually her ex-boyfriend if I remember correctly, a statement like that was perhaps being used as evidence against her seeing this other man. But once it became obvious to

everyone that she was seeing another man it became less of a rallying cry for wishful thinking and more a lament against the absurdity of consciousness. George Sphrantzes met this girl via a friend who worked with her in Galentza and immediately fell head over heels for her, which to my eye may have been more of an expression of his physical attraction to her than anything else. When I met her at one of George's birthday celebrations she seemed meek to the point of absurdity. I immediately took a disliking to her. Maybe not a dislike but somewhere between a feeling of being flummoxed and an instinctive cautiousness. What conclusions can be drawn here. No, I don't want to continue to expound about love. What is there left to say about love, we're practically a century and a half removed from Christ, what else can we say. The most important Man to walk the Earth that we know of, my friends, was born sans copulation, what should that tell us about this so-called love we seek. I've heard rumors of religious men further east than even the Persians who renounce all types of things, not altogether dissimilar to Christ, mind you. When someone like George Sphrantzes finds himself tied up in knots, and for all we know his lover was tied up in knots as well, what does this mean. What does it mean. We can't help but ask ourselves these questions. When we meet up with a George Sphrantzes, and we go have a drink, and we sit and we analyze these types of human behavior we can't help but become utterly flummoxed. And of course we try to apply lessons across behaviors, it was only a matter of time before I started to see in my harem girl some of the very same peculiarities as in George's girl. Of course

George wasn't innocent in all of this, for a brief period of time he considered, as we came across her randomly in Galentza, courting the ex-wife of Loukas Notaras. Of course it didn't go anywhere, but just the very fact George considered it was out of bounds, of course we could say the same thing for his first marriage, yet George Sphrantzes like all of us is apoplectic when these behaviors are turned *toward* him. George Sphrantzes knows the amorous crimes he's committed, yet when he finds himself victim to amorous crime he's indignant. I'm a good person! proclaims George Sphrantzes, victim of an amorous crime. And we can't argue that George Sphrantzes is a bad person, as a close personal friend of mine I can personally vouch that George is in fact a good person. Not without flaws however. Not without indiscretions so to speak. Yet I'm just as hypocritical in this matter because I found myself indignant at this female's behavior in relation to George Sphrantzes. She has some nerve! I found myself saying, not only to George but to myself as well. Of course George wasn't innocent, but why didn't he deserve to be treated *as though he were innocent*. She didn't know he wasn't innocent, for all she knew she was two-timing an angel, yet of course George and I both knew he was not innocent, yet we both became indignant. If hypocrisy wasn't possible no one would become indignant. Indignancy and hypocrisy are entirely codependent. There was one night I entered the harem and noticed Kyra, my harem girl, with disheveled hair and I thought to myself *she has some nerve*, how could she. I was indignant, yet not only was this harem girl working in a harem, but I should mention that she was

also the concubine of another man, whose name I'll refrain from mentioning here, before I met her! So here I was standing in a harem, staring at a harem girl, knowing this harem girl was not only working in a harem but also a committed concubine to another man, noting this harem girl's hair was disheveled and finding myself completely indignant at the disheveled hair. This disheveled hair became completely removed, I removed this disheveled hair from all of the other components of our relationship—relationship being used in the rudimentary sense of the word—I removed this disheveled hair from its proper milieu and became indignant. Of course I had no right to become indignant. George Sphrantzes, who was probably completely out of line becoming indignant, had infinitely more right to be indignant than I had to be indignant, yet I was so indignant I lost control of my motor skills for a short period of time. It was as if someone transferred me to some other dimension, clearly a dimension where I had a right to be indignant. It was absurd. Yet it was how I truly felt. We're always told to stay in touch with our true feelings, yet so often our true feelings are complete bullshit. So often in my life my true feelings have been completely out of line. If anything, for the sake of our society as a whole, we should be more repressive of our true feelings, it's our true feelings that are literally tearing the fabric of our society apart at the seams! Yet I felt for George despite the fact I knew at bottom he was somewhat of a hypocritical asshole. He was a hypocritical asshole, but he didn't deserve this. This was a little too much. George Sphrantzes probably cared deeply for this girl who apparently had nothing but contempt

for his feelings. It just seems so mean-spirited. Even if it was rooted in some spontaneous gesture and some deep-rooted insecurity she could never relinquish, a deep-rooted insecurity that probably has and will make every man she's involved with utterly miserable—even if all of that is true it doesn't change the formula George was forced to add up. It was ugly. Yet none of this is where the story begins, the story has yet to begin, yet it takes place between the years of 1430 and 1435, we should admit that. If we admit and agree that the story, this story, a history of a time, takes place, tracks the years of 1430 to 1435, then perhaps we can ascertain a beginning, perhaps even a middle, and if we're lucky an end as well. That would be nice. Riding through Galentza one day I took note of a man waving to me and, just as we passed him and imbibed the glance, I realized it was Ajax, a distant friend who had just opened a tavern *on the street* we were passing. I still hadn't stopped by and seeing his face, even if for so brief a moment, I could instinctively see the disappointment in his eyes, that look of Hey man I see you're on my street, where I've been struggling with opening this tavern, just passing by huh, maybe you should stop by. I didn't stop by, even though it would have been nothing to stop by, even though I felt somewhat obligated, or if not obligated then moved by a sense of goodwill to stop by. Ajax was a relatively recent distant friend and there was really no reason why I needed to stop by his tavern, but it would have been nice. I remember a few letters Ajax sent to me after a drunken conversation we'd had right around the time we first met, he thought of me as someone filled with so-called wisdom because of a monologue I

performed while inebriated that I hardly recalled, and I was flattered, and his concubine even came up to me one night and noted to me how much Ajax liked me, and I was also flattered, yet none of this flattering and feeling good moved me in any particular way to spend any time with Ajax. There was nothing wrong with Ajax, I thought he was a relatively nice guy. In fact, one night when we were out someone confused us for brothers or cousins, and I remember that very same night on a crowded dance floor seeing a young lady lift up her shirt repeatedly and show her boobs, and I was intrigued, she was dancing with a guy who seemed like a major douchebag yet kept showing everyone her boobs. I feel like Ajax probably saw this scene too. Maybe it was something we had in common. Having said that I felt like it would have been a nice thing to go pay his tavern a visit, he probably would have given me a free drink, it actually would have been to my benefit to go to this guy's tavern yet I didn't. Maybe it was the rumor of the Black Death that had been going around or maybe it was just a lack of alacrity on my part, I'm not really sure. After passing Ajax, John, George, and I went to three other taverns trying to find a decent meal. One tavern was closed, the other required a reservation, and the other was—also closed. Finally I dropped off John and George and I just happened to stumble upon a place that actually let us sit down and have a quick meal. I had an artichoke sandwich that was delicious. You ever fall while taking a jog. Like really fall. I hadn't either until last week I was going on my usual two and one half mile jog and my knee was kind of bothering me from playing beach volleyball on the North Side of

Constantinople the previous Thursday and, trudging through, my right foot caught on a rock and I went plowing palm first into the gravel. I slid on the gravel on both palms and my right nipple, then I had to run the entire way back, I was exactly at the midpoint of my jog, with my hands drenched in bright red blood. I've spent the last week watching my hands slowly grow their skin back, it's been somewhat interesting, but actually extremely painful for the first few days. I felt like a bit of an old man, maybe even a total doofus, when it happened, tripping while jogging. I mean, come on man. What the fuck. Jogging at a slow pace I somewhat seriously injured myself. Crazy stuff. In Galentza I used to hang out with this eunuch named John who just loved pleasuring men to an almost absurd degree, to an almost predatory degree really. He used to tag along with George and I when there was nothing to do, when we were just killing time grabbing a drink here or there, maybe even grabbing one too many drinks. Of course there are more than a few examples of a *Basileus* basically dedicating himself to liquor and whores and ruining himself, drinking himself to an early death, but it's debatable how much booze you really need to consume for that to happen. I don't think George and I ever got to that level, although we had our fair share of overindulgence, some of our predecessors would hit the bottle all day every day for years on end until their bodies just collapsed and dissipated before everyone's eyes. John was a funny guy. As a eunuch he was only interested in the oracular, so to speak, he was saving the back-end of his story for quote-unquote someone special. The man of his dreams. For a moment he thought I could be

the man of his dreams, but I've never been physically drawn to eunuchs and eventually I think John realized this, plus at the time I was preoccupied with my harem girl who perhaps I should detail a bit further. This harem girl actually took a genuine liking to me, and I took a genuine liking to her, and in that sense our friendship was quite simple, but in every other sense it was in fact way too complicated to parse apart. I've tried many times, too many times to count. Our memories, as I've stated, it's my belief they have some type of physical characteristic to them, they *exist* somewhere, but wherever that is I'm almost positive is inaccessible to me. Obviously one complication was the harem in which Kyra worked. Of course it's not impossible to take a woman out of the harem and make her a proper wife, we've seen a great *basileus*, Justinian, do just this with his great wife Theodora, who was more or less the Jesus Christ of the harem in her day. But now you add the fact that this harem girl was already the made concubine of another man, a noble nonetheless, and now you're dealing with a true excavation process when attempting to dissect things. Much like with George Sphrantzes's girl, we could reduce that analysis from three particulars to three abstracts. The first is *duplicity*, the second is *miscommunication*, the third is *insanity*. Why do relationships go awry, why do they become so difficult at times, usually it's due to duplicity, misunderstanding, or just unfettered insanity. Some people are insane. Not only that, but strong feelings and misunderstandings can make someone on the precipice of insanity full blown whacky. No one is exactly in love with their jobs, I had this exact conversation with Maddalena the

other day, you can't just give up and try something new every time you feel on the precipice of a calamitous boredom at work. If you did you'd have a job every other week. For example, my time in Galentza. Sure, I guess there were some great successes, some magnificent triumphs, but in retrospect all of that really just paled in comparison to the trials and tribulations of simple everyday life. And now we're in the midst of this so-called union of the churches, this ending of the schism, with these heathens, these European heathens, even worse the Venetians, who ruined my City in my great great great great great great grandfather's day or something, well I have a long memory. And why should I or any other self-respecting Roman respect, much less trust, these Europeans, you see amongst us, the Greek speakers, we're forced to look East and West simultaneously, in perpetuity. That's our job ad infinitum. And it's hard work. Between the Turks, the Saracens, the Bulgarians, the Latin Europeans, the lists goes on! Speaking of narcissism, in many ways our Roman world is the center of all things, and it's no fun! Yet it's a sad state of affairs when your Christian brothers, so-called Christian brothers, after all it was their idea to do the Crusades! It's a sad day when your so-called friends and/or Christian brothers loot you in ways your enemies would never imagine, not even the Saracens destroyed Greek speaking cities in the way those heathen Venetians did. There's nothing more dirty than a European, especially a Venetian. Of course I have to play the part and *act* as if I don't despise these Venetian imbeciles, but in private I spit on every minor compliment a Venetian gives to my City. These Europeans shit where

they eat, not that our people haven't indulged in our fair share of sins, of course half of the men who've been crowned *basileus* have either been gluttonous or in many cases totally insane. Yet we've upheld a literary and cultural tradition that puts these Europeans to shame, and now I can already see the seeds sprouting, the transmutation of our world into what these Europeans now call their culture. European culture.

Ick!

This European culture is a *footnote* to our culture, this European literary tradition is an idiotic cave-drawing in comparison to our massive libraries, this European logic is a cheat-sheet to *our* philosophers, these Europeans have lived as heathens for centuries and now want to pick apart our culture and make it their own. Fair enough. Yet for all our brutality and unfettered insanity, for all of the eyes we've plucked out of our own skulls, we've always been a melding of culture(s), there's always been some sort of tacit mutual respect, or maybe this is just me talking, maybe men have talked like this for centuries whenever their day is nearing its end, tainted recollections of an honor that never existed. Yet having said I can't, and I won't, forgive these European heathens for dooming Constantinople by their own hands and now pretending to weep for our demise. These Sultans, who believe me are plenty savage in their own right, have more honor than these heathen Europeans. Why is it so difficult for a culture to just *exist*, why can't we ever just exist, why

is there this constant yearning to overthrow, not just within, but from without, from the outside, we can never just have flourishing cultures existing side by side. Every culture seems to want to expand at a yet-to-be determined pace, and these paces are never in lockstep, never in agreement with the surrounding cultures, all surrounding cultures seem to either be in the process of conquering or strategizing to conquer, biding their time, waiting for the day when their culture becomes an empire, hegemony. What is it that drives this. Is it an innate defect in our communication skills, is developing culture some kind of dice game strategy that *must* be played this way? These Europeans are assholes. The Pope can kiss my asshole. I have no love for these Europeans, these fake friends. Fake friends are the worst, ten times worse than a formidable enemy, eighty six times worse than a regular enemy. Keep your friends close but your enemies closer yet the most dangerous enemies you have are your friends! Irony. How many friends look at you and look at either your success or your ability and crave it and, given their proximity to it, think they can steal it, but you can't steal an *essence*. This is the fatal flaw of all pretenders. You can't take an essence - just as a woman can try and look like the girl who all the men in the harem want to take home, but she'll never be her. In fact by trying to make herself into something she's not she'll become monstrous. All fake friends share a common trait, a total lack of knowledge of self, and without this knowledge they look upon the people *they perceive* to be their better endowed friends and think they can forge their way into becoming something they're not.

Thinking they can change their essence. But even if these fake friends topple us if they stab us in our backs and fuck our wives and access our gold reserves they can never be us, they always lose in the end, they always have to either succumb to insanity, or go through the hard work of making themselves into who they are, just as we did, and by the time that process is finished they realize stabbing their friends in the back was a futile process, all they did was stain their own legacy, and they're overcome with regret. They retire to a monastery and die in shame hoping our Almighty God will forgive them for their foolish sins. That's who they've become. They discover their true essence in one way or another these fake friends. Of all my faults, and I have many, I've never felt an urge to become anything other than myself, yet there are so many we surround ourselves with who have no interest in being anything *other* than themselves. If they had one wish they'd wish to become something other than what they are, despite the fact the great majority of them have no idea *who* they are. They're disgusted with the very idea of themselves. I, on the contrary, am disgusted with *my actions* all the time, but I'm never disgusted with my essence. I know my essence to be true, which is why I only concern myself with these heathen Europeans *to an extent*, because when they come to take what they think they can steal, which they inevitably will, they'll only be fooling themselves. They look at us and wish they could turn themselves into us, and they'll try, but they'll only make themselves look foolish in the process. A bunch of bogus Aristotles and counterfeit Platos. I wish them luck. But in Galentza my circle was larger. I wasn't as concerned

with these issues because these issues, the evidence of these issues, had yet to come to my attention, I was concerned with quote-unquote making the best of it with George Sphrantzes with John and a litany of other friends and acquaintances, with my harem girl, the list goes on. In fact, it was only around *this* time that I truly began to emerge from my ghost-like state as a full-time lucid dreamer into what we may call a functioning adult human being. John was a deeply disturbed individual with identity issues, but he wasn't exceptionally conniving, he was actually a pretty nice guy as long as he wasn't three sheets to the wind, which, to be fair, was his favorite state to be in. George has been my friend since I was a child and as for this harem girl, well, how can we assess an individual. I certainly can't. I can only provide a snapshot of how I recall our interactions, how they went, I can purport to have a window into their soul through these recollected interactions, but beyond that what can I say. Sure I have some good things to say about this harem girl with the obvious caveat that we were physically intimate which probably makes my intimations about her wholly invalid. What can we do, how can we accurately perceive the people around us. The harem girl was perhaps one of my most challenging relationships in terms of perception, this relationship marked the end of my extended lucid dream state. In many ways it made me more humane, it returned me to my instincts of actually, not only caring about the less fortunate, but recognizing that strokes of luck place us where we are as much as ability. This is something all despots should keep in mind, not that there's no skill but, in terms of influence, it's almost

always luck over skill, events we can't control that dictate our so-called fate. Justinian's Theodora must be highly respected in this regard, being born into the peasantry, more or less sold into the harem, and to end at the side of the *basileus*—that's quite an impressive feat of distance. Most of us, if born into the true peasantry, the most dire situations of the world, would do nothing more than drink ourselves to death and die. So many of us are born into more advantageous situations and still do nothing but drink ourselves to death and die. We can't help but emphasize this when we discuss the state of the world. That, while the machinations of empire may seem to be under the guise of human decision making, the fates of the individual are steeped in the stochastic. We're ragged pieces of fate at all levels. This harem girl confirmed my intuition in this regard because she possessed many noble traits that a person wouldn't expect to encounter in a harem, and at this time in my life, lost in Galentza, I was already succumbing to more brazen, more indifferent, more harsh philosophies of our human condition. I'd started to lose my sensitivity. I'd started to look at the world, yes, in the sense of a dice roll, but a dice roll with no humanity, no sensitivity. Some sort of *It Is What It Is* philosophy of the human condition. But to adopt this type of philosophy is to lose touch with our humanity completely. If we no longer feel for the bum on the street, for the concubines and harem girls, for even the insects and animals that litter window sills and patches of grass, then we lose an essential part of ourselves, in my opinion at least. My time in Galentza could have been leagues more psychotic—and it was

already thoroughly psychotic—had I not come across this harem girl, had we not happened to take a genuine liking to each other and discuss certain philosophical issues on a weekly basis. In this respect I'm entirely off base with my notion of these Europeans, we can't make blanket statements like that, although I'm not perfect, and in some ways I have no choice but to spew unfettered hatred at these heathen Venetians. This harem girl and I wanted to be with one another at the time, but we both knew the impossibility of it happening. To make an analogy of it two people are stapled to a wall yet still living—and if they were to ever rip through the staples they could quote-unquote *be together* but they'd obviously ruin themselves in the process. Maybe not the most eloquent analogy but you get the point. This was our situation. Analogies are always fraudulent, what can we do. Yet in speaking about all of the so-called noble things I took from my relationship with this harem girl I should probably note more about her specifically. But how. There's no way. This is the problem. This is why the story can't begin in the harem. Because I can only speak of it in extreme abstracts. Otherwise it's fictionalized in a way that's more pernicious than flattering. I recall this most distinctly in an anecdote I'll share about Gennadius Scholarius, another one of my so-called friends during these Galentza years. I'd foolishly, as a passionate young man, penned a recollection of sorts, partially about this harem girl, an extended narrative that I thought quote-unquote *truly captured* the essence of things, so to speak. This was difficult to do given how close I still was to the situation, but I did it anyway. Foolishly. And I

gave a draft to Gennadius, as he was the most purportedly literary person I knew, and he loved it, oh he thought it was great, but a particular comment he made always stuck with me. How the prose really showed the quote-unquote narrator (note: there are no narrators) was conflicted with deep thoughts or something, and how the prose depicted how *shallow* the girl's nature really was. It was here, being deemed a writer who penned a work of borderline genius according to the scholarly Gennadius Scholarius, that I realized I was a total fraud. My depictions were fraudulent. Who am I to take this harem girl and depict her in ways that anyone can interpret (incorrectly). I felt like a dirty piece of shit. My prose depicted falsities beautifully, how quaint. Who gives a fuck. There are no narrators, there are no characters, there is no plot, these things can't exist, they'll kill the person that writes them, assuming the person that writes them has a shred of any moral sensibility. This is the problem with our historians and scholars so-called. They have no regard for veracity. Because if they did as soon as the ink hit the papyrus they'd realize they're penning lurid fictions, they're depicting people who have no real way to defend themselves. Sure, this isn't the case in the sense of tyrants and other powerful people which maybe absolves the historians to an extent. But the biographers, the autobiographers, it's difficult not to view them as people inherently hostile to life, to the living. As theoretical bearers of death. Now there's no doubt that Gennadius Scholarius would find this analysis of mine perhaps a tad childish, perhaps just entirely off-base. But Gennadius has no moral scruples when it comes to the

less fortunate, he doesn't care. But there I am essentially throwing dirt onto Gennadius's name, maybe I'm completely off-base. Is he able to rebut. There are no narrators. We can't sit here and honestly say I exist as a true narrator, these are just words that flow from somewhere in my mind, perhaps my recollections, which are probably physical, my thoughts are probably physical too, but they all come from a place I have no access to. I can't access these thoughts and memories. They come to me. They spray this papyrus in ways I can't control, I can't depict an actual human being through this process, it's only piecemeal, and these pieces construct something entirely different from an actual human being. When we think of things in terms of narrator, character, plot we bastardize what it is we're performing here. A collection of thoughts that's all. Performed in a way that hopefully isn't morally reprehensible. Otherwise what's the point. Unlike these historians who for the most part are all hagiographers. They're all liars of the first order with political positions to attend to, these historians share many similarities with the fake friend, they're the objective observers who are anything but objective. All history is ass-kissing and cock-slurping. It's hagiography-par-excellence. These history books are at once essential to our understanding of culture and lurid documents of pure malice. In their objectionable character these hagiographies that purport to be histories tell us more about our culture than perhaps even an accurate history could. Objectivity and perception are the problems. We can't get around these issues, this is what we discover when we pick up the pen. This is why most writers

are so insufferable, because from the inception of their writing they make a pact with themselves to overlook what should never be overlooked. To falsify and overlook. This is a problem. Hopefully in the future these problems will be solved once and for all. With the invention of new technology perhaps true objectivity will come from Our Almighty God down to us. Scrolls of papyrus will be distributed to the masses and everything will work itself out. We could agree that this is maybe even probable. Humanity can't continue to be this way for hundreds of years down the line, that much we know to be true. Speaking of—it seems even today we've hardly scratched the surface as to the true nature of that city that was initially known as Byzantium, that's now known as Our City, as Constantinople. It's so funny in human relations how our memories of almost all of our origins are so steeped in mystery. We know nothing of ourselves, or our history, or next to nothing at least, perhaps that's why we're so prone to speculation, or perhaps it's because we're so prone to speculation that we have such poor memories. If we recalled everything accurately then what could we speculate about. Or perhaps speculation is the very root of our consciousness, perhaps to know everything for certain is to become a rock. I wouldn't doubt it. I've known more than a few people who made a slab of stone seem near genius. In Galentza particularly, what a small yet debaucherous town, I remember being carried to a tavern with John telling us about how he would always strip completely naked before shitting. *Completely naked!* he shouted. Then he would go to a watering hole and make a makeshift cloth to wipe his ass. In fact, George

Sphrantzes brought this up to him, one night he said John do you know Bobby Asclepius by any chance, and John said Of course I know Bobby Asclepius, and George said Well he's seen you shitting naked in the bathhouses multiple time and wanted me to tell you about it, he says it makes him a little uncomfortable. To which John said Everyone knows I shit naked! This was a common retort from John, when someone brought up some just totally absurd behavior he was guilty of he would reply by saying that *everyone knew he did it*, as if the knowledge of his absurdity excused said absurdity. It was a clever rhetorical technique. You're completely out of line. But everyone knows I'm completely out of line. In a weird way it makes perfect sense, if everyone knows it then what's the issue, you're the only one bringing up the fact I'm incredibly inappropriate right now, yet everyone knows that I'm incredibly inappropriate, so what's the issue. It's a challenge to everyone else, it's a challenge to the complicity of others. Everyone knew John took shits stripped naked. If they all want to bring this fact up to him, then so be it. In any case, the harem girl, it didn't end well. I'd made a few comments regarding her status as concubine, for some weird reason I thought maybe she should be my concubine, yet I wasn't sure I was in a place to accept her as my full-time concubine. It just didn't seem like I was in the right frame of mind for that. Yet my feelings were sincere. In reality I was no different than that total whore that did George Sphrantzes so dirty. It's possible, much like my false true-love from the beginning of the 1430s, it was that I didn't want things to end more than I really wanted them to continue. I didn't want things with the harem

girl to end, but I also didn't want them to continue. Things can't just be frozen in place. You can't see a woman and not have progressions, so I wasn't sure that I wanted to regress to nothing, but I wasn't certain any sort of progression would be good for either of us. One night she pressed her head between my nipples and said *Constantine, you can't have everything you want, you know?* At the time I seemed like I was asking for a literal piss drip, as if asking her to ditch her official relationship, a major source of financial support, and become my concubine was the least anyone could ask of anyone, yet in retrospect I was asking for an incredible act. This guy, a noble no less, wouldn't just *let* her go, she'd even fathered a son for him, this was no easy task, and to leave him and his well-documented history of financial support to come and become my concubine with no real guarantee that I would provide for her for any extended period of time, it was an incredibly bold thing to ask of someone. At the same time this harem girl had a way about her that, in my estimation, she would have no problem finding some other schmuck to fall in love with her, I can't say it was an incredibly big deal if I wasn't there, that would perhaps be overstating my worth, perhaps substantially. In fact, I probably went through three phrases regarding my request of this harem girl. My first phase was I'm asking literally nothing of you, come be my concubine—the second was Oh my God, I've ruined your life by not accepting you as my concubine, letting my own insecurities ruin our chances at an impossible relationship—the third being she would have left the bozo at some point anyway, and she has more than enough wit and beauty

to land most any man, especially working in that harem. This is my point about love. It always seems like it's the biggest deal when it's in fact the most rudimentary thing in the world. We walk into a harem and find a nice girl and a mutual respect is developed. Then the impossible fails to occur, and we torture ourselves for years about it, we stalk old stomping ground, speculating on possibilities that are all thoroughly impossible, over a scenario that's more than a daily occurrence in a harem. We walk into a harem knowing we'll never find love, and we find love in a harem, we learn exquisite lessons thinking these harem girls are the disenfranchised, when in many ways these harem girls live better lives than any of us, we torture ourselves for years about which scenario is true, are these harem girls steeped in misery, or are they putting us all to shame, only to realize it's obviously variable, there's no real answer. We recall a harem girl sitting on our laps and tearfully confessing *Sometimes I just I'd get hit by a bus!* and we torture ourselves over this statement, we attempt to make this statement into some kind of tunnel to the truth of someone's character, when we know our friend George Sphrantzes dated a girl who told him that he was the only guy who finished inside her only to cheat on him three days later. We think these things don't happen to us when they could easily happen to us. We don't think when we're in love. Thought and love are mutually exclusive. No one in love has ever had a remotely lucid thought occur to him or her. We all want to fall in love because we think it makes us special, despite the fact we're all falling in love every day, and there's nothing special about it at all, despite the fact

falling in love is the most routine occurrence in our lives. You could have three eyes and no cock and you'd still fall in love with a girl who fell in love with you, and you'd feel like that relationship was the center of the universe. But it's the furthest thing from. This is where the story begins. It's here, in this fundamental miscommunication, this miscommunication with myself. Not that there weren't egregious miscommunications with this harem girl. Because there were, we both were prone to fits of jealousy although in my opinion my fits were slightly more justified. It's possible I was drunk almost every time we hung out. None of these recollections can be considered historical. Not even remotely historical. John shits naked and orally pleases nominally heterosexual men, yet he's looking for love, for that special someone, I walk into a harem and learn how to wake up from a life-long lucid dream, George Sphrantzes thinks because he ejaculated into a female that they've become soul mates, this is love. This is where the story begins. We must say that, beyond a shadow of a doubt, the story begins here. A history of the years between 1430 and 1435. Should we conclude it here, or should we plunge further into the depths. There are no narrators, this much we've established. In setting our course in writing this history it's been well established that there are no narrators, they don't exist, we've relinquished this idea, this silly idea of plot, yet we still irrationally cling onto this antiquated idea of narrator. No more. There's no idea more absurd than a narrator. This idea of subjects and predicates, we've discarded them. But perhaps the story of 1430 to 1435 begins between 1405 and 1415, isn't it possible something

occurred in those years that irrevocably influenced these subsequent years. It seems impossible that it's untrue. On a Sunday night in Constantinople, I sat at a table with a handful of so-called friends and listened as George Sphrantzes, my good friend since childhood, told all of us that he was happy. It's what we all aspire to be, yet I knew George Sphrantzes was the furthest thing from happy. I've uttered the phrase *Yeah, things are going well* to George Sphrantzes hundreds of times, yet things were only going well less than one percent of the time I said *Things are going well. I'm happy, I'm good, don't worry about me*. The words of an utterly miserable person. I've learned from experience. The summer of 1430 was one decade ago, and I spent it engaging in pure debauchery with a Bulgarian princess. The Bulgarians are practically European at this point, or they want to be at least. Romans, we should never bow to the pressure of these Europeans, least of all these heathen Venetians. Falling in love with a Bulgarian princess, it can really give you some wear and tear, this Bulgarian princess really did a number on me. But what occurred to me between the years of 1430 and 1435, my utter misery, the amount of times I considered falling on my sword were plentiful, but they were necessary in order for me to wake up. You can't spend your entire life in a lucid dream. It's inadvisable. All men enter a harem and stay for a few drinks at some point in their lives. In fact, I sat that same harem one Sunday afternoon drinking from a jug of unwatered down wine and smoking a harsh hookah until a person, who looked remarkably like a Scythian whore, approached me, she wasn't looking for a coin from my pocket, even

after we spoke she didn't ask for a single coin—and to be fair I didn't offer one—she said to me You're ruining yourself, and you know it, you need to find out what makes you happy, you can't live for other people, this will kill you in the end. This Scythian whore said these blunt words to me, and it was like she saw right through me, it was like by a simple glance she acquired rock solid information. She said I don't want anything from you, I'm just sitting here for a break, and then she got up and left. Three sheets to the wind in the early afternoon, I contemplated her words, my life imploding before my eyes, even before she sat down and spoke. I was killing myself with harsh hookah and unwatered down wine, I was ruining myself, and I was wholly aware of it, I even took a sort of *perverse enjoyment* in it. I enjoyed destroying myself, although at first I was surgical in how I destroyed myself. But by the time I came across this Scythian the wheels were falling off, this was no longer a precise and surgical self-destruction, I was three sheets to wind on a Sunday barely past lunch time, I could no longer deal with things, things that were in retrospect so simple, things that people go through every day, I couldn't deal with them, so I decided to destroy myself. To this day I feel a strange sensation when I think about this Scythian whore, because it was entirely uncanny how she could read me in such a plain manner on a hot Summer afternoon, on a beautiful Sunday afternoon, I've never been read like that before in my life, if anything it's usually the exact opposite. Over the course of my life people have either found me inscrutable or made assumptions or observations about me that to their face I said were spot on, but were in reality

entirely wrong, that were the exact opposite of me, that couldn't be further from my essence as a human being. It's possible that up to that date and time no person on this planet had ever understood me, it was only this Scythian whore who looked at me for maybe five minutes, at maximum, before coming to her brutal assessment. Brutally accurate assessment. She sat on the patio where I smoked harsh hookah and drank unwatered down wine by myself, sat at the table across from me then approached me, she didn't immediately enter into her diatribe. She gave me a cordial greeting at first. Then she assessed me in a way that was entirely accurate, incredibly detailed, and really almost devastating in its intensity. She knew me. Somehow she knew I was crumbling under the weight of something I hardly understood at the time. You can't live for other people, she said in a distinct Scythian accent. She was half nude and was quite attractive, but there wasn't an iota of sexual tension between the two of us. It would have been like attempting to fornicate with a phantom. We could have sat at that table for centuries and never exposed our genitals to one another. I couldn't live for other people, I couldn't guide others to happiness, in foolishly doing so I was killing myself. In my own slurred way, writes Constantine XI (Palaiologos), I told her that I thought she was right, that I knew she was right, then she walked away.