



Crossing

the

Continental

Divide

a novel by

Daniel J. McKeown

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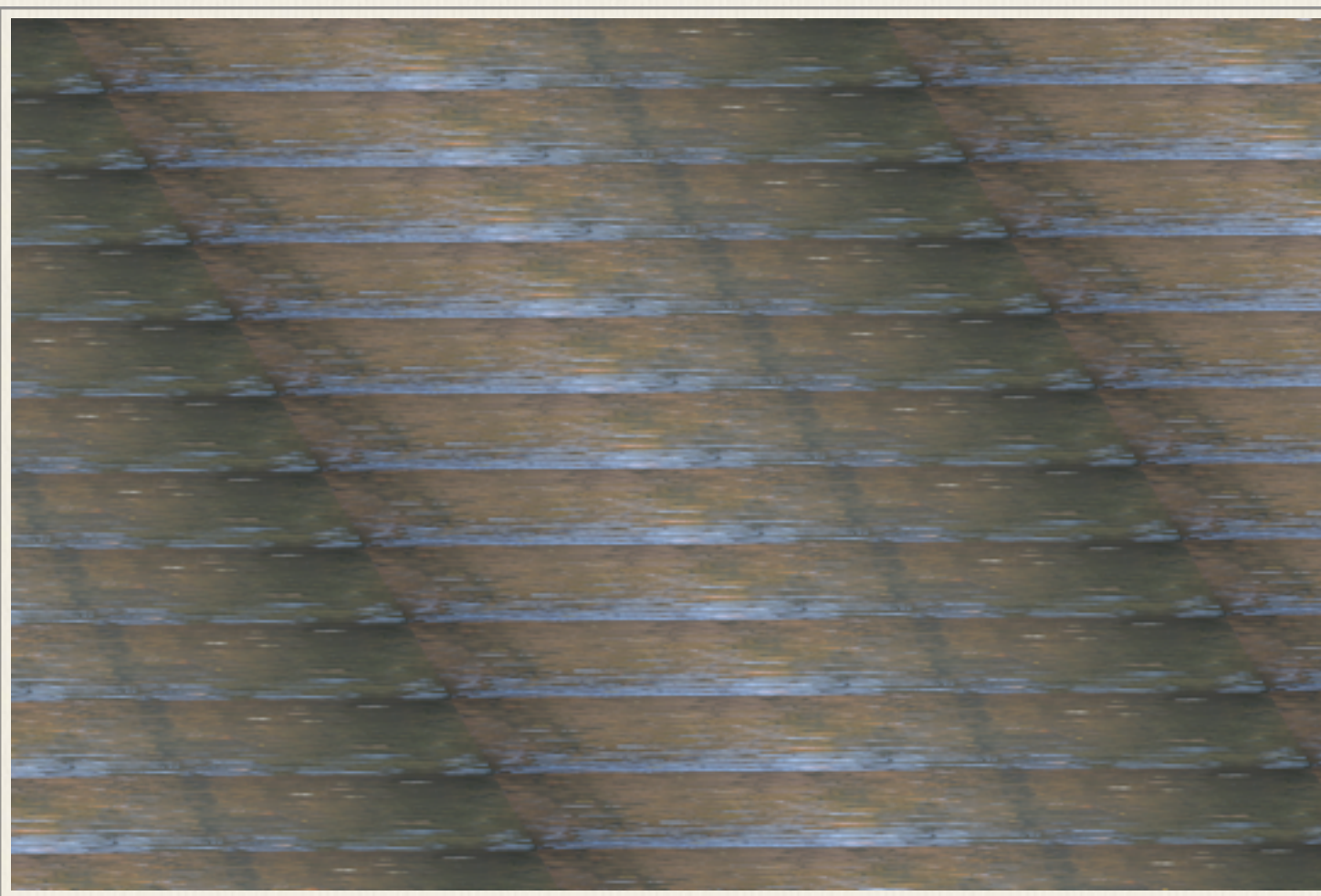
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Crossing The Continental Divide

INTRO

In this book I have only a few characters, and maybe I should just start telling you about them now, as we roll alongside the ongoing narrative.

Yoss lived in Cleveland, Ohio—this city you may have heard of, as it occupies a strange but notable place in America's historic crossroads. I think in frequent colloquial use "in Cleveland" is a shorthand for something, and I'm not sure what exactly—it's not exactly the same thing as "in Peoria," the slightly archaic term denoting 'in the middle of the nation, what the common people think.' On the other hand it occurs to me that Cleveland brings a darker context—the focus in this formulation of the prepositional phrase is not what the honest, hard-working people there think—no, it actually refers to a kind of cosmic "getting stuck," and while many people offer a treachery chorus of boosterism, the real rehabilitation of the rust belt steel town happens unevenly, and in some areas not at all. Once a city in the top 10 in population among American cities, Cleveland's city limits rank around 37th now in number of people living there. Those that huddle along the cold shores of the Cuyahoga turn inward toward an insularity that can easily alienate those that do move to the area.

Yoss lived just outside those city limits to the west along Lake Erie. On a warm night late in September he stood awkwardly alone at a high table with some sort of red wine in an overly trendy stemless wine glass. The smartphone is not a good look, Yoss thought, fighting again to place his iPhone back in the bottom of his pocket from the upper reaches where his hand had again unconsciously reached—but also he was getting fairly drunk on the wine. Because it was so bad. Having drunk enough wine in Sonoma County to know how poor this garbage was, Yoss ordered more and more wine in a vain quest for satisfaction of both his love of tasty cabernets and a strong attraction to the bitchy waitress, who he had decided to keep busy as much as possible just to watch her hot, tall black clad body and dark hair slither away seductively.

"She is so hot, whatever she does is seductive." Yoss turned around a bit startled. His friend Eamon was there, apparently after having read his mind.

"So you're done talking to all those people who give me weird looks when I try to engage them?"

"Maybe you're right to, yeah, uh, avoid them mostly," Eamon said, not answering my question. 'I didn't particularly care about standing there and play out my drunk duel of futility with the waitress, with the world,' Yoss thought. It was just a bit unnerving to consider the mind reading and he wanted to move on.

And the brick-walled wine bar echoed to its high ceilings with dissonant braying, and the waitress left Yoss at the end of her shift.

Yoss walked into the church at St. Jakes and sat in the back row. Grandiose and in disrepair, the large church had already seen off a challenge to its very consecration as an appeal from Rome had restored its status as an operating parish. Not that it mattered much to Yoss; he somewhat preferred the crumbling traditionalism of the Immaculate Deception church on the near east side of Cleveland with their Latin and their hard stares for late arrivals. The Jakes church was old but it had that aspiration toward northern European grandiosity that Yoss found somewhat off in America. Excessive German influence in the area? Stained glass of that stodgy multi-colored glowing saints variety, ornate but aimless carvings and an overall sense of darkness hiding disrepair; St. Jakes was a bit disquieting.

His cousin Genevive and her husband Paddy must be up there in the front somewhere, he thought. Standing in the pews with their heavy coats on, that most incomprehensible of Catholic rituals. It's very easy to understand why that would be the habit for the small handful of Italians who actually attend mass; those unheated treasure troves with surprisingly spartan decor; either they don't appreciate those things much, or they don't like to be seen full of appreciation in sight of tourists.

When time came for Communion Yoss noticed that his aunt, Sister Mary Dub, was one of the kandi sharers. Is that the right name for them? You know, those people that hand out the Eucharist. Amen enforcers? Anyway the technical requirements for receiving the sacrament (too numerous to recount here) were probably not met on that day by Yoss. He was debating whether he should do the typical everybody's-watching-I-better-go move that so many in his situation were in that mo-

ment were doing, when the vibration of his phone brought him back to more temporal matters. Eamon was texting him.

'You got the tix?'

2

When mass ended Yoss moved quickly and decisively toward the front. A small child running the other way (out of the church, of course) moved toward long right leg of Yoss, who pulled up in enough time to hardly be at fault—but regardless he managed to deal a stern blow to the head of the little one with his knee, touching off a screaming fit by a little girl as the dozens of faithful filed out. In some churches this may have been jarring, but this one was widely regarded as a screamer church, where babies and little kids had little chance of imperiling the good attendance of either parent. So with the prevalence of young families (try finding many single people or childless couples in the pews these days) it was a matter of statistical probability in a church that large that at most points in the service a bellowing scream would be blooming, probably just as the scratchy fade-out cries sound from the baby that was where the new bellower was just five minutes ago.

"Hey Paddy, I got the cash." Yoss moved quickly to business.

"Hey there, you might need that for the little girl's lawsuit against you."

"Which little girl and which lawsuit?" Yoss asked.

"You're disgusting," said Genevive. Yoss actually found Genevive disgusting, especially after that boating outing a summer or two ago where the mismatch between her filled-out (kind of fat?) upper body and her trim but oddly inadequately curved lower regions.

"These are going to put you pretty high up there, and—" Paddy was interrupted both from his sentence and his motion for the tickets in his pocket, and Yoss took a deep, frustrated breath that might as well have been a sigh. All breathing by big guys has the potential to be interpreted by smaller people as a sight. Really, it's just a lot of oxygen being used, you know?

Sister Dub had found our conference and was injecting herself into the situation as she always does. "You'll have to walk with me to the office, I have to do some paperwork for the parish. Father can't sober up for even a Parish Council meeting anymore, I've got the collection just sitting out there where those Mexicans can get to it and I'm not sure I can trust them, Jesus Mary and Joseph, do you know what your sister told me? She told me that one of those Mexicans that works for us got an abortion at that nasty little clinic down on Center Ridge, the one that sells body parts to China..."

Yoss and his cousins were soon following the black-clad behabited old lady down into the bowels of the church and out the other side into the new wing of the building with the event room and offices. This side had the bland hopelessness of a 21st century Midwestern small business. Medium-sized offices with hard, ropy, sticky carpeting in a half circle blocked off by a half wall from a kitchenette where time and space would collapse like a black hole the second donuts were dropped off.

The airless basement set aside for events was where the after-party was at, and Sister Dub asked Yoss to carry the big tin coffee pot down the stairs, which seemed okay (insofar as being here at all was okay) until Yoss realized that he had to get down a slippery, dusty linoleum staircase carrying a large coffee pot that presented no friendly gripping an-

gles. Even still he got it down most of the way, before dropping it at the bottom of the stairs on its side letting the tar-like "coffee" free in a gushing stream across the cheap carpeting.

After plenty of trying to do his part with the massive cleanup, Yoss was finally rewarded with the chance to buy the Browns tickets from Paddy and get out of there.

'Upper deck but they'll get us in there' he texted Eamon as he drove off.

3

As the Interstates snaked and faded through Toledo, Yoss took one of those vague loopy exits and managed to find an Volcano gas station with plenty of pumps. How much of this neighborhood is abandoned? Apartment buildings with scraggly edges of broken bricks sat isolated between the decrepit road on one side and the Reconquista of nature on the yard side. Toledo is a yard town, everyone seems to have some sort of yard. Kind of a nature box. The best haphazard layouts in Ohio neighborhoods reveal strange secrets. Often plots of at least ten feet by ten feet site fenced on all sides from neighboring yards, guarded by trees on a side and shrubs or a fence on another. Piles of cans or abandoned lawn mowers add a farm-like junk clutter. These little spots are very important, a little bit of shelter and free range for the animals like possums and squirrels and cats that would be in the neighborhood anyway.

This jungle of mysterious junk and grateful animals was just providing a deep backdrop of energy, a vague and disparate reassurance, against the despair and utter broken-ness of the area. Yelling, random

yelling, beat up cars, obviously insane people muttering along the sidewalks—everything here was immediate to Yoss. But he was thirsty. Wondering if he should abandon his sedan even locked even for a second, he nonetheless went into the gas station's store, where two people hunched just to the right of the entrance playing no-cash-payout video poker. At the counter with a few Spepi Colas, Yoss noticed a meat cutting machine of some sort behind the cashier on a desk, unused and piled high with receipts and envelopes.

The early evening saw scattered light over Toledo, but Yoss knew that there wouldn't be much light, night or day, where he was going as he returned to his car and got back on the road. Yoss was on his way to Michigan and its clouds.

4

House music legend Orgetorix was playing the St. Angie's venue in downtown Detroit. A converted church, such as the story went, the place was dark and high-ceilinged and beautifully resonant with sound, more Romanesque than Gothic, affording a better echo for electronic music than holes like the Maestro in Chicago.

The game last weekend had turned into a drunken nightmare. Eamon had enjoyed lots of vodka in the parking lot. The tailgate scene in Cleveland is a buoyant mix of grilled meats, errantly thrown footballs, men wearing hats and drinking beer and blasting unnecessary pre-game chatter or Led Zeppelin, and women who are dressed nice and warmly on the upper body with sweatshirts and cardigans but provocatively [sexily??] below with those ubiquitous black yoga pants.

5

Yoss looked across the dimly lit apartment at the dark curls strafed over a gorgeous little back. "I think I have a condom in here somewhere." She fumbled around for an impossible amount of time, and then suddenly Yoss saw her turn around and instantly she was bent over his crotch. Yoss just loved the care a good woman could show by her posture while sucking dick.

What sort of wonderful chain of events could have led here? Yoss had gone drinking at one of the few grim bars open in downtown and found it filled with cute little idealistic women, one of which (an eager, nice looking shorthair) engaged him quickly right as he sat down next to her. Or had he talked to her until she showed interest, or..when things are flowing right they are flowing right. A few minutes of rapt attention from the shorthair were passing nicely when another woman sat on the right side of Yoss and auditioned for attention. An opening line, said too faintly to really be heard by Yoss, nonetheless had the effect of winning him over with its combination of energetic confidence and conspirational cuteness.

Her kind of unstoppable luminescence was quite apparent from the way she dressed, Yoss realized. A pink bra sheltering large breasts on a trim frame was quite noticeable as it both escaped at the edges and made its presence known clearly in silhouette through the shirt.

Leaning almost uncontrollably toward his right, Yoss noticed her quickly pushing back and looking right at him. "Just throw me out of the way if I'm too close," she said.

'Hot.' Yoss thought. 'So hot.'

"Were you at the Orgetorix show?" Yoss asked her. Around this time the woman on the left, unlooked at for minutes now, decided to get up and walk toward the scrum in the back.

"My name is Lisga," she said. Yoss smiled. She was hot.

6

Orgetorix had put on an energetic show, working up to a heavy, steady beat and blasting pulsating bass before being joined on stage by a couple of French singers named Gilliat and Droit. Gilliat was a surprisingly effective hype man, lecturing the audience on the work, determination, virtue and perseverance needed to truly live out the house music lifestyle. Like Orgetorix, Gilliat was a powerfully built guy, basically wearing a nice tracksuit and some gold chains with cool sneakers that he'd be loath to have called "kicks." Droit was a stubbled skinny dude with an intense, in-and-out voice that complemented the music eerily mechanically—but it was for real. Yoss had some skepticism going in that too much processing would be needed than could be pulled off live in order to sync Droit as effectively to the beat as he sounded on record. No this guy was for real, hanging almost off the stage. Pictures of rock shows held in this venue couldn't have prepared Yoss for the look of the setup here. The pile of old-school electronics gear, all the sequencers and synthesizers and computers needed to put on an Orgetorix show, was crowded all the way up to the edge of the stage. Part of what made it all feel so immediate was that Droit was practically marooned at the edge of it all—exactly where he seemed comfortable. Droit and Gilliat, when they came on stage, took much of the visual focus off of Orgetorix and he felt comfortable taking rips off of joints passed from crowd and crew as he moved from machine to machine.

This show wasn't an easy ticket. A Chicago House legend at a good Detroit venue is a major deal in the dance underground. Eamon had given Yoss the ticket.

"I'm not going to Detroit, you want it?" he had asked an excited Yoss.

The Browns tickets from his cousin had been rounded up by Yoss as a show of gratitude. Eamon had been quite free with that gratitude and had exploited it all it was worth. By the time they had gotten into the stadium, ordered \$28 worth of hot dogs, pretzels, and beer, and climbed to the upper deck, even Yoss was actually a bit drunk and rowdy. Not a particularly loyal professional sports fan, Yoss had yelled "The Browns are clowns" a couple of times and very nearly gotten punched. Two punts by the home team later (which is to say, not very long after) Eamon suddenly seemed to have his legs taken out by the opposition. Sort of a chop block meted out by vodka. Yoss was glad that he was a big guy and that Eamon was about average size for a guy, because he was putting his arm around him and supporting much of his weight as they stumbled down the ramps, with Eamon asking more and more to stop and recover and Yoss letting him do that less and less as security and police needed to be seen off over and over with increasingly creative excuses. "He's tired...He's epileptic..He's Irish." One or two of which was certainly true.

7

When they woke up together, Yoss and Lisga each had apprehension, but before long Yoss was stroking her hair and telling her about the show. The excitement of the concert and the attractiveness of his hostess were so overpowering that he was amped up and talking about it like he

was just another musician checking another one out. Which was a true observation but not to scale.

"I'm a teacher here in downtown Detroit," she told him. Lisga explained that downtown Detroit has a lot of people moving to it. Yoss had heard about this phenomenon but had thought both that it was probably overhyped in the media and on some of the left-wing blogs he read—he imagined scary ultra-gritty first-movers-of-gentrification characters, people possessing both an appetite for high risk and perhaps a penchant for urban farming.

"I don't think that urban farming idea is really going to work," Yoss intoned. It wasn't relevant to anything, but nothing had been said for a while. Had it? Yoss was thrown off by how sweet and real this woman seemed.

"I didn't go to the Ag School, I don't know. You know, actually my college used to be called Michigan Agricultural College. But I think a few farms could be started. It's a land use issue."

"All that vast amount of land, those grim blocks of abandoned houses and closed business—"

"—and dance music geeks" she said, laughing.

8

The stange sand cays jutting out into Lake Superior, I mean Erie, have a strange backcountry—a sandy pit of mystery in the middle of the island that must be the province of bold dirtbikers and adventurous SUV drivers—Yoss knew he didn't have the car for doing stuff like that, didn't want one, but he cruised on the circular road on the island until a few hits on his cannabis bowl and a few tasty sips of light roasted coffee and

that Ohio sun coming through his sunroof—no this way a day to stop by that park with a lighthouse and a view of Cedar Point where you sort of have to park in the lot of that Methodist Church, or is it Lutheran. Remember how much Tom Wolfe made of John Glenn's Luthern-ness in *The Right Stuff*? Anyway Yoss stopped and walked near the water and nothing was even trying to convince him this hadn't been a great weekend.

Lisga had given him her number and an alluring kiss goodbye, but a woman that transcendent was too perfectly adorable to be corralled effectively quickly. Corralled in a loving way—Yoss loved how beautiful she looked, how smart she seemed to be, her uncomplicated idealism. A woman driven to such heights of wonderfulness did not usually come out of an ideal background—and could be lost back again to that wilderness.

9

"This is some awesome shit!" Eamon exuded. "We're talking some out there stuff, some tits, it's going to blow your mind."

"How well do you know Orgetorix?" Yoss asked. "I've been thinking about that show all week, now it just seems to be getting bigger and bigger to me, I want to have him produce a track and do a remix for me, that would really blow my shit up."

"I can talk to him about it, but you know he had a ton of projects and offers. Guy's a fucking legend. Think he's out in Portland or San Francisco right now. It's incredible down there in Miami, most DJs that could set up shop there would just do that I'd think, but Orgetorix seems to like that really out there psychedelic Western vibe, which is fine, with me, as you know, but I'm really excited about what they're going to do here."

They pulled up on a neighboring street and ambled over to Taylor Road and the old observatory. Eamon's effusive knocking seemed to arouse a skittish kind of paranoia in the porcine woman dressed in a squirrel costume who answered the door. "What the fuck, oh, Eam, who's this guy dressed like a Sears commercial?"

"This is my friend Yossarian. He is here to learn."

What he learned was that some adults like to dress up like fuzzy animals (that much he had heard of) and say they had the "soul" of that animal or whatever.

"If they had species change, would you be game? You know, gene splicing, genetic engineering?" is just one of the snarky questions from Yoss ignored by the frolicking, mewling, barking group as they groped around the dark observatory, looking for what was next.

"This is some shit," Eamon laughed as they drove away a long hour later. Few others had left of the two dozen or so crammed into the forgotten relic of astronomy. Yoss had no idea what he meant.

10

A mile or so in from the mouth of the Rockó River, Yoss stood on the riverside with a Bait Lakes ale (brewed just in town) in 1 hand and a glass weed bowl in the other. Since the lighter was needed frequently, it was gripped by fingers in th3 hand holding th2 bottle. Dipping into his 'LL Coat rainjacket for the grinder every few minutes to reload the bowl, Yoss stared out at the stunning mix of fall colors with yellow and brown leaves mixed with the still-green and hundreds, thousandsn little accents of red. The red leaves are an especially prized target of a certain type of photographer. Something about the declining levels of life (a serif V

of geese sounded their honks as they flew overhead Yoss) brings a perfectly understandable rage in the hearts of so many in the Midwest—the heartbreak of a disappointing romantic summer weighs heavily on this slightly cool day on Eamon, as we will see soon, and the letdown of the cooling temperatures, the impending indoor conditions, a loss of freedom—this rage must be channeled—into football.

How football sums up American life is undeniable—Eamon had convinced Yoss of this in very long-winded metaphor, but what Yoss had essentially taken from it is that football's arbitrary elevation of certain people over others based on an arbitrary ranking of their position.

11

The river was flowing rather lightly. In a dry year like this one the Rocky River wasn't navigable upstream of the MetroParks Marina. Too many submerged rocks would turn into little rapids. Yoss had rented kayaks with his friend Shelley T. A couple of summers ago when the water had actually been higher and they had still carried out a couple of awkward portages despite that. This spot where Yoss stood was only 50 feet or so from a rightward bend in the downstream direction. Upstream within view was a bridge for the road that snaked more or less along the river but here approached it at a right angle to cross it.

12

Sunset was approaching soon and a Cleveland police car was sitting at the car pulloff spot across the wooded edge of the river with a meadow between them. You know the kind of meadow-field they have at forest preserve areas—this one had a shelter for picnics and parties, and a lot of open space with a few people walking their dogs around.

Yoss started becoming aware of the pig-faced officer after walking blithely out of the wooded area into the meadow. Suddenly aware and decisive, Yoss turned around instinctively. Why did he still have a beer in his hand? Had the cop seen him?

13

As Yoss looked toward the river, he noticed a jogger alongside the river trail. Before long he had joined the trail and was some 20 feet behind this jogger, keeping pace. He wasn't sure but he thought she was growing alarmed, moving faster and faster and with a terrified, desperate energy. He was sure that he had heard the starts of a scream, which was apparently suppressed. Then after awhile, after crowing the road once, Yoss settles into a nice thatch soot in the wood and waited until the cop car pulled away. He knew he'd been late for a while to meet Eamon, since venue before the jogging incident.

14

Eamon was already eating pizza off one of those raised serving trays they used in this kind of sports bar—tucked into a strip mall, a modest storefront led in to a spacious bar starting with tables on the left and the bar on the left, with TVs on a lot of walls and games and bathrooms at the back. Just a fish from the range of darts was the table that Eamon sat at with a couple of women Yoss hadn't met.

"This is Jen Mich, and this is Amanda. I used to go to school with these ladies."

Which school? Yoss didn't wonder for long. Before long they were talking about high school again.

"She never had a chance to actually get a scholarship, she was injured her whole senior year./Yuh I totally thought he got her pregnant I don't know./Her dad totally paid for that car, I know./&c." including a long rehash of chreeleading team controversies. Yoss was pretty sure from context that neither of them were actually on the cheerleading squad. Whatever.

"So, what do you do?" Amanda asked Yoss. She wore jeans and a sweatshirt and carried around one of those tallish curvy bodies that Yoss could get behind. Dressed in a gray Ohio State pullover hooded sweatshirt with red lettering and jeans and a pair of New Balance running shoes [we'll consider those in a moment], Amanda offered the question with a sweet understatement that made Yoss less hostile to that kind of question than normal. He leaned forward slightly and staggered his timing so his answer would seem less incongruous.

"I'm the guy that gets Eamon tickets to Browns games." Yoss said.

"Oh, the Browns, huh huh," said Jen. Narrower than Amanda, Jen still had tits that were just as big, and she let her blonde hair bounce around her breasts where large areas of them were free from the cover of her light blue cotton low-cut top. Yoss looked back at Amanda and thought how much prettier he thought she was. 'Her face is cuter, emphasis on -er, Yoss thought, plus that brownish-reddish hair without too much red looks great as she moves her ring-clad left hand through it—' Ring. Ring.

15

Later that evening when they were up at the bar and a few other people had joined the group, Yoss had been messing around with his Nikon

dSLR camera when Jen decided to put on a show. Posing with a few of her friends, the progression of photos reveals them becoming more and more leery as Jen becomes more and more slutty, pulling down on her top and making puckered lips in an increasingly hot series of images that Yoss was fond of looking at on occasion.

16

So about Amanda and those shoes. Runners are a sanctimonious bunch—the act of punishing one's body in that way doesn't appeal to a lot of people, which seems to invest runners with the idea that they were special. Amanda had been a cross country runner in high school, not exactly a zephyr of speed and endurance or anything but a participant anyway. After giving up running rather completely in high school and gained dozens of pounds, Amanda had a brief period in her mid-20s when she got really back into running again. Now 30 and with only some of that weight back on her [of course we should note that a guy like Yoss would love this particular build she currently had with a passion] Amanda had nonetheless acquired the consumer trappings of a runner (Runner's Earth Magazine, Nike fitness apps, special running shoes) and had integrated the style into her wardrobe, even if now her main form of physical exercise was going to Michael's Cycles spinning classes (making sure to check in on FourSquare each time).

17

Everyone was pretty intoxicated after a while, ordering Burden River bourbon ale and Slew Moon white wheat beer and Budweiser Elect and all sorts of other stuff, punctuated with vodka shots and shooters and before long, everyone was bumping into one another in the dark confiding things, and Amanda happened to be standing near Yoss.

"It's so unfair that my husband moved to Columbus. Today my dogs were fighting, one of them mauled the other one pretty much, he's such a jerk, I had to take Hon to the vet and he had this cut above his eye and can you believe how I feed them the same, of course I don't know who's eating what when I turn my back,, not that I do muchhhh,, and Wooster gets so much bigger so much faster. He's such a fatty now." She looked apprisingly down at herself; her peek seemed to inspire confidence and she moved on. "I was watching that zombie show and Wooster totally wanted to eat and I'm like, what, do you, think—did I mention that on my blog? Oh yeah you don't really know me." Odd, inappropriate giggle. Not a sexy giggle, Yoss thought. "So I have this blog and I like to talk about what I eat. I get stuff from cool delis down in Steelmont. Then I take photos—you know I used to use a dSLR. Nikon, um, D—"

"I use that one also," Yoss said.

"Well, I used to use it—now I mostly take pictures with my iPhone. And a lot of times I just upload the photos of what I'm eating to Instragram. I used to blog about running, well—I do, in season, you know." This was not the season for running. "You KNOW Wooster doesn't like to run. Hon will go run with me but he's so naturally thin, like my husband, what is it how guys can just lose weight so easily, but with us women—" Amanda looked down at herself again. "Well, you know. I was trying to eat this macrobiotic stuff I was getting from Hoss Market, but actually Wooster got his paws on it. Or, well, his jaws on it." 'Save!' Yoss thought. 'Go on.'

"You know what's really crazy is what dogs do in the car. Oh, I got Wooster a Lighting Shirt but it didn't make him any calmer or behave

any better on the drive to Columbus. I have a friend who got a different brand shirt, I would never do this, with the built in shock collar."

"Oh, Carrie? She just zaps that fucking thing for sadistic enjoyment. She's an ugly nasty bitch." Eamon had just walked by and decided to join in.

"Don't SAYYYYY that about her," Amanda said. "Although I can't believe that she could be a newlywed and already having an affair. I can't stand working with her because she slips out and does stuff during the workday even, I'm covering her ass in meetings."

"And Dougan is covering her ass with his ejaculations." Eamon said.

"Dougan? Oh, no, she's with Keegan now, I mean not really with because she also has her husband." Amanda said.

"I was listening to this podcast one time—" Jen started.

"Where did you come from? Did the random guys get sick of you," asked Eamon.

"I used them up already," Jen deadpanned, continuing. "One time on his podcast Kevin Smith said he was staying in the Columbus area during a tour and was put up at a nearby house, which he eventually surmised from the drawers full of porn and kleenex everywhere that this was a house of swingers. And for some reason he seemed shocked that it would be going on in Ohio."

Laughing, Yoss turned toward the bar and looked at the bartendress. 'Soon your kind,' he thought, 'will be the only ones wearing tank tops.' Yoss thought about how he had somehow developed a good deal of self-governance in one narrow area—hitting on barmaids. There seemed

to be no upside. Had some traumatic event trained him like a dog to avoid the bland charms of an alluring drink pourer? No, probably not—Yoss decided that he had just learned the complex value proposition of bar service by sitting in so many. Certainly not every stripper is a grateful stripper, enlivened by the marginal increase in cash payment. For whatever reason barmaids don't respect the tips in the same way. Do they think they're more important than strippers? (They shouldn't think that.) For whatever reason, additional tips bring additional contempt.

18

Late season baseball on the TV screens. Cleveland is out of it by this time of year already, again. Bloop single to right by the cleanup hitter. The other team is going to have to finally pull the starter now in the 8th inning. We'll be right back after some beer commercials.

19

Yoss was trying to get to Eamon's house in Stony River by mountain bike when the driZzzle started. Before long an enormous, sky-darkening thunderhead cloud was moving in—from the bridge Yoss was cycling on a view of Lake Erie revealed an amazing continuum panorama—to the east the sunny day that everyone on the area had been until this 3 o'clock hour enjoying was still visible, slipping out of view so slowly while the stormy left side of the view seemed to advance faster always until—whoosh a wall of wind and heavy rain descended. Soak-through conditions led Yoss to shelter under the awning of a local cleaners. Actually it was more than an awning, more like an overhanging roof structural element that was held up by a column in the middle which allowed two different archway accesses to the double doors. One archway led to the parking lot of a nearby grocery store, the other to the sidewalk. Mists

and spritzes of foggy water dabbed Yoss and his bike but he was at least spared the full brunt of the storm for now. It can't possibly keep going at this rate for long, he thought.

Eamon's house was a typical cramped dwelling. So many baby boomer era houses with plenty of cramped rooms packed into small houses are dotted along the streets in western Cleveland and outwards. Stony River actually had plenty of bigger houses—some locals might have called Eamon's place more of a west side kind of house—but that was because of the garish gazebo in the back. On the particular tradition of front porches, such a trademark Cleveland feature, Eamon's house matched its neighbors in lacking a front porch.

'Front porches, like detached garages, are a wonderful tradition of this area. Taste or quirk of history?' Yoss wondered as he finally set out around 20 minutes later, still being rained on lightly but dry enough that he hoped his iPhone might survive. [Later he learned that it had, however his mid-range quality earbuds were effectively busted as one channel had stopped working—Yoss had stubbornly left them in (he had a hood!) to listen to a music podcast that features Gilliat that was really syncing up well with the loud, wet, rhythmic clunks of his beat-up mountain bike.]

"Oh, shit!!" Eamon said as Yoss pulled into his backyard dripping wet. "Well, I've been stuck under here, smoking this dank bud as fast as I can put if fear of it getting wet!"

"Let me have some of that stuff," said Yoss.

"You're wetter than..you're—"

"What?!" Yoss asked insistently.

"Okay. Well." Eamon coughed. He had told Yoss one time that a professor at his grad school had explained that coughing was better and more effective than clearing one's throat. "The fact is I met this crazy chick who gets all sorts of fucking wet for what I do for her."

"It's probably not for amateurs whatever it is," Yoss intoned.

"No, she—okay well I'm at this happy hour after work." Eamon's worked in the massive medical cluster on the east side of town.

"So, just getting drunk after work, and I meet this nurse."

Yoss wondered if Eamon's and notices his involuntary eye roll at the mention of a nurse, but he decided that the fact that he had a glass bowl in his mouth, pulling in that sweet weed smoke, meant that he wouldn't notice—or maybe that meant that it didn't matter.

"So she's a nurse, and she went to Kent you know [Yoss didn't] and she specializes in the care of the, uh, handicappedly unabled, I guess you might say—"

"Why is the word retarded taboo now? All this leads to is people like you trying to say something nicer, more euphemistic, but really just making things worse. There are some people, I will tell you, who at some point you just can't talk about because there is NO WAY to keep up with which acronyms and terms are the acceptable ones on campus at this very moment."

"Yeah, okay," Eamon said. "So she works with these people all day, and she notices that they have sexual urges like everyone else. So I'm talking to her at this bar, and she's like, she's really getting turned on telling me about this, so—"

"YOU didn't!" Yoss yell-coughed.

"Oh, I did. She dressed up, the whole thing, the Velcro sneakers, the medical alert bracelet, elastic waistband pants, helmet, you name it."

"I bet she stole a lot of that shit!" Yoss said.

Eamon reached for the grinder. "Probably. I mean, what is she supposed to say, I'm buying this for my unabled sister? You know? The sex was really hot, actually the weirdest part was when she broke character. I'm kind of half awake, laying in her bed afterwards, and she's like, 'I'm going to start drooling and speaking poorly again.' And she didn't even explain in any more detail. Apparently the implication is that I should just sexually graze on her as I please while she's acting that way."

"The implication is, you're into some out-there stuff. Are you sure you didn't just talk some nurse into this?" Yoss inquired.

A loud, middle pitched roar of laughter escaped Eamon before he started laughing in a slightly more civilized way, too amused to even give the truthful denial he could have offered in the situation.

20

This was the second gazebo that had been built in that spot. Eamon loved the word, all he really know it to mean was covered backyard deck, maybe round (though Eamon's was more hexagonal) with an entrance on one side. He had grown up going frequently to visit his grandparents up in weatern Michigan. They had a cabin up there not half a mile from the lake but up on a hill in the woods, and even though a deck sat on one side looked over the bluff, Eamon's favorite memories there (other than sweeping acorns with his kind, cheerful grandmother) in-

volved fast-paced card games with his grandfather, small sums but big stakes.

Eamon's first gazebo had weathered away slowly over about ten years. He preferred a slightly decrepit structure in the back, the lawn an inch or two higher than neighbors, and little delighted him more than the sound of a woodpecker hammering into his house. They are such beautiful birds, it takes them a very very long time to do any damage, and they provide a metronomic beat when they're doing their best work. Eamon would smoke (and sometimes eat) cannabis and try to play a bongo drum or midi keyboard in time to the bird. Who knows what magical unseen conductor influences a woodpecker's timing?

21

Eamon horsed around with the iPad for a view minutes and after a stupid commercial for a form car went past evening and yes were watching the Mets play St. Louis.

"They're out of it, like your tribe." Eamon said oh his favorite team. "But my team's not supposed to be like that. You know when I was a kid playing stickball in the street of Harrington, New Jersey, all the neighborhood kids were into the Yanks but I knew, I knew they were headed for..."

"Great..things?" Yoss helpfully offered.

"One great thing, 1986, I'll tell you that. People forget how great that team was, winning 108 games, that was for real, yeah that Buckner clown made an error, that kept him out of the Hall you know—"

"He was a marginal Hall of Famer at best before that, but yeah, he's the other side of the oversimplification coin, at least to national fans. But

didn't they have a whole forgiveness thing, after 2004—oh who cares about them anyway, what I was saying is, back when I used to hit those busted up leather hardball with those plastic bats, or sometimes those thin wooden softball bats, we lived on a dead end you know. Stickball all summer when I was there, visiting my grandparents. I've always respected that about New York and New Jersey their love of baseball. Also the bitterness between the fan bases, well back in the 80s the numbers were a lot more even. You know my grandparents, the Irish ones that lived out east, they had a house that was built into the side of a hill. So, their backyard—Or should I say, they's backyaad—it was a patio and a little grass and a couple bushes up against the neighboring yards, but then after not much grass was a cinder block wall about waist high that, like, sort of held back a jungle of ivy and trees and birds nests. I saw sparrows in there a lot, I think they were. No, finches. Well it was left to nature, and cats, whatever, it was steep. Thick with vegetation, and then up at the top anyway there's just more houses and more people from New Jersey." Eamon raised his head up and laughed loudly, looking to Yoss like a character from the Peanuts cartoons when they scream. "New Jersey. What a blast. Can't even tell you the last time I had good Portuguese food! That place in the next town over, we'd go in there and, I was just a kid but it was like the big place to go there or whatever. I never realized why until I came by just after New Years 2000 when I was in town. Went there with my friend Tee. We couldn't believe how much they wanted for some clams and wine, let alone some of the more Spanish stuff like the tapas. Sorry..pesticos!"

"Expensive stuff?"

"Yeah, and going in there as an adult—one who had just turned 21, a young one, but no longer a kid—I picked up on a very martial, melancholy air to the place and imagined a dreary night in port as the brave citizens prepare to fight a sea monster from the deep as its squid-like talons swirl asynchronously in an asymmetric choreography of intimidation, as if to say, you may breed loyal, likable water dogs which will some day prove popular with Barack Obama but at this moment you are under siege from a terrifying monster of the deep!"

"So you didn't eat at that place?"

"No, we got some Chinese takeout. The neighborhood, though—it was so long before you got to the street that there was a walking cut-through closer to the end. That's a great idea you know—Sidewalks that run at right angles that aren't running along streets."

"Does that really matter," Yoss asked.

"It really—I'm telling you," Eamon stated, "it has a real effect on the feel of a neighborhood. That old block, well first of all so many members of the family lived on it, but also, there were so many kids, lots of Irish and Italian families, so many players for pickup baseball games. If there weren't enough people just hanging out in their front yards, you could just walk down four blocks and they'd be playing ball in this cramped park, perfect right because I had a real shot then of hitting them out, and of course the other way and there were the tennis courts, stripped of nets and filled with rowdy kids bashing soccer balls around. My cousin was actually one of those guys, kicking ass in there, but I always had a hard enough time reacting to plays on the grass field even with my quickness—I have like this pro-active quickness, not a ton of

speed but quickness of the mark—but my reactions, like connecting on headers, not exactly legendary."

"Lots of concussions from that I would guess." Yoss said.

"Probably," Eamon agreed. "Well—" he lit up and drew in a hit. "I'm just sayin', New Jersey in the summer when I was a kid—something amazing about it—somehow coming there for a week or two from the Midwest gave me a chance once a year to live with the volume turned all the way up. The people, the vibe, the hustle, the noise—just way up. And somehow baseball there—playing it, watching it, talking about it—reflects that energy.

22

A blue Jay flew down into the yard in front of them onto a wooden bench that sat in in the back right area.

"I can't figure out where that guy lives," Eamon said. "He swoops in looking at I think is looking for nesting material but then sometimes I'll even see his partner I think i guess I'm assuming, hard for me to tell gender of birds very easily it seems like they seem to have something going on anyway they gather up stuff for what must be a newt but I'm not aware where that is. They have nests, right. I remember thinking that my parakeets wanted a nest and it turns out those nests at the pre stores are for finches parakeets are actually just a really small kind of parrot and they like to be up in a branch or perch thank you very much, so what I'm saying is that I don't know if jays even have nests, well they wouldn't be the size of that eagle's nest I saw once at at Yellowstone of wow that was—"

Loud sounds of an intentionally compromised muffler on a Harley-Davidson meant weed was here and Yoss had a big smile on his face as he yelled "Rico!"

"I brought you some moonshine!" Rico was in town again from Kentucky, and he had the old banned intoxicant of rural bluegrass country to go with the one that, if you listen to a lot of rumors these days, was fast becoming the new cash crop of choice for many in the area.

Clad in a black leather vest with all sorts of patches (who was Yoss to doubt this man's street cred?) with tattoos up and down his arm in the style of an old biker (or a trendy young woman of the moment).

Rico soon broke out a mason jar filled with a profoundly murky, cloudy fluid that seemed to swirl angrily after the top was unscrewed. Without hesitation he sucked down a very large gulp with utter abandon, the fluid leaking down his mouth as a smile emerged, revealing a spotty presence of teeth. Rico's short gray hair seemed to stand on end a little more edgily than before but he seemed to have survived.

Yoss looked over at Eamon and tightly shook his head, instantly wondering if Rico had noticed the micro-gesture.

Either way the jar was soon handed to him, and Yoss shook his head, more emphatically but still in a somewhat minified way, this time at Rico.

"Here you have some Eamon. Your friend here seems shy."

"My friend there, right, Rico, this is my friend Yossarian."

"Pleased to meet you." Rico stuck out his hand.

Yoss liked to take a sort of centrist position on hand shakes. On the one hand, he was willing to do them because he just didn't want to be

the weak one, afraid of a mild hand strangulation contest. Firm handshake—a really stupid, perhaps essentially homoerotic concept. Yuck. Every dumb-ass guy trying to grab the other guy's hand really hard, like they're trying to prove something. For Yoss, this meant (if he were to observe this convention rigorously) that most guys get their hand crushed in his reasonably large, strong hands, and then every once in a while a strong, athletic guy pummels his hand like a garbage compactor. In practice Yoss was inclined to show mercy to the weak, though he could only gamely pretend to be strong enough that it didn't hurt to be crushed when those compactors came along.

Yoss's centrist position was essentially, go along with the nonsense if necessary, but don't be a handshake enforcer. And he considered any if those who would stick their arms out at strangers to be handshake enforcers.

"I don't want any moonshine either," Eamon said.

A little discouraged but satisfied with Eamon's bluntness, Rico took another swig for himself.

"You know this weed's a lot better now that more of it's available on this side of the hills, for a long time I was going all the way down to Missouri."

"Missouri?!" half-cackled Yoss. "That place would have to be—where is it coming from further down the chain?"

"Mexico, probably, I don't know" Rico demurred.

"What about locally, do you have police protection?"

"Well what do you mean by- actually yeah I have a couple cops that buy from me, if that's what you mean. Nice people, see the thing is, I have them over sometimes, I just make sure that I don't have any other friends over at the time, for discreetness and whatnot. Like when I have my buddies from the Angels over.

"Are you in the H-"

"Nawww," Rico drawled. "See, I was, well I've known some people inside, but its always, you got to check in, tell them what you're doing all the time, and yeah, that's part of being in the club right, but I'm just- look, when I want to go on a ride, I'll go on a ride, thank you very much. This guy asks a lot of questions, Eamon, what does HE do!"

"Oh, Yoss is a very talented artist. I'm remixing a few of his tracks. He's...figuring that career thing out, you know."

"Yeah, hey, that Orgetorix show was just insane, I really like Gilliat too. The whole thing was awesome." Yoss said.

"I had that one was good-we'll if you read something on the Internet does that count as hearing it?"

"Might as well," said Yoss as Rico intoned "Nahh."

"I'm going to pick up tickets again on Sunday before the game, I'm meeting my cousin at church again, he's still got them. Well, he's my cousin-in-law."

"Church? How'd he do that to you?" Rico laughed.

"Well the bastard is setting me up, I'm just calling his bluff, like 'oh of course family member of course I'll be at Mass see ya there" except maybe it isn't a bluff because he'd go anyway but I'm pretty sure that's

down to my cousin. I think it's a passive-aggressive thing, like, my wife makes me go to Church and on top of that sees to it that it's impossible for me to fit those Browns games into our Sunday schedule so AT LEAST YOU HAVE TO GO TO CHURCH TOO FOR FUCK'S SAKE."

"Whoa, keep it down," Rico said.

"So I'll meet you Sunday at like 11:30 whenever I can get out of there and over here how's that?" Yoss asked Eamon.

"Sure, that works. And I've got you hooked up for the Orgetorix show. I should be able to get backstage—"

"Good! I need to talk to him, try to get his attention, ask him for—"

"Don't ask him for anything the first time you meet him!" Eamon looked over at Rico.

"My man here, little impatient," he said as he pointed the bowl at Yoss, who grabbed it out of his hand and took a hit as the blue jay called from the branches of a nearby oak tree.

23

The front entrance at St. Jakes, high above the several steps connecting the church to the sidewalk and framed between two conventional if thick spires, featured multiple levels of ornate relief, at one high level almost Byzantine and moving down to Italian style semi-arch carvings and four saint statues from left to right. Under the entrance four dark marble columns vaguely recalled the might columns holding up the indoor awning over the Pope's seat at St. Peter's.

24

The priest started the Mass walking after by Yoss who had chosen the worst possible time to show up—just when the grandiose procession made its way in, complete with the fornicular or Host-I-scope (you know, that thing that even Jack White wasn't able to name when quizzed about it on Comedy Central by Stephen Colbert?) and three altar boys and the cantor and the epistler (whoever it is that reads the first two readings from the Old Testament and then from the Acts or one of Peter or Paul's letters) and the old, cracked-vein-faced priest with a thin comb-over and portly gut that put the angle that his vestments at on him at about 45 degrees—Yoss had been in the entrance area with the baptismal font on one side and the door to the brides room and stairs up to the organ on the other.

The baptismal font had recently been replaced. Gone was the austere silver metal colored bowl held up by vast iron legs on a sort of a table. (Eamon had been baptized in that font some 33 years ago.). Now babies were dunked in this craftsman style solid wood atrocity that, while well used, looked more like the baby was being invested in some strange woodland ritual than into the Catholic Church.

Before he walked into the main chamber of the church he had seen Amanda come in with her mother and aunt.

"Hey, you're Eamon's friend!"

"Yeah," Yoss offered, staring at her, trying not to. She was wearing a dress, yes, very classy, but this was a sleeveless asymmetric-top black dress stopping well before the knees of her curvy, pretty legs with high heel shoes at the bottom of them.

"I'm so hung over!" she said quietly to Yoss, accentuating it with a bit a loud giggle before moving on toward the pews with her Mom.

After the procession and then the opening prayers and the first two readings and the Gospel, time came for the sermon ("Homily" is what they usually call it there) wherein the priest railed against people co-habiting before marriage and ranted and raved mostly about how this didn't use to be the convention, but now that it is it is so much harder to shame people into not doing it.

"Maybe this church," the priest thundered, "doesn't want those sorts of people in the flock! Maybe the holy father is right to stand for traditional values!

As the ceremony ended and the priest marched out the way he had arrived, with the same entourage, the cantor led the congregation in singing "page 107 of Suburban Hymns, 'The Eagles' Flight.'

Yoss was a bit amused by the old guy in the pew in front of him singly loudly in a terrible voice, but at the start of the second verse he started to pay more attention to the lyrics:

'The Eagles rush into the night

Harvest Moon provides the light

Winds will blow and trees will crack

Old Scratch wants his cauldron back

Villagers cry out for The Lord

Eagles talons cut like sword!

Outdoors where rapacious things

Swoop down on us, flapping wings
Safe we will be with The Lord!
If we know to stay indoors!
Who knows what bewitchment nature holds!
Let us leave hippies in the cold!
Though we may use their guitars
We have prayers to go with ours!
Let us shelter and drink wine
Unburden our thinking mind!
Trust in all that is said here!
God is great so you must fear!

After Mass Yoss was again unable to quickly get the tickets and leave without running in to Sister Dub. They went past the sacristies to the kitchen and Yoss again carried the coffee pot, this time wrapping his green zip-up hooded sweatshirt in uneven clumps around the metal swill tank.

"Okay, got to go meet Eamon, nice seeing you—" Yoss really wanted to be going toward the Eamon's and the game.

"Aren't you going to have some coffee and visit with your great-aunt?" Sister interrupted.

Yoss didn't know what sounded worse—terrible church basement coffee, talking to a nun or, hey, maybe he would get hit up for donations or volunteering.

'Without a spill of the coffee pot like last time,' Yoss thought, 'people will actually drink this awful stuff.' He resignedly poured coffee into a styrofoam cup that he had no intention to take a sip out of.

25

The House Of Booze was located in down town Cleveland near the trendy restaurant row of E 4th. Against Eamon's earnest protests, Yoss wanted to try the trendy new little spot with a loft floor and a light-stained wooden bar with antiquated red plush stools and is woodsy elk-horned chairs crowded up to tables serving odd small dishes mostly wrapped in bacon and given stupid names. Yoss looked at the menu after the chippy, annoying maitre-de seated them, and quickly looked up at Eamon.

"Ahh, you were right, Goddamn water chestnuts and chutney and Oregon duck sauce! What the hell is the food in the city coming to?" He asked.

"I remember back when I lived in San Francisco," Eamon said, "this was about a decade ago, I was getting drunk with this chef's guy, cool crazy big-earring bald guy drunk partyer, that classic San Francisco chef-in-training, anyway he's telling me about the different parts of the Tenderloin where it's possible to score weed dime bags and not just rocks, and he works in the area, he's telling me about the food he cooks, and I course I kind of turn the conversation around to something I find interesting so I'm asking him all about how he interacts with customers, and he makes an interesting comment—he says 'Oh yeah The Food Network has really raised people's awareness of cuisines, a lot of people know what foie gras is now!'"

"Ugh. Everything that's wrong with the expectation nexus that these places are dealing with." Yoss offered.

"This place doesn't need any help in sucking." Eamon pointed out.

"Yeah," Yoss said.

"I mean, look at these fucking bricks. Interior bricks in non-residential setting, okay, but not these red and burnt orange inner ring suburban house things."

"You know what's even worse, that place at the end of the street there. The one that's owned by Michael Reijstag." Yoss declared.

"Nahh..nah I can't agree with that. That guy is a total douche bag. GOOD food though. But he's kind of a douche, I got into a ridiculous argument with him on Twitter, and you realize at some point, this guy is just too famous and too infused with celebrity narcissism to be able to actually respond to anything other than straw men. So whatever."

"Whatever!" A tall guy with buzz-cut hair wearing a workout shirt and trainers with a large silver (platinum?) chain around his neck had walked up to the table.

"Orgetorix! Yo you showed up!" Eamon sounded a little surprised.

"Hey, I said I would see my man here!" Orgetorix looked up at the cute women at the bar. "Lot of pretty ladies out in Cleveland tonight."

"Cleveland has lots of beautiful women—you'll have to come here and hang for a stretch after you run out of women in Chicago!" Eamon joked.

"Don't know when that will happen," Orgetorix answered matter-of-factly.

"You know, that would be a cool thing to do a statistical projection about! We could look at the area's birth rate, immigration patterns, his burn rate or..whatever you'd call it—come up with some probabilities!" Yoss said.

"Okay, now that he's illustrated how scatter-brained he is, let me introduce my friend DJ Yossarian. He's the guy—he worked with me on the "Raptor Flight" remix, I sent that out to your shop.

"Raptor Flight, I'm still building my dub of that one. Can't start going through the remixes that came in yet. But if you're working with him he must be good! Brother I have some pressing business, I will hope to see you after the show!"

And with that, Orgetorix was on his way to pressing a business card into the hand of a stunning tall blonde at the bar decked out in a narrow-strapped sleeveless dress which showed off quite a bit of exposed shoulder bones and collar bones, her legs so thin the knees seemed to inflect the calves inward—important music Industry business, Yoss thought—the kind of woman to be seen with rather than the kind of gig you want to see on your bed.

Ordering calamari seemed to be the safe way out of the food conundrum they had created by coming to this mediocre but trend-glazed eatery, so Eamon and Yoss both ordered calamari.

After eating they walk up north and around the corner—and not much further and the booming feel and non-negligible foot traffic peters out out to the big broad double boulevards of western downtown, overseen on one end by the strange, pyramid-coiffed Key Bank building and the other side by the warehouse district with the deunken clubs (on big sum-

mer nights, crammed with college students mixed with people from the hood) that were already cooling for the winter, and then the fancy restaurants on W. 9th, and down to the east Flats with a couple shady clubs mixed with vacant lots and condos carved out of old warehouses, and over the river on the other side were the strip clubs. Orgetorix had been mightily impressed with The Ruby Club the time that Eamon had take him there.

Eamon isn't mind the surprisingly sweet little sex-wraiths as they grinded down on him..on his large hard-on. Eamon was convinced that the hot blonde that had just given him a lap dance subsequently sat next to him and asked for a massage and asked about his "girlfriends" (men love it when hit women ask them about plural girlfriends, nice ring to it) and then sent another hot friend to socialize with him, just in a flirty friendly way–Eamon had been convinced that she was interested in him because of the size of his bulge. The point is, The Ruby Club was good at selling powerful fantasies–at a very reasonable price no less. Eamon didn't know if Orgetorix was going out on the town tonight or maybe heading back to Chicago right away. He hadn't really thought about it until Yoss asked.

"Well can we see if Orgetorix is up for hanging out after the show?" Yoss asked. "I need to build a rapport with the guy if I'm going to be able to work with him, I really appreciate what you're doing to help me get access, I'm just thinking that we should–"

"Arms up." They had gotten to the front of the security line. Another stupid pat-down. Police state thugs tactics everywhere. Hardly anyone even thinks about some untrained weird stranger feeling them up for no good reason on their way in to all sorts of places, or even worse going

through dangerous back scatter radiation scanning machines or some other untested solution to no real problem of the national security state.

"Security theater!" Eamon laughed as they showed their tickets in the next line and went into the House of Booze for the Orgetorix show.

26

Two entrances to the main floor sat on the left and right. When they walked in they noticed the huge pile of equipment that the area between the entrances that took up space going into the floor-house gear, although it seemed like one PA system piled on top of one another in a snaggle sideways mess of gear and wires and cabinets.

The lights lined up in front of the PA gear were already running some sort of strange blue and green rotation pattern as they walked in, seemingly randomly until they realized that an old school drum machine beat started fading in along with a hip-hop inflected vocal loop—something like 'Put it down on that glass' Yoss thought—and in swirled eerily reverberating simplistic keyboard noises which slowly gave way to a stringed instrument, a zither maybe.

Orgetorix walked out as a heavy bass beat hit the crowd. The house lights went down and suddenly the colored lights pointing onstage moved in sync with the beat.

At a fairly ponderous BPM by today's standard, the song changed very slowly, moving gradually into a bvahu-wahu-wahu groove where drum beats and low bass synthesizer tones met and bounced off of each other.

The crowd was moving raucously, Yoss thought the show was kicking. He was not the type of guy to want to dance very often, but this was a

pretty cool crowd, everybody seeming to be doing some sort of dance or movement, and he felt oddly free to bounce with the music, even start moving his feet a bit. Dancing in a strange crowd with a friend next to him might seem strange, but Eamon lived dancing. Previously he had explained that he liked to do it, but then if he was hanging out with a woman that he wanted to sleep with, he would be loath to dance at all in front of her. Probably if he was an extremely talented, trained dancer that would be fine—or maybe not even. But for the average dude, listen, oh sure women will say, like, yeah dance with me, they probably won't want to have sex with you if you take up the invitation. Sounds strange? Maybe it is, but it may well be true, in some cultures anyway.

The movement of the crowd was heavy on frenetic upper body movements, and Eamon picked up on that after a while and elbowed Yoss.

"Hey, he's going to try to move this crowd."

"He IS moving the crowd," Yoss said.

"No, no I mean he wants them to move toward the beat of house music," Eamon explained.

He was right, although the critique of the crowd waited several more songs as the (deceptively un-)simple, heavy-duty grooves bounced off the unlit walls and small upper seating area and off the gear piled up front and in the ears of all the beautiful women up front—Orgetorix pounced suddenly.

"I know you say Cleveland rocks." he said.

Huge cheer from the audience.

"No, no" Orgetorix blared. "People of Cleveland, tonight we are not headbangers. We are not going to screw our spines up by thrashing our heads up and down and end up on Alex Jones like Dave Mustaine!"

Some laughter, mostly puzzlement, and maybe a scattered boo [Alex Jones fan?].

"You need to dance. To move in a hot, sexy way, like you're in a club in—" quick save here, instead of saying 'Chicago,' he said "the nastiest part of town!"

Big cheers. Wild dancing.

27

Yoss looked around at the crowd. A few of them were still holding drinks so they kind of had a hard time really dancing that well but overall the room had an incandescent energy that flowed around the dark interior of the house of booze that night as Yoss looked around the at the hot women and suddenly he was struck by the thought of [Detroit teacher ladyfriend shit I cant remember name right now] and turned around with expectation.

'Now, I do see several hit brunette with curly hair, but not that one.'

As it turns out she was in town and just a couple doors down closer to Tower City—she was hanging out at Noodle Dog where a blogger meet-up was in full swing—she had thought about calling Yoss, even told a few of the ladies (the bloggers here were all ladies) about him [a bit anyway] but had demurred on actually contacting him. She didn't know what he thought about her, and well maybe right now Yoss was realizing something about how he felt about her.

Before long the show was a pulsating escape from this question, but as the staccato rhythms of the house music were punctuated by an almost whistling high pitched (synth?) Yoss found himself fantasizing about being with a woman as beautiful, as alluring as her..'and that would be her,' Yoss thought.

Orgetorix had been moving around more than the Detroit show, but deliberately in a way that conveyed his authority as a Chicago house (emerging) legend, moving his head up and down like a cockatoo dancing at a bar.

28

A barrel had been given a cap to make it a garbage can, but that was before the Indiana wind storm that had come through and separated the cap off and now it was just a barrel again, rolling indecisively, and inch here and and inch there, as the wind pitched and roared.

Yoss was on his way to Chicago. Eamon had a set planned for a small club out in a suburb called Palestine. He had actually mentioned it earlier to Yoss, but when Yoss had answered the phone 7 hours earlier he has been cruising Cleveland's west side in an early afternoon bike ride when the specific phone vibration that Yoss had set for Eamon started. This was very early to hear from Yeamon, so it might be something.

Yoss picked up his phone and held it up to his ear.

"Yo."

"Yossarian, oh, good. Look I'm glad you picked up I was going to have to try to call

Bemsha the Alligator [another local DJ] if I couldn't get through to you."

"Okay, then, we've established that you're desperate. So what's up?" asked Yoss.

"Oh well I'm doing a little show here, local DJ named Star Cower said he would set it all up and I just had to show up and headline. I get here in town yesterday, there's nothing, no flyers, no radio chatter about it, Cower and his stupid crew are nowhere to be found and now I'm calling in all the favors I have from the area's house DJs and yet none of them—actually I could have gotten one of them to open for me, but I kind of used that chip."

Laughter from Yoss. 'Eamon the poker player,' he thought. Hilarious.

Eamon continued dispassionately. "So I had to well actually basically I said oh I've got a good DJ I just need help with promotion and stuff, so I kind of painted myself into a corner.

"Well Eamon for one thing let me remind you that I am a producer, I'm not an experienced DJ." Yoss pointed out.

"But you're good. People are going to respond to your DJ work, you just need to put it in front of people. A lot of the crowd just doesn't realize that sometimes they want to hear Pet Shops Boys songs beat-matched to pay-trance. And you can—"

"Alright, fine, I can show up and horse around with the DJ app on my iPad if you want that to be your opening act—or if that's what things have come to. I'll be on my way once I get back home and throw a few things in the car. Wow, can you believe this cat out front of me?"

One of those big grayish neighborhood cats was just sitting in the middle of the street, looking right up at Yoss, who had pulled his bike to the side of Bosworth Road as the conversation had gotten interesting. Now this feline was just standing there, looking at him with a combination of a lack of fear and a strange feeling of empathy.

"I'm the stray cat of the Midwestern dance music biz!" Yoss said on the phone.

"Um, right now you're like an outdoor cat who is being called in right now." Eamon said.

Yoss nodded, to the cat and to what Eamon had said, and started peddling west to get back to his place.

29

Now Eamon was on the I-80 east west toll highway, a flat straight shot from Cleveland to Chicago with its own world of rest stops and toll booths and dark strips of road cutting through the (unusually for the thus time of year) brown fields and corn patches and little strips of wood dividing the vast lots of flat American farmland.

30

The first stretch of the drive, where Yoss entered the highway just before it crossed the Stony River on an old stone bridge with those craved archways that you might see on Ohio bridges—some of those bridges in northeast Ohio are quite beautiful and intricate—even in the eastern and southern suburbs of Cleveland have some of the early foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. There's a bridge that connects Ohio City to downtown, the one near the ballpark where the Indians play (as of this writing referred to in the media as "Progressive Field") is filled with amaz-

ing, intricate carvings that those who walk this bridge (as Yoss had) are often entranced by—relief carvings of men and women, they had reminded Eamon of the Depression-era murals at the Coit Tower, the depiction of the common working person as a noble and hard-working and, if not quite enlightened, then waiting-patiently-and-reverentially for inspiration or whatever. More than that, Eamon had insisted when he and Yoss had talked about that bridge. The carvings and the swaying and the seagulls and the wearing of time only revealing a strength and humility—this bridge was uniquely placed as a positive energy catching net for the good vibes flowing out of Cleveland—he then pointed downriver in a vague direction (so much could be seen in that direction).

"I would think that there are a lot of good vibes coming from that direction—out there where the Ruby Club is located." Eamon said and laughed.

31

"What's going on today, who's going to pitch? Is it going to be the guy who lied about his fans or maybe they'll bring in that loser loud-mouth reliever who sucks and yet still takes time to say nasty stuff about the fans," Yoss said.

"The Indians suck, Yossarian. What doesn't suck is maybe the last warm home game of the year. Last series. Where the savvy and desperate of the lonely baseball drunks huddle together looking for one last outdoor butt-grabbing make-out session for the year. A lot better than that awful summer SoShitzlist or whatever party at the Cleveland Museum of Art. A few overdressed weirdo guys, lots of horny single women, and I went there with a date. I mean, it was Jen with the big tits but still.

You know some fan bases really care about what happens on the field while they're at the stadium. Not here."

"Not here as far as baseball. And basketball most of the time. But the Browns fans care, which is stupid."

"That's because football stadiums are mass attractions, less Coliseum and more Circo Massimo, the seats are tilted towards the action, which is violent and compelling."

"That's not why people care," Yoss claimed. "Just, for some reason, they get all butt-hurt over the Browns here."

"Let's...let's not discuss the Browns maybe," Eamon suggested. "The Indians may suck but they have about six innings worth of beer and foo at that stadium to interest me, then at that point maybe we go."

"If they're down by 5 runs at that point," Yoss said.

"So, leave after six it is."

32

Yoss had joined the highway and crossed the Stony River and before long 90 merged with 80 (although the sign for its exit said "second right" in the event that actual exit was to the left—maybe left IS the SECOND right?) and Yoss grabbed the ticket from the booth and continued west.

The sun was already sitting overhead, off to the left in a way that made keeping the moonroof in sunroof mode quite tolerable. Maybe it was just a slight effect, the greenhouse, effect, Yoss thought, but he wanted any kind of warmth he could find. It was some four weeks after

that (rather) warm baseball game, and the long winter in the northern part of the country was beginning.

Winter succeeds fall in a heavy way! When the spirits visit Ebenezer Scrooge, the transition from jovial to serious to dark. That middle one must be the hardest to move effectively from paper to stage or screen—I have seen so many portrayals of this one, often he is diffident or indignant or impatient or sometimes even a bit empathetic, but usually a bit self-righteous. Is he supposed to be all these things.

From Yoss's readings of the text, he had found that stage portrayals so often would ring loudly with sincerity and truth, whether he saw it at the Gooseman Theater in downtown Chicago years ago with his grandparents or just last Christmas season when he had taken his parents down to Playhouse Square in Cleveland to see a performance of *A Christmas Carol* there. Parking had been very interesting for his parents to watch—being from such a big city, they were shocked when Yoss just drove down to the east side of downtown and circled around for a couple blocks before finding a space. Now they did walk for 4 blocks in blistering cold, but still they were impressed with how easy parking was in Cleveland. Of course, it may be worth noting that Yoss was told by a girlfriend once that he had great "parking luck," though he hadn't been sure of such a thing. Parking karma? 'If you only tied up your horse at appropriate spot in your Old West past life,' Yoss had asked her, then you get good spots in this life. Does everyone have an Old West past life?'

"Does anyone have any past lives," she had asked.

'Wull ok," Yoss said. 'Parking instant karma? It's all coming back to me for that Eagle Scout project I did.'

"What wuz your Eagle Scout project?" she had asked. Not the best date.

So Yoss was walking in to the theater with his parents for those 4 blocks in the cold, trying to move fast enough to not be discourteous to his date who was speeding up ahead of him with her green Ann Taylor jacket and her high heels and legs in tights—where he really wanted to be, up there with her and most importantly moving QUICKLY toward the theater doors but also move slowly enough to not get too far in front of his parents. Those two were fairly big, athletic people, but his propensity for playing soccer (quite seriously; he was still as competitive as when he had won a high school state championship as a teenager) and her love of snowshoeing out in places like Alaska and Montana had visited upon them a couple of serious leg injuries in that last couple of years.

As they walked into the theater, they noticed a rowdier crowd heading in to one of those musicals which strings together a handful of outdated hits from some band in their twilight years. To the left was the staircase which twisted around until leading to the ornate old theater upper seating, where the audience could watch the proceedings from high enough about that not too far in front of the lowest seats of this section hung the incredibly shiny, metallic chandelier studded with lights in a circle like the enormous crown of some greedy dragon. Was this to be used during the performance? 'Perhaps the second spirit could come down from it?' Yoss wondered.

"What?" asked his Mom, seated next to him.

"Well I'd like to see them use that chandelier." Yoss looked at the program.

"You know they were doing *A Christmas Story* at one of these theaters, probably this one, until like last year. That would be kind of cool to see, in Cleveland where the house from the exteriors is and all."

"I'm glad we saw that," his Mom said. Yoss has suggested that place—they have this tour and stuff—last summer when they had been in town. 'Maybe I should have waited until the winter time,' he thought.

The ghost of Christmas future, the third spirit in the play, wasn't the enormous talking prop, a ten foot tall veiled ghost, that Yoss had sort of expected. Instead he was played by a cloaked man who wore his hood in such a way as to reveal a bearded, almost wizard-like old man who didn't just point, but also cackled faintly.

'Does that fit into the Charles Dickens universe?' Yoss wondered.

33

Farm country got flatter and wider. Toledo is visible from the bridge over the Maumee River, and then quiet farmlands sprawl for another 80 miles before Indiana. Northwest Indiana is even more flat, and more open as the Great Prairie gets rolling. After a ways South Bend signals the start of a slightly more densely populated region before industrial northwest Indiana with Gary and Hammond. After he crossed into Chicago Yoss still needed to take 90 north until he was following his iPhone's directions through high suburbia with huge power lines and strip malls and water reservoirs.

34

Palestine had that old hat kind of Arby's sign right along the main drag the one with street lights and shops and a few little strip malls and parking lots strewn with fast food and of course this being Chicago

there had to be some gyros places. Palestine was a lot like many towns in the small town Midwest built along single road that was probably classified as some sort of business Loop sometimes with the same name as the nearby interstate or maybe a state road but the one through Palestine was a Federal highway that continued to head north up to the next town Which was another exit called Bison Grove. The gig was at the venue setting up in the main room which had a small punk style stage and a long narrow room The place also had a kind of antechamber our front room where many people would go about even during the session of that headliner Yaris been to this place once before to watch a jam band from South Bay with an old friend maybe 10 years ago.

35

Opening acts are of course among the most hoary cliches and ignored phenomena in the live music business. A few people filed in and out as Yoss played records with his iPad and launched midi loops with a controller connected to his MacBook Pro. The crowd wasn't rude or anything—but at the very beginning one of those awful insistent brooms-men swept away insistently even as Yoss tried a couple drops to get his attention and maybe shoo him away—he even played a hard style record to annoy him but to no avail at least for a couple of minutes until he filed out.

Some people held drinks and swayed their head a bit, and a couple drunk women had danced together for a couple

of the heavy house tracks Yoss played. Mostly, it seemed to Eamon as he watched at the other end of the dark venue, Yoss played tech house harder core stuff and it was good, for an opening act.

Since the crowd had peaked at the end of Yoss's set he decided to go on pretty quickly. He started with one of those tunes with synth string patterns giving way to plucked acoustic guitar and powerful female vocals. This was a track by Detroit techno DJ Chris Blaxk that featured the Pakistani-American temptress Shamira. Essentially her voice could be compared favorably to many trance music chanteuses, with a pretty mid-low full sound combined with a persistent harmonic ring on an octave higher. Shamira had an exceptional ability to change the pitch of her voice and was using to its full ability (with surprisingly little digital enhancement) while these words she had sung rung out in the club as Eamon played the song:

'Down a river long and far
And you were chasing me in your car
Long roads on Japanese mountains
And Yellowstone's thermal fountains
Cannot encapsulate my love
Encapsulate my lo-o-ove and
And I've been watching you
[pencils written the lead through]'

Yoss thought that's the last part as he heard it but who knows what the real words are.

Yoss started drinking a lot of beers at this point. He had been a voracious beer consumer in college, knocking off a couple of 40s here and a

twelve pack of Natural Ice ("Natty Ice" was a great get- drunk-quickly-and-heavily option, delivering a nice high alcohol level.

In those college days of Yoss, in the late 90s, such incredibly awful and bizarre commercial beers were still widely available, and even though their wider popularity had long peaked, people at Michigan State could normally show up not just with the local staples of Labatt and Stroh's and Bud Ice but also these strange already-outdated beers mentioned above, like Red Dog. Or Red Wolf. Which one was it?

The beers that Yoss tried at college ranged a wide variety from okay stuff like Samuel Adams to incredibly awful stuff like Woodchuck hard cider. Yoss had been to London and knew about the many hard ciders out there in Britain, as well as the yeoman warders (and their lax security!) and their odd insistence on being called that instead of beefeaters and why had he bothered to go out to Hampton Court? What a confining odd place with petty courtyards and nobody would want to live here not this century not any century do you know they took incredible amounts of land from monasteries, crops and livestock seized by that syphilitic maniac Henry the 8th—Yoss's Grandpa had told him this as they sat at his farmhouse up in Michigan.

37

After the show the crazy ass vibe like a cubing of the energy described earlier started up—we will discuss that up ahead.

After the show was over Eamon walked out carrying the last of his equipment and said goodnight to his buddy and local sound man Jim and saw Yoss in the parking lot hitting his small glass bowl with the jam band logo emblazoned or embedded or whatever on it.

After taking a few hits himself Eamon asked him where he was staying tonight.

"I'm probably just driving back to Ohio tonight," Yoss responded.

"Good," Eamon said.

"Uhh, ok. Alright."

"No, no what I mean is that you should come up north to western Michigan to my Grandparents' place. It's a farm near this town called New Era. Beautiful farm country there up along the lake. Asparagus, cherries, and likely the best blueberries you've ever—well it's probably late in the season for all that stuff but you should come up anyway. They have a small second cabin on the property."

"You know what's crazy?" Yoss asked. I remember I went to one of the cow towns north of here one time to pick apples with my family. One of those hayrides out to different parts of the orchard. We'd pick the red 'delicious' I don't know I've always been a Fuji or granny smith even kind of fan, the different tartness of the green apples."

Yoss thought of a conversation he had with Lisga about apples and recalled how they had both also proclaimed their love for green apples.

"I like having vodka and apples, for some reason," she had said.

"I like licking vodka off your ass for some reason," he had said. Yoss wished she had been able to make it to the show. He only knew last minute and he still let her know about it but what was she supposed to do about it anyway? She hasn't had time to make plans. Yoss hoped to see her soon.

"Those apples," Eamon said. How long had he been buzzing along about childhood apple picking. "Yeah one time with the bushel tied to the roof rack and one time my Mom drove under a motel entrance awning up in Michigan while we were driving that enormous Dodge van you know I have a couple brothers and a couple sisters and we were all up there with my parents and grandparents and on the way back we stopped at this barbeque joint and oh sure maybe it's good I mean good tasting maybe it's not so good in the aggregate pigs are after quite decent of animals they are very smart and I saw some pot belly pigs at a pet store in Maui once and they were so nice and cute they also had beautiful exotic birds what a paradise they have myna birds I guess they're the natives oh that place is wonderful with the sugarcane juice and the beautiful coast line I remember the cafe at Paia and the crazy Cali surfer dude and the random hip little ladies and the laid back vibe they liked us there not so many counts on that island that I saw upcountry Murakawo and Haleakala ohh," Eamon grabbed his iPhone and poked at it until he had a drum set app and started primitive sounding drums to go with his chants of "Halaekala, Haaaleaakaaala!"

Yoss nodded his head to the rhythm. Ok.

After a minute or two Eamon got back to the apple picking.

"Oh I'll eat those occasionally but the sweet red tang is a reminder of—what do you think of honey crisp apples? Did you know that they were developed at the University of Minnesota?"

38

Ok why not, he thought, Yoss agreed to go up north along the Lake with Eamon. He put the address in his phone and found the address us-

ing the maps app in his iPhone which he considered a bit lesser than the one from the previous version of the operating system—but then Yoss thought the whole Apple Maps thing was a bit overblown and the maps were in many cases close to as good as the ones previously which had been provided by Google (though Apple had designed the app).

The drive included a trip across the conurbation of Chicago, and they had the advantage of going through downtown with the big highway going through downtown with the crazy on ramps where cars enter on the left, with very little runway, and you kind of have to know which exit you want if you're going downtown because streets are one-way. The steel and glass of downtown looms on the left between the highway and the Lake. On the right is Greek Town.

"We should stop at the Greek Islands for some saganaki and gyros and cucumber—" Eamon effused until interrupted by Yoss.

"Dude we're already leaving, from the northwest suburbs, after midnight. Don't know that they'd even be open, and how many hours is it to, uh, what was that, Grand Rapids?"

"No it's actually up above Grand Haven."

A short stretch of the trip took Yoss through Indiana—he had already lost track of Eamon, who was a much faster driver and anyway getting through Chicago with a caravan of cars intact is a very hard task—the nation's 3rd largest city is crazy for driving. The craziest driving city in Yoss's opinion was probably New York, narrowly, and then Chicago before LA and probably Seattle. The last of those isn't nearly as snarled with traffic as the first three, but people drive with a rushed, wild attitude that doesn't seem to match the (off the road) relaxed and fun vibe of

much of the city. Minneapolis, only been there a few times, once in May and it was freezing, but there they seem to have a friendly attitude on the road and in person—certainly many people there could be described that way.

The highway splits in Indiana, Yoss was taking 94 heading west northwest, splitting away from the 80/90 road that ran due east back to Cleveland. Off the highway are several of those enormous barns filled with high-powers fireworks. Oh yeah you can buy cherry bombs and Roman candles but also available are the thick industrial missiles favored by police and fire departments for citywide July 4th. Yoss laughed thinking about his home suburb of Lake Town and its botched Independence Day fireworks attempt. Something happened to a detonator and the firefighters were unable to launch an overwhelming majority of the fireworks. Well the big rockets at those warehouses all seemed to have wicks. Would have been the way to go.

Yoss crossed over the Michigan border and as he drove onto US Route 31 after passing through the nondescript stretch of Berrien County that the highway takes (the lakeside town of Benton Harbor inland from there had seen riots about ten years ago after police killed a man fleeing on a motorcycle) Yoss got a call from Lisga.

"How did the show go?" she asked.

"My set..went well, and Eamon was putting down some heavy grooves, spinning a very credible house music tale to the drunk but enthusiastic crowd. And then this big crew of cool, you know, city-styled people, you know we were way out in the suburbs, these people start taking over the front of the venue, and then all of a sudden Eamon no-

ticed that it was Orgetorix's crew. And..it was a few minutes later, but then in walks Orgetorix, he's dancing, got a couple of those—"

"Of those what?" she asked.

"Uhh, well they're, they're those uhh, curveless chicks, you know," not my type Yoss thought but didn't say. Lisga laughed. A little.

"So Orgetorix, he really took the show to the next level with his energy and his crew, but he wouldn't go up on the decks, Eamon kept asking him, but I think he wanted it to be Eamon's show. Cool guy, I actually talked to him about trading remixes and he sounded like he might be interested. We drank—I drank a lot."

39

The second house turned out to be on a different property. Eamon's (maternal) grandparents lived in a farm house that more closely resembled a vacation cabin which was just down Scenic Drive where they arrived and around a corner, set right next to the farm. Eamon and Yoss actually were staying in the "annex," a spartan vacation cabin that (confusingly?) more closely resembled a western Michigan farmhouse. This house had green paint around the heavy window wells and a dark roof but the rest of the building was painted white (this was Michigan farmland!). A front door that looked a bit narrow (Yoss could get through easily in practice) with the edge of the roof crowding the doorway's top. Next to the doorway near the top sat a 2-headed halogen flood light. A narrow window on the left side of the door provided the outdoor light for the small kitchen attached to the smallish front room. On the right of the door was a larger window (still a single unit) with another window, that smaller kind, above it on the second floor. This half of the house

had a second story—the whole area including and to the left of the door was only one floor, and a small room there was left empty besides a very broken old dSLR camera and an 12 string acoustic guitar with 10 strings, along with some rags and other less interesting clutter. Now the outside of front had been largely described—but then another section had been appended to this annex. The roof sloped toward the front in the area of the door, while the 2-story left side had a left-right roof slope. But an area to the left Of the door had a front-sloping roof but one on less of an incline than the middle (door) section. The old wood siding, white though it all was, was certainly a giveaway as well because it was placed up and down in narrow strips compared to the wider boards arranged horizontally in the middle and right of the structure.

The cottage was down a short gravel road through some thin woods into a clearing that turned out to be a bluff (and in this particular spot along the lake something of a cliff really) overlooking Lake Michigan.

The front door door led in to that smallish front room with kitchen and dining room 'ettes and four doors leading through—one to the left feeding the small paper-cluttered office (complete with antiquated IBM typewriter on the desk and one of those green-shaded reading lamps that old men are known to favor). Another couple of doors to the left led to the couple of small bedrooms that were part of that apparent addition area. The last door went straight through to a messy laundry-room-hall with a sharp staircase leading to the right-side second floor room and finally to a back door with a decrepit unevenly hanging busted old screen door barely hanging on after the last winter.

"I saw a couple of mall chicks," Eamon droned. "Just walking by last year when I was trying to get out ahead of the Christmas shopping season—these young ladies at the mall well one of them had the pink hair and she was a curvy tasty looking young thing—"

"How young?" Yoss inquired.

"The other one," Eamon went on, "her hairdo was this fascinating kind of gray hair. It was an obvious dye job, just fascinating, but you know like all pulled forward with one of those soft black hatband things holding it in place."

"What do you think of all the young women getting tattoos? I mean of course many women have gotten tattoos for many years but I think the audience for that is growing in numbers and intensity. Lots of very young, very cute little chicks, and conventionally pretty I'd guess you say, getting full sleeves."

"I love it!" said Eamon. "You know I have tattoos, of course I like the chicks that have them. Usually really cool ladies, artists and intellectuals. Love the great conversation."

Even though he was being totally sincere, Eamon couldn't stop himself from chortling a little bit as Yoss's loud, syncopated laughter spilled out like a waterfall.

"The whole Christmas shopping thing, it's like I said on Facebook, can't we all just exchange \$20 bills?"

"I hate Facebook," Yoss said.

"Yeah well I see you promoting your shit on there."

"YOUR shit, mostly, Yoss said.

"Yeah, well, not like anyone even commented on it. Partly no one cares but also now Facebook wants you to pay just so people see your stupid posts, I agree it sucks, but anyway like that Guns 'N Roses lyric, like 'I said what I meant and I meant what I-' wait I thought it was 'intended' but crazily now I'm thinking it's 'pretended' okay maybe not that quote look I'm just saying this Christmas stuff is aggravating back when I was with Jen she complained when she got mad anyway about spending all this time with my family meanwhile my sister's dog is tearing the fucking house apart and we do thi Christmas gift exchange thing and I always get a bum draw someone like my Aunt Rihann who maybe has good intentions maybe not but she can never say anything sociable or give a decent gift. Part of it is her son is a few years younger than me but close in age so she thinks well I should get him something that my cousin would want but in the event almost nothing this cousin likes is to my taste. He's one of those developmentally retarded people who really love video games but in that really antisocial way, you know he'll have some bad lines from a comedy movie like Beverly Hills Ninja ringing in his crazy head and he'll just shout that stuff out right in the middle of family parties. So no one really gives or receives any very good gifts—I have an Uncle who will give a flashlight, hammer or screwdriver as a gift and that is it. We have an aunt who used to work at the Gap so you can, uh, guess what that was like, here try on your khakis in the bathroom (!!) and it was kind of fun back when my grandparents had their second house down in Cleveland instead of down there in Florida—"

"Where in Florida?" asked Yoss.

"Sanford."

"They live in Trayvon Martin's town?" Yoss observed.

"For seven or eight months a year now, yeah. I have an aunt and uncle down there and they look after them for that part of the year. On the other had my Mom is going to have to move out here to help them maybe, or they might be moving to Cleveland, or Florida year round."

"Really? Don't they like it up here?" Yoss wondered.

"Oh yeah, my Grandma especially, she loves it up here. This is her ancestral homeland. Did you know the farm, and other properties besides, was originally bought in the early part of the 1900s by a great-great-uncle of mine who was a priest in the Cleveland archdiocese. He traveled up here and like the land, near the lake and well, it's great asparagus and blueberry soil, you saw all those blueberry trees when we got off the highway didn't you, and so back in those days diocesan priests had money, I mean some of we're quite wealthy, and so he likes the bit of property for sale along the lake and buys it. Now this property does have some land to work with it but my Grandpa had wanted to really do some farming along with running the lumber yard in Shelby so he bought that in the 1960s. Oddly coincidental in my mind to the overalls-and-carpenter-saws phase of the hippie 60s—I mean he bought a farm in '68. So it was back to the land for that New Deal Democrat. You see, my Grandpa voted Democratic for many years, certainly he was part of old FDR's coalition, but then something happened between then and now. I guess the 60s were so radical that they brought out paranoic fear in the more culturally traditional parts of the old left. Today my Grandpa gives lots of money to Republicans. Well..so they're going to have to move soon, they're well into their 80s and they're pretty healthy thank God but then my Grandma gets confused very easily—my Aunt has been up there much of the summer helping take care

of her, and my Grandpa, well he likes Florida better, he built the lumberyard and purchased the farm with the profits, sort of to prove he could do it in that stubborn Depression-forged way of so many of our grandparents, and to be totally financially independent from here side of the family. And now he has his place on Florida, and he doesn't take his Grady White fishing boat out on the Lake anymore, so he's much happier drinking coffee at some Target in central Florida with his equally old engineering buddies."

"So that's the meaning of Christmas, showing your wife family that you can make it in the plywood and asparagus business?" Yoss joked.

Eamon and Yoss were sitting on folding chairs at the dinner table at the ramshackle cliffside house with its peeling wallpaper everywhere, although the bathroom's incredibly 70s papering was the least worn down (maybe it was the newest?) and it had oddly winged and obtusely shaped but still sort of sexy ladies as some lacy frill patterns.

The table was effectively three-legged; a fourth one seemed to come up mysteriously short. The refrigerator was one of those frosting things, its green shelves heavily jammed with ice because it hadn't been defrosted in a while. When Yoss asked him about it, like why it hadn't been replaced, Eamon gave him a surprisingly broad and serious answer.

"Listen to this story and you will learn a lot about my family." Yoss was about to learn a lot about Eamon's family, but probably more from interacting with them himself than from this cryptic story. "They bought this thing, say, probably just after I was born, so say in the very early 1980s—my Mom once told me, 'Oh, we got this when you were a baby. We were shopping at Wiigbolts and they had a sale on those refrigera-

tors, so I let your Dad know and we head out to the store. It was near Baseball Mill out in Crane, on Crane Road. Not far from where I had that accident with you in the car. Oh I had to be laid up at the hospital but you were just fine. cooing in the front, babies would go in he front seat sometimes, and I had seatbelt burns or actually are they burns or what are they? And we, oh yes the fridge. We got there to pick it up and we're in the kitchen wares section and-' and I interrupted by Mom," Eamon said.

"And I told her, well you know I think this is actually my first clear memory. Running crazily through a department store, getting chased by store personnel yelling 'Little boy! Where are your parents' and I didn't know who they were but I knew they sucked."

Eamon grabbed another one of the chocolate glazed donuts that he had produced from his cooler. "They're fresh," he had said as he put them on the table, and Yoss hadn't argued much because what use would the truth be in getting either of them fed right now?

"So they buy the fridge, I guess pretty standard at that time I don't know--"

"It has a solid, steady, square look to it that you don't find in many of today's white goods." Yoss interrupted.

"Uh, 'white goods,' okay who used terms like that outside WALL STREET?" Eamon mused. "So they buy this fridge, the kind that you haven't seen in years, and just keep it? Because by the time we first would have thought to replace it, if we had bought a new, non-defrosting kind of fridge then, it would have probably broken by now."

"SOUNDS reasonable," Yoss said. "But at some point that becomes a kind of endless circular logic."

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The Scenic Drive that the wooded path connected to was a road that ran as far as a bend where vacation cabins are located in a cluster. Some kind of state law or something prohibited the new construction of directly on beach front property in the very early 1980s (cliffside buildings like the one Yoss and Eamon were staying in were still allowed), but of the couple dozen or so of the cabins at this spot maybe half were built on the beach. This had proven problematic for the owners of a handful of these houses when Lake Michigan rose drastically in the mid 1980s. About four of the houses were gutted, the waves of the lake mercilessly plowing into the cinder block lake-exposed basement (these houses were built into the sides of the remnant of a mighty sand dune—like the land that is now Golden Gate Park the lakeside here, still miles south of Silver Lake's dunes state park, once were guarded by a dune that required a non-trivial effort to climb) over and over again with the relentless force of a windy Great Lake. Eamon wasn't a sailor but his Grandpa was and he had been informed as a young child that the Lake was not to be messed with—swimming was only to be done with others, never alone, and in fact Eamon's grandparents liked to take him to the little swimming area (one of those small-lake metal 3/4 rectangles which formed physical, grabbable, floating sides for a virtual pool in the lake where the small kids could stay inside the rectangle and maybe the older ones could jump outward into the lake) at Stony Lake, a smallish medium size lake—which is to say, a small lake for Michigan but not for, say, Indiana. Tucked in along the edges were numerous homes sort of

peaking out of the woods with their little piers and small boats. The extended off into the distance from this swimming area in its northwest corner because of its curviness and slight narrowness at its end. Under a road bridge a short river flowed its water out into the Lake. After the swimming area was a small general store, one of those kinds of places that still exists in 2012 in Michigan where confederate battle flag hats sit alongside Route 69 shirts, live bait and cold beer. An air of retail improvisation hung about the place as displays had no common origin in their construction and all sorts of people could be behind the counter, from a cute shy little young woman to some redneck guy with a fishing hat and one of those cheap cigars with the plastic (applicator?) tip bouncing unlit in his mouth. At this point he couldn't recall exactly where but around here Eamon remembered a long time ago going to St. Jack's Church somewhere nearby, it was one of the coolest churches he had seen. A large single room with cabin-style planks protruding from the ceiling, it had a simple white alter at the front and the enormous priest wielded a simple but elegant clay chalice quite unlike the bejeweled pimp cups of many priests—he called it "the prairie church" although the name didn't stick with his family.

It was between these vacation cabins to the south and the Stony Lake to the north that both properties were located—the one where they were staying and the one where Eamon's grandparents lived.

"It's time to go pay the grandparents a visit. Got to pay our respects to the old lion, and I love my Grandma," Eamon said. They got in Eamon's Volkswagen and he drove in his typical overwrought way around the corner and up to the farm property.

'You haven't always done things right,' Yoss thought in a moment of self-consciousness as he and Eamon gathered up the donuts left to put in the frosty fridge and grabbed the loose bits of weed shake on the table.

For some reason he was thinking about some woman he had dated in college. 'I was a jerk, sort of, blowing her off a bunch of times and I don't know I tried dating her and it didn't work maybe it's no big deal.' Being up in Michigan was making him think about the old days. 'She was from Paw Paw, Michigan, I'm pretty sure. One of those James Madison types. Lived at Case Hall, the whole thing. Pretty sure that was a parallel universe. There was the whole political science department, separate from that, but there they were with their own set of classes, largely closed to those not in that college—that term ^college^ which resides inside a university, but not just like the old School of Communications or the School of Business, not this comprises where people eat, hang out, study, live, socialize with—like we're talking about some Ivy League school, or one in Britain! Not sure how it would work where you're this guy that is dating this woman who everyone knows at her school and she'd expect me to have some sort of group of serious, decent people as friends instead of the drunks I know from the dorms and the drug freaks that I make it my business to keep tabs on. But what should she expect from a guy who (let himself be) drunkenly grabbed (by) someone attractive enough or the moment in that loud unfinished basement filled with dozens of writing college students—where should one expect things to go from there, we had that moment anyway, trying to keep moving rhythmically through the tedium of that Outkast song that was playing a I reached my hands around and grabbed ass—'

"You ready?" Eamon asked. "They've been watching my birds for me." They filed out into the bright cool mid-October morning.

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The house that Eamon's grandparents lived in was much more a home than the vacation cabin—the design could be described as 60s vintage A-frame lodge, complete with a loft upstairs with a desk and a few old beds.

Bound as much by restraint as by creativity, the house opened up in the front of the A (as the back was taken by the loft area with a whole house fan at its apex) with enormous ceiling-high windows, almost, as the panes were actually fitted by wood planks and about 8 feet by 8 feet each, 3 on each side of the main support beam going up and down. The view looked out first to the wooden deck that wrapped around much of the house in front and to the right. At the end of the deck was the 'front' door (the back of the house faced toward the road—so while the front door was at the front end of the side, it was on the right side and the [back] side of the house that faced the street only had windows for the bedrooms). So when someone walked in the front door after walking up a couple of steps onto the porch, they'd enter and see a narrow room with a shower stall, cabinets, a freezer, some shelves with candy—all sorts of stuff. To the right was a kind of doorless doorway that led to the kitchen, which consisted of a counter with a sink part facing the back of the house and after a right angle turn a segment of counter that was the only real divider of the kitchen from the rest of the main room of the first floor with those big windows and an old shaggy brown carpet on the floor and the rolling rocking chairs and La-z-boy recliners and end tables stocked with crossword puzzle books and copies

of Barron's and Forbes magazines strewn about them with souvenir coasters from a town called Chicken, Alaska and some decks of Bicycle brand playing cards and poker chips. The kitchen had an old wooden table, always with a tablecloth, with a sturdy old orange wooden bench installed on the wall side (the large windows stopped as the bench started. On the ('front') door side wall was a big wide non-frosting refrigerator-freezer and some old wooden shelves to the left of it housing stuff including a toaster and an old microwave.

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Eamon hadn't believed the hype from his Mom about how bad the condition the house was in. Well it's not like an episode of Hoarders on cable where a pile of goods bought from the Home Shopping Network mixed with beat-up appliances, socks, shirts and old bandages and stuff from that store that Kristie Alley used to do commercials for is held together by a gelatinous glue made of various food items like fruit and yogurt and milk spilled out spoiled when the cardboard wears away and bits of pizza melted together. This gooey solution is the real secret to taking a hoard to the next level, without it the 'hoard' is really an excessive pile. No the place was neat and clean, filled with Eamon's Grandpa's amateur radio gear and satellite TV and his Grandma's sewing stuff set up in the corner of the house with the card table under a skylight. But the doors wouldn't shut, cabinets looked sideways—this was not hype, the structure was starting to lean over. An architect friend of Eamon's uncle Pierre had observed these problems a year ago, according to Eamon's Mom. Now it was pretty obvious. They had come up with a plan to rebuild the place, with Grandpa involved. But now that plan had been mixed by Grandma, who had gotten EXTREMELY upset at

the mention of taking the place down (even the promise of using the now-rare original hardwoods as part of a structure with a new foundation had been dangled,

without success) and now the situation was a stalemate.

They were cooking pancakes when Eamon and Yoss walked in. Yoss quickly noticed the old microwave, which eeked him out a great deal. Like, that thing is from when microwaves used to be expensive, and they just hold on to it now maybe not aware that newer better ones were available and this thing was probably leaking radiation all over the place.

Yoss wondered if he was so different from his younger siblings because he had his baby formula heated up with a non-microwave means. How had his parents described it? Something about the bottle being heated up on the stove, a glass bottle floating on hot water or something. Just having glass bottles was a privilege. Yoss thought about glass. What a wonderful invention. It's so much better to get those glass bottles of pop from Mexico, the Coke in that distinctive bottle, so tasty, and there was that gas station somewhere outside Chicago in Des Plaines or somewhere where they sell Mexican Pepsi. That stuff is really good too. Not sure where they get that stuff or whatever. Always seems to have a little fog in its bottles. Tastes great though. 'For a little while,' Yoss thought, 'the cola market had a very legitimate entrant that was under-rated, ignored, which I guess eventually disappeared. Not fair at all. Such a good pop. Surge was a great pop. Also under-appreciated. Late 90s. They really rolled it out in mid-Michigan. They love to test market stuff there. They at one point got a lot of 7-11 stores to install a Surge fountain that had a speaker. It would like say stuff to

you while you poured Surge into a Big Gulp. That may have been them taking it too far. Can't get glass for a Big Gulp. I've been told that both are bad, plastic bottles and aluminum cans, could be. But I'm pretty convinced that plastic is worse, what with the way a bottle of water looks after sitting in a hot trunk, all melted as malformed, I wonder how much stuff has absorbed into the liquid—well glass is better than all that. Back in the day (mainly back in the 1990s when people used to say "back in the day") stoners used to go around with those metal Graffix bowls, I remember the one I bought in Bloomington, Indiana once that I used in college, had a number of segments that screwed together, making it a bit easier to clean resin out but also I guess someone must have gotten a couple of those things and screwed them together into a really long-shafted bowl or maybe into some kind of colorful piping decoration like the front of the Centre Pompidou.'

Glass bowls had really changed things by a few years later, although Yoss had for a while in the early 2000s owned a glass piece with a 'shotgun' hole on the side of the bowl that needed be covered for it to work, but which often exposed the finger doing the covering to fire—this bowl had been called "Burny," and Yoss and a few friends commemorated it fondly, for a couple seconds anyway, which felt like enough, the night that one of them had dropped and broken it. None of them could have remembered now who had broken it, but they could all get a laugh from being reminded of it. Before long the glass bowls like Burny gave way to the design that lots of the really young crowd refer to as the "chillum"—a sort of nearly symmetrical glass cylinder with whatever distinctive markings the creator felt like adding, often multi-colored glass strips and swirls or embedded logos or charms. Though looking symmetrical from the outside, one end is just hollow cylinder (the mouth end)

but the other side has glass on the inside formed in a cone shape as an area for the weed to be packed in.

This design contrasts with the earlier glass bowl (pipe) designs (which can still be found at bong stores [which like to be referred to as "head shops" for some reason]) that more closely mimicked the conventional pipe design with a rounded bowl at one end and a narrowing area for the mouth at the other.

Glass pipes cool down faster and don't get hot. That's very important for bowls, which are often smoked surreptitiously due to outdated and freedom-hating attitudes on cannabis in America and other places. So when the bowl is being passed around quickly by a few marijuana enthusiasts it's good if they're able to hit, pass, clear, and reload the bowl quickly and with a minimum of burns happening.

Good glass just seems to have a cleaner taste, or not really any taste.

Some people, like Eamon, loved rolling up his marijuana. It's just some sort of instinct in certain people, they love to roll joints and blunts. Now spliffs (in the traditional, tobacco-infused way) were unacceptable to Yoss. He couldn't stand that kind of stuff for his smoking, though for a non-smoker he had a pretty good tolerance for cigarettes by the day's standards. Eamon on the other hand had an ongoing issue with tobacco—he was always quitting, always almost done quitting, trying the gum, trying the patch, Eamon had seen Eamon smoking a week or two ago, that was the last time he'd seen him smoke those things but how did he know how many cigarettes Eamon had burned since then?

Lots of pancakes and bacon were being made for four people, and Yoss settled in to the task of making a dent in the pile right away while

Eamon mentioned the donuts from earlier as he walked through the kitchen and into one of the four doors that were lined up along the back side of the house (3 to bedrooms and 1 to a bathroom), came out of there, walked up the staircase that descended into the middle of the main room and led to the loft, came back down, before his Grandma looked up from her pan (Grandpa hadn't looked up from his newspaper) and said "they're in the screen room."

Eamon went to the front left corner of the house which had a door leading to a 10-by-10 room which was only protected from the elements by screen walls and a screen door which led to the front of the deck and the farm beyond.

From that room Yoss heard a rising chorus of "Ta-t-tweet! T-TWEET!" as Eamon's parakeets greeted him.

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"So I really want to get Orgetorix to remix one of my tracks," Yoss thought as they sat on folding chairs only feet away from the cliff's edge later on as he looked out on the red Lake Michigan sunset.

'Curvy in those jeans up to that butt,' Eamon thought as he looked at photos of Shamira that he took on his iPhone back at the bar in Palestine. He had taken out his phone to use an HDR app to take sunset photos but had become distracted looking at pictures of her.

The clouds had prevailed for much of the day—this time of year Michigan had already seen the vacation season come and go at this point. Many of the area's vacation homes were only geared up for the vacation season, roughly from Memorial Day to Labor Day, and not at all for the frigid Michigan winters. Soon in the area many water lines would

freeze and many local electrical transformers would be switched off and the campgrounds at Silver Lake and the miniature golf course up in Spentwater (where the shoppes on the one main drag all had anti-windmill stickers on their windows) and the 9-holes course over in Benona Shores and the Drack Woods Dune Ride would all be shut down, their workers scattering to some migratory pursuit.

Whatever time of year, Michigan's position being as it is, surrounded by large lakes on three sides, sets it up for enormous, multi-layered and intricate gray clouds to sit over it for many days a year. Often when driving towards Detroit Yoss would notice the skies turn darker just as he pulled over the border from Toledo. So today had been a typical cloudy gray day, not much cooler than 55 degrees and not unpleasant, but not predictive of a high probably i a good-visibility sunset.

That all changed as they sat and watched the clouds lift enough off of the horizon that an amaing half-orb emerged out if a smeared water-color orange cloud as the sky's color lightened from light orange to bright yellow in an amazing gradient from the skies to the Lake. This happened while the sun was a bit up in the sky still and before long the whole star was visible as it sank slowly and a red glow emanated until the sun finally seemed to sink-sink-sink-plop and descend and at that point Yoss shot frenetically with his dSLR.

"I love twilight shots. The rich reds tonight remind me of the pre-sunset tones of Haleakala. The best of these things sometimes require clouds along the way!" Yoss said a he sparked his small glass bowl with some purple berry mountain weed he had gotten through his brother in Chicago on the way out of town. His brother still lived in the Chicago area with his parents in the house that they had grown up in, and he

was a great guy. Always willing to help with stuff like that, or whatever. Also good at music, but Yoss was working hard to establish himself at the moment, and didn't have much that he could do to raise up other people's profile. 'Yet,' he thought. Certainly he desired to have that ability.

"Is DJ as tastemaker antiquated?" he asked Eamon.

"Wulll.." Eamon mumbled. "Ssssomethingg sommmettthhhhing in a don't understand scvvzzzHhhhy it but what you have is an ear for production, that's what you can do to make an impact."

Earlier they had filed in quite high to Eamon's grandparents' house with the pancakes on the grill and Eamon was excited to see his pets.

Eamon currently had three parakeets and they were housed in a pink-red wire cage with a rounded roof all filled with toys and perches. The flock had formerly had four members: tow of these had died a couple years ago, Strikor and Avea, and they had been mourned by the surviving flock members (Eamon included) for some time.

A few months later a third bird named Dingo was added to the the survivors, thus completing the surviving three. While Strikor and Avea had had green feathers (Strikor the dark black-accented 'wild type' while Ava having an incredibly beautiful mix of a kind of desaturated army green with grey fringes) the new bird Dingo was blue like one of the birds he joined (named Beale). While Beale had sea green blue colored feathers accented with yellow, Dingo was a stark blue and white, a nice near-primary blue with with a high level of tint that made it quite striking. The other bird was totally yellow, Eamon had been told she was a 'lutino' bird, and she was a big, pretty, bossy and fussy female

parakeet with the neener-neener-neener sounds at the ready for any bird that moved too close to her but also a very smart bird with a beautiful song.

The birds all had very distinctive personalities, as all parrots do, and parakeets (also known as budgerigars) are after all just small parrots.

Dingo was the youngest bird but he seemed to have the wildest personality of the flock regardless of age. One of his trademark moves was a kind of karate kick which involves him pivoting with one narrow little bird leg on a perch and kicking with the other one, spread-claw, in a way capable of pushing another bird backwards. Eamon wrote some code and had thought for a while about creating a parakeets game—he actually had two game ideas. One was of course a fighting game where different buttons or combinations thereof could lead to birds using kick, bite, and charging moves in an attempt to knock the other bird off a long perch they're both trying to stay on. Was this too close to a cock-fights game? Well a few benighted states in America let cockfighting continue into the 2000s—the bloodsport was not illegal in Louisiana until 2008.

The other game idea Eamon had revolved around getting the birds back in the cage after letting them out for a while so they can fly around the house.

Many bird owners clip their birds' wings. The wings are sometimes said to be like fingernails or something like that, capable of being trimmed. Eamon could attest to the claim that it didn't hurt birds much or at all physically—he had taken his birds to have their wings clipped by a vet tech at this place out in the suburbs once and had stayed in the room while she did it, and he had even decided to attempt it once himself.

Holding the birds still was not easy, but aided by a rag and a pair of scissors bought at Petco for that express purpose, he had managed to clip the wings of the birds, with help from Jen who he was with at the time. But they had noticed that the birds were quite moody and refussy after the clipping episode (and Eamon probably managed to clip a couple feathers that were supposed to be spared according to current best practices) and after some consideration of the matter Eamon had decided that he was more in favor of letting them fly—but with that decision he knew he had to be super-careful about open windows and doors, a little difficult because he liked to be outside in the back in the gazebo in much of the warm months, and he also had those kind of windows that have 2 panes, up and down, and they can both slide even with each other either way, but the bottom pane is the only one with a screen behind it. When Eamon had told Yoss about them, Yoss said that he liked that kind better than the windows at the house he grew up in, which were those thoroughly suburban ones that have handles that crank in a circular motion and the window turns out sideways.

"Those block the breeze in one direction. And with the kind of storms they get out there in Chicago, they don't need those things sticking out there twisting in the wind, while you're running downstairs to the basement yelling about the sump pump!

People really have no idea what a swamp Chicago is. Those reed marshes at the edges of those muddy little Wisconsin lakes, you can usually get a canoe or rowboat around in them if you go exploring that corner, but they ain't great for rowboats, anyway Chicago is that marsh at the bottom edge of the Lake, more or less. People have sump pumps working away day and night there pretty much, everyone has a white

pipe sticking out of their house somewhere, every once on a while, BTTZZCLLLLL-plunk a stream of water pumps out, just pumping water out of the basement, and if you don't have one in your yard there's a god chance you have it hooked up to the sewage. Either way, if you're in that Des Plaines River valley, you get flooding."

Blue water had melted into a dark drink and the blue and yellow of the late afternoon sky had long given way to the orange and red and now darkness, the placid and amplitudinous laps of the waves continuing as before but always moving slowly in and out of perception as the psychedelic color waves of the sunset blended into the pulsating waves of the lake. "The sonic trail of the waves is a florid gateway to undistracted perception!" Eamon said. "Beyond the dark blue near-infinity of the deep glacial caldera is a fluid medium of teeming life, so many thousands of our brothers and sisters of the sea long to share with us the secrets of our own minds!" Eamon took the bowl from where it had rested tenuously on the seat of the unused beat-up white plastic deck chair and lit it up.

After coughing some half dozen times, loudly, he continued. "So many holes for the bowl to fall through in this chair, just like there are so many holes of negativity that we are prone to fall in with our minds. Our minds are wonderful and mysterious, mostly, like this bowl filled with kind buds. I once read that Aldous Huxley essay, 'The Doors of Perception,' it's a great work by the way, worth reading, but there was a specific part—I think from that essay—where he says that we have in our memory everything we have ever observed. Now I don't know if that's technically true, it may be more notionally true, but let's just say that our brains may have a recording more or less of everything that's ever been

sensed by us, and really it's just a question of whether we recall some particular information at the moment. I'll say this, trust your memory. Very powerful evidence of this memory we have and perhaps the good work of the subconscious can be provided to oneself when one is unable momentarily to recall some bit of data, a name or date or something, and instead of worrying excessively about the question or looking it up right away one just simply waits, not dwelling on it. An overwhelming percentage of the time, I find that the bit of information is soon occurs to me before long at all. Well, it might take an hour or two but it can often be much quicker than that, and I have no question in my mind that some process had been going on in my subconscious in the interim that may slightly resemble the Odyssey with the control center of my brain playing the part of Ulysses, ruggedly passing from one dangerous mooring to another in search of a tenuous goal in a world of madness."

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After saying hi to his parakeets that morning, Eamon had walked over to the old wooden table and sat down on the bench at the other end from his Grandpa, who put down his paper.

"They're saying that Romney has the momentum now after the Denver debate. People are finally getting comfortable with the idea of him as president, and with Obama's approval at below 50 percent, this could be it. I remember how Reagan trailed Carter until that debate, and then the floodgates opened."

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"I think that Barack Obama will win," Eamon opined.

"That's just what the New York Times wants you to think," replied Grandpa.

"Aww yeah, you believe in that so called 'unskewed' polls site and their nonsense, and all those Republicans like Dick Morris and Scott Rasmussen and their hollow cheerleading—or maybe—"

"The lamestream media is biased in favor of Democrat Party, everyone knows that. There is going to be a skew in their polls, of course!" said Grandpa.

"Well a lot of those polls work to correct errors, and all the ones I've seen reported lately use a 'likely voter' rather than a 'registered voter' model, which probably use outdated historical assumptions about turnout demographics, and look at the projections based on state and national polls being run by Nate Silver and you can see Obama's ahead—" Eamon said.

"Obama won't get the kind of turnout he got in 2008—like in 2010, Republicans are the ones who are enthusiastic this year," Grandpa retorted. He crumpled the paper in front of him a bit.

"You know, I think the demographics issue is a big one, as the country gets more educated, more Latino, more Asian, these trends all help the left," Yoss said.

"Grandpa," Eamon said, "this my friend Yossarian. Granmda, Yossarian."

"Yoss is fine—you can call me Yoss."

"Well have some pancakes," Grandpa said, and before long Grandma was dropping pancakes on plates and Grandpa was working on his crossword puzzle.

48

Grandpa asked what they were going to do today. Yoss and Eamon had been planning to go walk around on the dunes at Silver Lake.

"Well you got a warm one out there. Y'all should come down to the lumberyard, I do inventory on Sunday.

"How's the farm going," Eamon made the mistake of asking.

"Aw well, you know, I had the land leased to the guy across the street, but he's a lazy swindler, I signed a deal with him for a 50/50 split of revenue, well he grows practically nothing, or so he claims, and on top of that he keeps stealing my water. There's a pump—you know over in that back 40 over there, there's a spring. Now, lots of very nice springs with good flows of water can be found around here—that cliff that the annex is on, don't know if you noticed that it whatnot, maybe it's not even flowing much at the moment, but spring under that property actually gets fed by a creek flowing out of a little marsh in the woods there, well anyway you can sometimes see a waterfall go down the side of the bluff there."

"Thanks for watching my birds, Grandma." Eamon said.

"Oh, sure, I like having them here, little Sporty is even starting to look at me when I come up to the cage instead of turning away like they usually do. They're so shy!" Grandma said.

"They're so small, they're just cautious. Not as bold as larger birds, more flighty—"

"Do they fly?" Grandpa asked.

"Yeah, they flap around now that I stopped clipping their wings." Eamon said.

"How do you get them back in the cage?" Grandpa wondered.

"Uhh well, it's sort of a game. I try to coax them back into the cage by putting my finger out for them to perch. Sometimes they step up but then fly off and around for a while, but eventually they are willing to fly back in the cage or be placed back in there. But there's a whole game to which one you approach first—for me Beale is the real key, because when you get her in then the others are likely to come eventually, and she is easily the most cooperative."

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Grandpa started working on a crossword puzzle. Grandpa had always been a bright guy ever since his days at Oloko High School in Wisconsin. Once while Eamon had taken a trip around Lake Michigan, he had stopped in front of Oloko High and sang the school's fight song. He had later been informed by his mother that the current high school was a new one and the old building had been knocked down. This had led to a question from her. "Did you know that your Grandpa lived in Arizona for a year when he was a child?"

"No, I didn't." he said.

"Oh yeah, his mother, you know, Grandma L, she is the one that raised him because if his original Mom dying in childbirth, well Grandma

L had her mother, father and husband all die in one year. Her aunt offered her a chance to live out in Arizona, to recuperate, they lived out in Phoenix, Dad showed me the place when I was out there in Scottsdale for your cousin Hank's wedding."

Regardless Eamon now had camcorder video in his archives of himself singing the Oloko High School fight song, which he had even taught by Grandpa as a child. It went like this, as he recalled it:

'Oloko High School

With both comrades and good sports too

We will always fight in day and night

Cut down fear like guns shoot deer

Milk our cows but we don't allow

Any sense of recompense when you meet OUR DEFENSE!'

A half century and longer since his days in Oloko, Grandpa was really in to crossword puzzles. Eamon could recall him getting very interested in them maybe 15 years ago, talking about, you've got to use your brain if you want to keep it. And the proof seemed apparent—Grandpa was only semi-retired from the profitable lumber yard over in Shelby which he still owned, and he traded stocks online and read his papers and did his crosswords. What was it that had precipitated the interest in crosswords? Eamon vaguely recalled hearing Grandpa talking about a lady he had met. A super crossword genius old lady, she had written one of those crossword dictionaries that insane people keep on their desks. Apparently Grandpa had thought, 'I want to be as smart as this lady,' and had since gone to town doing the puzzles in an attempt to get

good at them. He seemed to have succeeded, though he had gone through quite a sudoku phase 5 years ago—those puzzles suited his engineer mindset, but the crossword puzzle obsession was at this point more deeply-seated.

Yoss was okay at crossword puzzles but didn't do them often. Eamon was surprisingly bad at them for a smart person, at least that is how Eamon would have put it.

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"4 across, 8 letters, Gandalf's cousin." Grandpa read from the crossword puzzle.

"Radagast," Yoss said. "Although actually there's some debate whether they are first cousins by relation or just, like fellow wizards, like, what up cuz?"

"That sounds like one of the movers we had working for us when we were moving from

Cleveland. The Amos and Andy moving company, is what I called them. Just shocking and jiving, I had to keep getting up and walking around looking like I was busy just trying to get them to do work. I'll tell you, I think some people think this country owes them a living!" said Grandpa.

"Who thinks that?" Yoss shot back angrily.

"Oh, this country has the most socialist president it has ever seen in its history, and it's all, let's blame the rich, let's blame the makers instead of the takers! Obama and his people, that Chicago cabal—"

"Hey! I grew up around Chicago!" Yoss said.

"That's probably why you like this president, who won't even turn over his college transcripts, dental records and list of sexual partners the way investigative journalists are demanding!" replied Grandpa.

"What investigative—" Yoss started. He let himself trail off and decided to not go any further. He wasn't sure if Eamon cared at all about this or not, probably not, but why go further?

The right-wing had at this point in history created an entire parallel universe of fake reporting, falsified science and dubious "experts" in order to endlessly delude right-wingers. Yoss wondered if right-wingers like Grandpa were amenable to evidence, but Eamon knew better. The Republicans have their modus operandi and it can be summed up by the so-called 'Downing Street Memo' from 2002, which was prepared by British intelligence to inform Tony Blair that the war in Iraq was going to happen despite any reassurances that a diplomatic solution was being sought. The key quote is "the intelligence and facts are being fixed around the policy." So come up with rich-friendly and pro-big-business policies, throw in some half-hearted but repellent social conservatism, and then look for any shred of out-of-context falsehood that can possibly be argued, mostly to stupid people of course, to support extreme fascist policies.

The demographics of America are of course changing, as mentioned. And the spectacular failure of the Afghanistan and Iraq invasions had cooled the bloodlust for foreign resources, though perhaps temporarily.

The act of aggression on Iraq by George W. Bush ranks as one of the most blatant violations of international law (Kofi Annan called it an "illegal war") ever committed and George W. Bush should be charged as a war criminal. Thousands of deaths and enormous destruction were vis-

ited on a country in a naked act of aggression, an "adventure" as German chancellor Gerhard Schroeder referred to it. The American media at the time (when alternative media on the Internet was in very early days) cheered shamelessly for the invasion. Much was reported about Schroeder's campaign for reelection being run on the promise to keep Germany out of Iraq. Less was said about how this was a combination of good policy and good politics, almost an act of political heroism.

Sometimes standing for principle can be good, and popular. That's what Yoss and Eamon were hoping people in Washington and Colorado would be doing on the pot legalization issue next month. For now, here in rural western Michigan, Yoss decided not to bring that campaign issue up.

51

"12 down, SF trance music duo. Is that like that Indian music those hippies would play when they were smoking hash?" asked Grandpa.

"Hash, isn't that what Brian Wilson was all hooked on during the Smile recording sessions. That's what I heard," said Grandma. "Your mother was really into the Beach Boys, Eamon."

"I was listening to this new record that they released, well those that are left, including Brian Wilson but not.." Yoss paused and looked up at the ceiling fan spinning way up there at near the apex of the A frame, "well not everyone, those brothers, when they put together an okay melody on the new record, they're getting going, you're just waiting for Denis and Carl, but, well that's not going to happen. But they recently put out that Smile record with those extended versions and stuff, so there's sort of a version of the album and then all those other little pieces, like

it's a puzzle I guess. There's really some incredible pieces of stuff in there, though, shards really, little flashes of gold in the pan which are quickly drowned out by the money's screaming and the noise of the gathering crowds.

Bits of romantic stuff in there, but much of it seems like it's looking backwards, at childhood both with the sounds and the lyrics. "Child is father of the man? Is that a Byron lyric. I remember reading that pompous stuff, oh well actually I'm not complaining about the poetry, well really I don't like his poetry, but then having these illogical or obtuse metaphors shoved down my throat by the sanctimonious pedant, going on endlessly about the 'paradox' that the, er, child is the father to the man. Thinking this requires first the acceptance of a silly concept—that one's earlier self is somehow a kid of shadow parent, helping, um, what, raise him or her self, and then after accepting this nonsense one must then have the tinkering to be shocked by the confusing nature of the leap of logic that has just been taken. I for one say no! No to excessive emphasis on the outdated medium of poetry. No special privilege should be afforded Byron over randomized Internet cat poetry. The work of great craftsmen like Coleridge and Rimbaud will stand on its own merits quite well. But enough with the pretentious and boring whines of Byron and Tennyson. Let English children read those apologists for the 1 percent of their era! I'll have nothing at all to do with, as certainly as the Earth rotates in a circular orbit I mean spins on an axis and tilts away from us as the cold season approaches browning fields and sandy beaches of western Michigan!"

Yoss was searching around on his phone and found the Beach Boys on Spotify.

I find 'Heroes and Villains' a bit mystifying, but then a song like 'Surf's Up' hits it out of the park, it seems to combine so many threads—" he started playing it on his phone. "The beachy lyrics of early stuff, some harmonies that have a 'Pet Sounds' vibe, and then the childhood motif, "are you sleeping, brother John," amazing. Then random Hawaiian-sounding words and music box sounds and imitation train whistles. Some of the imitation of real-world sound stuff kind of seems like a mess, but what do I know?"

"12 down." Grandpa insisted the crossword puzzle be recognized.

"Bill and Brenda," Eamon said.

"Not enough letters," Grandpa replied.

"Gabriel and Dresden," Yoss offered.

"That might be it," Grandpa said. "I was a navigator on a plane dropping firebombs on Dresden. Serving my country!"

Yoss threw up all over the table, his chair, the floor, and even got a bit in the syrup boat.

52

Upon falling leaves the two of them did stare
Over the lake the wind blew cold Wisconsin air
Drunk though they were on local Holland brews
They needed to leave for Chicago, and quickly too
A show from Bill and Brenda was awaiting
This is before Yoss and Brenda were dating

Eamon had tickets for a box up above

And a desire to gain Shamira's love

53

SO those fucken guyyys getting all high on that dope. Praise be upon the great marijuana. I like the stuff. It is like this sort of sacred plant people. It is good when cooked or smoked it vaporized.

Oh but I like the bongos.

54

Chicago's Elnrond Theater on the north side was host to the trance act that Eamon knew and besides they had been invited by Shamira, the pretty singer and entourage member of Orgetorix who had also arranged for Katya to join the group. BEFORE THE show they all met for drinks and it was clear to Yoss that pretty, blonde Polish hottie Katya was in to him. He was very excited to be kissed mercilessly by her after only perfunctory conversation. This was a beautiful woman striking his tongue tenderly with hers, at a table at a restaurant and really this is all okay, we left in every morning from Michigan after cleaning up there at the cabin, and Eamon I'd talking up this little blonde in between hid worship of... Shamira. Okay that-explains-some-of-this... Today reflected on how Eamon is one of those guys who seems to have hit a long post-college dating slumps. Now he was so into Shamira he would talk relentlessly about her and now he's following her around. KATYA kissed Yoss a little longer and then walked away toward the ladies room seductively showing off her red and white high heels and short black skirt revealing narrow legs that still has some nice curvature in that European style.

They had to stop on the way back to Chicago. For some food and stuff. Eamon would tear up ahead on the US-31 freeway and eventually through text and poorly mic-ed voice conversation they would figure out where each other was when they stopped. So they had blown through the Muskegon area and down over the channel is Grand Haven and beyond the Dutch themed shoppes of Holland (and its neighbor Zeeland, named after the part of the Netherlands that is not called Holland) and before long they were on the big Chicago-Detroit road of I-94 when Yoss decided to stop for refreshment. They arranged to meet at the exit where Yoss remembered there being old Slewart's Ice Cream with the huge cones and the wood table eating area crammed with families. But this was late in the season, Slewart's wasn't still open at 8:16 p.m.! So they went back the other way, under the interstate towards the lake, and found a little old school (in a 70s kind of way) fast food joint with bright-red painted plastic tables with red check table cloth and a framed Time magazine with Rush Limbaugh on the cover on the wall near the doorway where the customary one inner door led to a simple maze of two perpendicular exit doors carefully pointing exuents alongside the building instead of into (the light) traffic of the parking lot. The place was called Red, Hot and Real.

Yoss noticed no one up front when they walked in, so he started telling stories. "You know, an ex-girlfriend's friend one time, I'm taking her order for a burger place (now mind you the girlfriend was a vegan) and I ask her, okay, burger or hot dog. And she's all like, 'I don't eat hit dogs,' in sort of a patronizing way, and I'm thinking, really, my girlfriend

won't eat any of that stuff, that seems like a stand she's taking, what you're doing just seems like holier than thou ceremony, but whatever."

An older lady comes out from the back area, not a door to the back so much as an unseen portion of the kitchen that disappeared behind a bend.

'I'm still creating, I'm still writing. A dream comes limping home with a black eye and all sorts of mysterious bruises. At this dream's age, how dignified can it be to still be living at home anyway. MAYBE there's a difference between ^accepted^ and dignified.'

56

They were downtown and ate at one of those retro cafes on Navy Pier when Shamira and Katya said they wanted to go to the zoo. At first Yoss thought that they wanted to go out to the western suburb of Brookfield where they grew up, he had just learned. But no this was the city zoo just east of where they lived, in Lincoln Park. Chicago in early November is often cold but today wasn't that bad and hey, the ladies weren't complaining about it, why should he? On the drive north to the zoo they managed to pass around a few bowls of strong Chicago Sativa and when they got to the zoo and parked on that strip between the lake shore drive and the zoo park.

Yoss was a bit high then. As he looked at the lions and elephants out in the cool air he was overwhelmed with emotion. He looked at the a few black rhinos and tried to empathize with them.

'We're different than you, you don't understand,' one of them seemed to tell Yoss. Horse-like pride, Yoss thought. That's all. We're all brothers and sisters.

The aviary had a very cool egret, distinct from buy reminiscent of an egret Wamin had once photographed at a pond in Golden Gate Park in San Francisco.

57

After the zoo, on Fullerton they found a really good pizza place, basically just another local Italian restaurant, but with that amazing pizza that they call "stuffed" in Chicago but they call "Chicago" in Cleveland. Yoss remembered going to a nearby Italian place one night when he was staying with his Grandmother, the one from Michigan. They found an Italian place called Villa Massimo, and it was a special night out for Eamon, long remembered after age 11 when it transpired because he got to order whatever he wanted. Well, within reason, he didn't push it. He was just glad not to be told not to order this and don't get that.

"We can't afford that." –Response to pretty much anything Yoss would ask for Christmas. Being the oldest of five in an Irish Catholic family means always dealing with the sharp edge or parental idealism, they were such sanctimonius people and experience served to blunt their extremism—experience of course in applying these misguided religious ideals—well what it really led to was probably a lot more hitting and threats than necessary. At some point the user of corporal punishment becomes just like any other administrator of torture—casually, senselessly lashing out in a deepening pattern of hatred or atrocity, totally without reason and without concern for the victim. Eamon had rebelled, and then sort of made peace with his parents, but he wondered: now in his early thirties how much was he still traumatized by distant events from childhood? How much did this early trauma make him secretive, wary, and frequently unable to trust.

-Pizza's here!

Eamon looked at Shmira's beautiful face and tried not to look right down at her sleek, hot body. He was so glad to be out with this incredible, talented woman. Across the table Katya looks lustily at the pizza, and at Yoss, and at some of the random guys in the restaurant. Shamira looked at the "split" pizza with sausage on one side and spinach on the other.

"These half and half pizzas are such a farce. They..they have these cut lines right in the middle-" she said.

"I demand we return it!" Eamon yelled.

"No, no, it's fine," Shamira said.

"It's cold in here," said Katya, crossing her bare legs and tapping Yoss with her foot. "I'm going to stay warm by dancing tonight at the show!"

58

Waves lapped up at Baker Beach, way down the cliff, as we ride the bikes dehlink-dwaClink and cut onto those interior roads passing by that spot in the woods near a campground with the ocean swell sounds faint in the distance, they rode by the shelter for campers and the sand dune along the road and the interior side with the barely decommissioned artillery range (where Eamon had told Yoss that his betta fish Fishersen that he had owned during his grad school days was buried) and then they rode up to the back side of the large abandoned building that still guards the end of 15th Avenue. Some sort of former medical facility or barracks or something had been left for years, five stories and a city block footprint, built unit the hillside. Just a chain link fence with holes

between the parking lot (still used, by Presidio visitors, making it a busy lot next to an abandoned structure) and the building out front. In the back where Yoss rode up to, the back of the hill put the back entrance several stories up where the building connected to the hill via an old metal bridge. Yoss walked several feet out rickety bridge, to a spot with a nice view through the trees of the church at USF, and put his new Berkeley-purchased glass bowl in his mouth and lit some good California weed.

He found a note that seemed to have this scrawled on its tattered surface:

"You of them know about this love is a motion to this phone figured tonight and are you can come if you like about 10 pithiness Mya and they 3 o'clock."

59

Haight Street buzzed.

'ZZZzeerwaaahh a stoned harmonic sound sending out the signal faintly after all these years since the mid-60s but then where can one more easily find weed on the street but at the edge of the Park. Yoss walked by the commotion as the day had broken unexpectedly warm and the people of SF swarmed the sidewalks of Haight and Ashbury as they do even down Cole Valley and down near the park there's a good mix-in of European tourists they flow in here you'll find the American tourists at Fisherman's Wharf if you're looking for them but Yoss couldn't blame them or loving those bubble drinks but only if you knew to go to the places on Clement Street but whatever now he walks up Ashbury Heights and catches a bus around Twin Peaks and he sees that USF

church again from the other direction and the scraggly semi-gangs and the undergraduate students and the kooky trip takers and the thrift store workers and the optimistic sun lovers from south in the state all huddled together on the hill at Sharon Meadow is just beyond the trees in the view. Is that a text from Lisga?

60

Yoss was fucking Brenda now. I'm skipping ahead a bit maybe. The show that Yoss had gone to with Katya, Eamon and Shamira had been amazing.

Bill and Brenda were playing it. A few weeks later Yoss was at Brenda's apartment in the embrace of filthy lust. Something about Brenda had made Yoss go mad from the first time he heard her beautiful voice live with Bill's pulsing trance beats bouncing off the walls of the Elnrond—now Yoss was so incredibly amazed by Brenda's body. Yoss loved the curves from thick thighs and incredible, full breasts—they were so thick and full and yet felt so real, Yoss had put his tongue all over them and grabbed them and kissed them and thrown his cock between them. And he had just felt up and down around her amazing perfect smooth mid-section, so incredibly firm and flawless for a woman with real curves. Yoss felt a sexual energy from Brenda on this first encounter commensurate with how hot she looked. What perfect even reddish brownish reddish hair, a pretty sweet and very lovely face, with a nasty look in it, yelling "I'm so wet!"

Yoss was amazed that the overpowering, gathering lust made him act somewhat more aggressively than normal even, to the point where he had flipped her back over onto her back after she flipped over onto him

and she whispered, "You're a psycho alpha male," sounding more surrendered than complaining.

He had put another condom on and slowly stroked the tips of his fingers over the back of her body after leaning her down head below ass on the low bed. As he entered her vagina from behind with a first thrust and then building strokes, she yelled "FUCK MY BRAINS OUT!!"

61

Eamon was so in love with Shamira. He had been increasingly weird the last couple days since they had gotten into town and when Eamon had tried to get the group all leaving while he thought Shamira was in an amorous mood or something, but Yoss had insisted that he wanted to talk to Orgetorix after the show. That of course had been part of it but Yoss was also transfixed by the beautiful voice (and physical appearance) of Brenda. Katya was a hot offer but he felt like Brenda was just one of those beautiful, brilliant and unique women that were to be treasured—Yoss was sure that he had a very refined appreciation of that kind of woman. A very strong kind of grip could be felt on him the second she actually looked at Yoss after the show, when they started talking instantly the second she passed by the spot he was standing at waiting for Orgetorix to come out of some door. Somehow they were just instantly entangled. Katya saw what was going on and instantly starting acting jealous—and after all that was when the problems started as Yoss saw it. At that point he had held off Eamon's urge to take off with the ladies in tow and the four of them were partying backstage, hanging out, but once Katya saw the way that Yoss and Brenda were looking at each other she started acting bitchy and that threw off the whole system, obviously.

Yoss stepped out of an Italian espresso shop and started walking in languid circles around Washington Square Park. The place had had four corners. The first was the northeast, overseen by a large church named after two different saints, crammed up on its sides against neighboring buildings but providing a Gothic traditionalism to that corner as students played frisbee on the grass and local poets lounged on the benches. The church was on the north end and the Coit Tower loomed to the northwest. Then the corner to the southeast was the Dogs Corner, where homeless men and their ragged dogs huddled in a clump lined with a couple of trees that shaded the views of the small locals-filled high end cafes. Rolling around to the southwest, the flow down from the Wharf and up from Little Italy converges maximally in this much trafficked-area. Then the northwest corner—call it the trolley corner—continues the tourist path but with traffic and local and tourist and vagrant all meeting at unexpected angles.

62

So Yoss stayed there that night at that small room in that apartment building south of Geary Boulevard in San Francisco just west of HWY 1. First he had kind of let Eamon down as a wing man in Chicago, and then he had let his infatuation with Brenda lead him to decline a studio session with Orgetorix in order to work as a "roadie" for the rest of the Bill & Brenda tour. Now that tour was over after three more dates—Minneapolis, Bozeman, and Seattle—four if you count the show in Milwaukee after the one at the Elnrond that Yoss had joined the crew after. Now Yoss was at this little apartment with the room that she seemed to want to stay in and when they had been taking each others clothes off and she was down to bra and black thong panties, and she said she

would be right back but then hesitated and looked at him in the eyes and said "But I want to FUUU-Ck youuu," drawling the words. And soon they were back all over each other and then they were kneeling up on the mattress and he reached down and went around the back and fingered her butthole first before her pussy. She smiled in a really dirty way, tongued her lower lip, and mumbled over his kisses "you havvv a great body..I think you've done that before."

Before long she was naked and wet and jumped on top of him and threw her head forward with her hair flying in his face before whipping it back and she started riding him, her breasts bouncing recklessly to the rhythm that she created and he sustained.

She asked him to bite her nipple. "Please!!" she implored. "Bite it."

Yoss bit it. Some fun this was, lightly closing his front teeth over the top of the beautiful pink nipple situated there as a justifiably beautiful peak of a gorgeous, round mountain and taking his bottom incisors gently but firmly to the bottom to create a definite hold. 'Mmmm.' Yoss thought when suddenly he heard her pleas.

"Biiiiite it! Haaaard!"

Yoss bit down harder. 'Oh she is so crazy, I am so hard, this woman has taken me completely into this moment with her and I love—'

"Haaaarder!" Brenda screamed.

Yoss bit down assertively with his powerful jaw. After that for the next few minutes he thought she looked at him with a kind of cowed respect before her wet filthy lust took over her face as it took over her vagina and she screamed incoherently as he he felt her body.

San Francisco leads out to the sea along Geary Boulevard, legend has it that Hunter S. Thompson would go to that little motel on the edge of the seaside that was right along the end of the route west through the Richmond that Yoss was off of right now. On the road that runs north of Golden Gate Park (this park runs east-west [widely] through the western third or so of San Francisco south of the Richmond and north of the Sunset District, placing it a few miles south of the actual Golden Gate) the RVs and beat up old cars with the out of state plates pile up at the western edge of the road near the sea.

Yoss called this area "The End of the Line," and he considered it an important psychic refueling station (or something like that) for those still inspired by the randy wanderlust of Jack Kerouac's *On The Road* (at least the first half of that book, the part that Yoss had read).

Yoss had been walking around the city the next day and went across the road from the Safeway and past the End of the Line and into the tree-covered area that sheltered those mysterious windmills down there by the ocean. He saw them turning in the breeze and fog, moving like the currents of space-time that he felt, and he thanked the ocean for these last few days, as he didn't know who else to thank as he recorded the shoreline noise, hoping to incorporate it into a song as he savored the thought of Brenda's vocals.