

Madeye

Daniel Christopher June

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Contact the Author at

perfectidius@gmail.com

Or visit his webiste at

<http://www.perfectidius.com>

Other Books by Daniel Christopher June

The Life of Allism

The Natamyths

The Writing Life

Upcoming Books (2013):

The Emilegends

Sophia Lux

For my wife Sherry, who knows my madness is also my gift.

*

Dominic awoke. But instead of remembering his dreams, he remembered a week earlier, working at Starbucks. He denied his eyes the light, for this memory was eluding him like a morn-time dream.

Smocked in a green apron and haloed with a black radio headset, he had been sweeping the floor when his headset beeped, and all three baristas looked up from their tasks. Adam Jave clicked the headset:

“Welcome to Starbuck's, this is Adam; what can I get started for you today?”

Dominic ignored the rest and returned to sweeping through his thoughts. But when the customer drove up, Dominic looked. A blonde woman caught his eye, looked away: middle aged, chubby, laughing to herself. *Common fodder*, he thought. Yet something taunted Dominic's eye. He removed his thin black glasses, looked closer, and raised an eyebrow upon seeing a wiry man decked in green and red, like a bird of paradise, perched beside her. He was whispering something in her ear, though she

appeared oblivious. The man met Dominic's eyes. His brow was stained with a purple tattoo of a strange glyph. The man glowered, gestured left, gestured right, and Dominic forgot about the queer man and the glyph.

And he hadn't thought about it again till now, which was a fact as strange as a tattooed forehead.

He cleaned up and headed to the library. Bible Word College housed the largest library in the city, and though he had never attended the college, he had a card. He drank the milk of scholarship fresh from the source, spending his off days studying philosophy and poetry.

On the drive there, he noticed a billboard. It read, "An invitation from God: Come worship with us at the First Assembly of God Church," with a flapping white pigeon thirty feet long, sporting a blue halo. At first he saw "Come worship us," but looked again and this time saw a skull in the halo – or was it a hand? or a Chinese ideogram? – and curious, he pulled around and looked at it again. But now saw nothing exceptional.

The church belonged to Bible Word College, and was attached to the library. Aside from that, Dominic held no interest for it.

The library stood deserted. Even the librarian was missing, though she could be heard to be in the backroom chatting on her phone. This was typical. Dominic sat down and sank into a book by Derrida.

“Hi Dom,” chimed a taunting voice. He looked up without needing to. It was Alexa Prose. She was seventeen, and too cute not to know it, but such a smirky girl that she never needed to flaunt: red hair, freckles, ironic smile, eyes that seemed both lusty and mocking at the same time.

“You know, you really need to get a phone,” she said. “I had to ambush you here just to get a hold of you.”

“If you need me, call me at work,” he said.

“Or I can *ambush* you,” she said, “Right when your nose is in the wrong thing,” and she snatched his book from his hands. “Empty French!—so style drunk they can’t even write anymore,” she tittered, and then added, “And they never could to begin with.”

Dominic looked at her.

“You look so innocent, Dom, I want so bad to corrupt you. But seriously, I need your nose in one of my books now. I am going to send out my poetry to be published, and I need you to just rip it up with criticism until nothing is left but God.”

“Nothing will be left,” he said.

“Don’t be *that* critical. I need you to come over and give it a read through, and then you’ll *want* to read it again because it will catch you in its spell.”

Dominic looked at his stack of books.

“You can take those with you.” She grabbed them in her hands and headed towards the checkout desk. Dominic followed.

“I’ve finally cleaned my room, so you have to see it,” said Alexa once they were at her apartment. “Dad’s out for a while, so you can help yourself to whatever you want in the fridge.”

Dominic sat on her bed. Her room was wallpapered in magazine cutouts, men and women in stark poses, a poster of a black-haired angel covered in scars, and a bookshelf decked in

poetry and art books. He perused the bookshelf. She had worn copies of American poets he had never heard of, but the one that caught his eye was a thin volume by Nema Prose.

“Is she related to you?” he asked.

Alexa stiffened. “Yeah, actually. That’s my mom.”

Dominic considered, picked it up. The Title read *Matters Beyond Matter*. and the inner cover: “Keep the flow, your poetry has promise--Nema,” and below that another weird mark. Dominic considered this mark, and his eyes unfocused and he felt an image of the sun, of waters rushing, and a feeling of dread. He blinked.

“Are you close to your mom?”

“No. She left my dad to teach creative writing at Harvard. She’s back now, but even though she’s in the same city, I never see her. She’s not mom material, really. But this is what I want you to read.” She handed him a fifty page printout.

“How long have you worked on this?”

“Well it starts in Middle School really, only I’ve reworked them to death. Nothing is good enough; it must be edited beyond itself. Constantly, Dom!” She laughed, and then

said quietly, "It's kinda like me. I need some major editing to bring me to completion."

Dominic flipped through the poems, stopped at one. It read:

*Petals of razors
Thorns of silk
My childhood drown
In sour milk.*

Dominic stopped, skipped around, found another.

*Demonic possibility advent
Order reversed, voice lost or gained
Murder and birth,
I feel in my groin,
Nurtured like a grudge
Illuminated and ill-lusioned
Comes again again in me.*

"Never mind that one," said Alexa, plucking the book from his hand. "But never mind *any* of them for now. They're meant to be read in leisure." She caught the papers up and patted them into a stack. "So how's work?"

"Fine," he said. "I should get back to it."

"Not your books. *Work*. Starbucks. How's baristaing?"

"Fine," he said.

"Could you get me a job there?"

"No. You're too young."

"It's McDonald's level. What right do they have to be snooty about who they hire?"

Dominic considered. "Why do you want to work there?"

"Something to do," she said. "I get sick of my friends. House is lonely. And money is always good."

"There are other jobs."

They fell silent. His eyes returned to searching her room. Her eyes searched his face.

"Dom?"

"Yes?"

"Why do you study all the time? I mean I know you have friends, but you never talk about them study all the time, y. And ever since I've met you I've only seen you talk with customers and coworkers. You just all the time. You know, you could go to college and make that studying work for you."

"What would I gain from college?"

"Become a teacher, and then get *paid* to study."

"I study to perfect my system," he said. "I'm making a philosophy."

"Ah," she said. "Why do you care so much for philosophy?"

"It's the basis of understanding."

"Ah, ah, ah...And what's all this understanding for? Are you a dragon hoarding up every golden idea in a big heap?"

Dominic looked at her shelf.

"Oh, I didn't mean to offend you! If it's your passion then you should go for it. But you should know that there are other things in life. There is poetry, of course. And then there is love. And then there is good food. Note my hierarchy of values!" she laughed.

He picked up another poetry book, flipped through it, read the notes in the margins.

"So you're just going to study all the time? For the rest of your life?"

"When I find the truth, I'll live it," he said.

“That’s your *first* mistake. Life is not about truth or wisdom. It’s about being foolish and seeing what you can get away with. It’s about daring to find somebody who can love you for what you are, someone who could heal you, you know? You’ve got to make bonds in life, and find people you can depend on.”

She took his hand. He looked at her shy smile.

“Someone like you,” she said, and then added, “I like you.”

Dominic smiled politely. “Why do you like me?”

“Oh, I don’t know,” she said. “If I understood my own heart I would be dangerous. But you are smart and persistent, pensive and repressed. You are all possibility. Artists just love to exploit possibility.”

“You do not love the things I love, nor seek the things I seek. What you admire in me is not what I admire in myself.”

“So what?” she raised her voice. “Is my admiration any less genuine? It’s not like you have to fall in love with your twin.”

But now she had said too much, and bit her lip. Dominic looked at that lip, and admired it. He looked where kissing that

lip would lead; saw the long tortured path, the frustrations and possibilities. The black of distraction lay on that path.

He frowned and looked away.

That evening, back at his apartment, he turned his stereo on loud, drank a sweetened ice tea, and enumerated the things he had learned that day.

Then he sat comfortably in front of his mirror and fell into meditation. At first he considered truth, work, and life, and that was relaxing; but then he considered the mark of Nema Prose. Instantly he threw his head back and felt the sun, the waters, the swelling of deception in his mind. A great unspeakable force was trying to shut him out; but he had long practiced facing deceptions; he overpowered it. It led him to consider his body of belongings.

He looked around at them: clothing, CDs, books-- libraries full; blankets, trinkets, clutter. Why? What for? He had grown fat and sluggish with possessions. He looked intently at his books. They seemed to be glowing. The ones glowing blue he had read continually. The others he had read once or less. He

gathered these latter ones, and the trinkets, photographs, papers and notes, everything unessential, into his hands, and put them in a large brown box. He left it in the dumpster outside.

Then he looked at his bed, broken and fallen apart. He dissembled it and threw it out too, except the mattress. Satisfied, he rode his bike to the bookstore and bought a blank book. Now he would cut down his excessive thinking and amber the best of his thoughts into words. Now he would start his philosophy.

“Is somebody moving out of your apartment?” Adam asked. “I grabbed a bed from the dumpster.”

Dominic washed the dishes. He said: “It was broken.”

“So it was yours,” said Adam. “That explains the box of your notes.”

Dominic shrugged.

“Just decided to get rid of things?”

“Baggage.”

“You are not a materialist, and that’s good. Jesus wasn’t either. But you could have donated your stuff to a charity and given it to those in need.”

"Why?" asked Dominic.

"Because it's a good thing to do. It gives them a chance."

"They are not my poor."

"Well, we are all our brother's keepers."

"He who would claim to be my brother must prove it by blood," said Dominic.

"Hmm," said Adam. "You must have been an only child. I have two younger brothers: Joshua and Clete. Having siblings might help you realize how we are all brothers on this earth."

"You are mistaken on one account," said Dominic. "I *am* a materialist. That is precisely why I got rid of the baggage."

"Oh, I see," said Adam. "Would a materialist work for minimum wage?"

"Money is but one matter," said Dominic. Then they had to leave to help a customer.

Shep Hours came in. He was wasp thin, with long straight hair that decided to curl at the end. He looked typically gloom.

"S'up, Shep?" asked Adam.

"Eh," Shep replied.

"If you were a materialist, would you work here?"

"I wouldn't work here unless I had to," said Shep, and then added: "I hate it."

Later, Dominic asked him: "Why don't you work somewhere else?"

"Because there *is* nothing else. I was meant for so much more than this. Everybody here has a college degree, and what's it for?"

"You don't use it?" asked Dominic.

"Not to make money. No one's hiring. They don't care about you. It makes me want to stab someone."

"You're a victim of your expectations," said Dominic.

"What do you mean?"

"You expect more, and so you are unhappy when you don't get it."

"Well if you don't expect the best, you will never get it," said Shep.

"If you expect the impossible, you will never get it."

And then they returned to helping customers.

**

Dominic searched the library aisles at random. He came to a door in the back faced with the faintest outlines of Nema's symbol. Immediately he forgot about it and sat down to study.

After half an hour, he remembered the symbol, and immediately he began scratching his wrist with his keys. Perplexed, he stopped. He sat down and let his mind flow. There was something he was missing here – and he never dismissed a mystery, nor let it remain unsolved.

That night he tried to sketch the drawing, but could not remember a single detail. He tried to write about it, but couldn't move his hand to write. Instead, he found himself ripping up the paper and throwing it in the garbage, though he didn't know why.

Finally, he scribbled an arrow penetrating a circle upon his apartment wall with a permanent marker.

It worked. Whenever he looked at that sign, he was able to remember that he had some obscure goal. With enough mirror meditation, sitting a few hours each day, he could focus his

mind on the question of the unknown symbol, at least for a few moments, before he would fall into confusion.

He couldn't bring himself to ask questions, didn't know what it was that confused him, had only the intuition of a mystery, of a problem that he must task at until it was solved. Like learning the guitar, or like learning philosophy, he knew that growth required sustained, frustrating, fruitless discipline to even give the smallest return! But how sweet that return! True gold costs you your own blood.

Finally he was able to inscribe on his wall: "library symbol back door." And holding that question in his head took hours of meditation. After a week he was ready to start his campaign.

Every day he mapped out the library, attempting to get to the door, but instead of his task, found a meaningful distraction, thought of a wonderful insight or fascinating question to pursue. Each day he returned to the black scrawls on his home wall and remembered what he was after. Each day he came closer.

Finally, at the end of the sixth day, he felt the bliss of nearness, the certainty that he had almost found the door, the hope that behind it he would find an inner library.

Considering this mounting excitement, it is odd how the next day, upon beginning his adventure, he caught sight of a banner for the outer sanctuary service. It was Sunday and the pastor was giving a morning sermon. He forgot his plans and entered the church.

It was a megachurch. Dominic had often wondered how a university got mixed up with a megachurch, as the sanctity of study and the hubbub of worship are diametrically opposed. He expected to find a set of students who were required to attend chapel; what he discovered was this:

A professional staff of worship leaders, including electric guitarist, brass section, keyboardist, and drummer playing a set of upbeat worship songs celebrating the greatness of God, the awesomeness of Jesus, and the recommendability of the Holy Spirit. Unlike at the smaller chapels that met on weekdays, there were no charismatic antics on Sunday. With the cameras rolling and the public watching, nobody interrupted the

service by speaking in tongues; nobody writhed on the floor, nobody was "slain." The Spirit had learned good manners for the camera.

The students were sitting in the front rows, dressed in suits and ties. The rest were a promiscuous bunch: hundreds of men in denim, T-shirts, suits, slacks; women ranging from prim to casual to Magdalene. Walking into the group, Dominic felt an overwhelming pressure, like a finger of wind pressing down upon him. He sat in the back row of the balcony. After the worship there was an advertisement for heart-moving books in the bookstore, a passing of the collection plates, and then a second collection for a guest missionary – everyone finally paid – before the audience straightened up for the sermon.

God is good, Amen? And he is good to us. Because the one thing we need most of all is God. Nothing can quite nourish the soul like Christ. Each of us has a God-shaped hole in his heart, and that's the place the Holy Spirit fills. It says in Genesis that God took part of Adam's side – part of his heart – and used it to make Eve. But they soon figured out that Eve couldn't fill up that hole again, they both had holes in their heart. Adam was unable to find a helper among the animals, and he couldn't even find the perfect helper in Eve, because he needed Jesus to come and give us the Spirit. Unless we're twice born and baptized in the Spirit we have no part with God.

Now men, you love your wives, and wives, you love your husbands; but you will be miserable if you love *for* them. If your husband is the highest being in your life then you are making an idol of him, and the hole in your heart will stay empty. No man is perfect. No man can fill the hole that only our heavenly Father can fill.

But each of us thinks he can do it on his own. I've done it. We all have. What does a man say to himself? He says "I will lean on my own understanding. I will be my own God. I don't need Jesus to forgive my sins. I can make it on my own." And who does that sound like? That's right--Satan! He, too, thought he could be greater than God, thought he didn't *need* God. Pride is the cause of all sin. Adam and Eve wanted to be like God so that they wouldn't need him anymore. And where did they learn that from? From Satan, from Satan in the serpent.

You see, Satan was just teaching them to do what he had already done himself. He wanted to know good and evil, but all he could know was evil. So too did Adam and Eve seek the place of God, and they only gained knowledge of evil. They were immediately ashamed, ashamed of their nakedness. Who told them they were naked? The serpent. And ever since then, the only thing man can do is sin, every passion of his heart is sin, and there is no hope for him – until the spirit fills his heart.

It almost seems too easy, doesn't it? Just ask for forgiveness, just invite the Holy Spirit into your heart--and that's it. You wonder what the atheists and nonbelievers are

complaining about. You accept the free gift, and the Spirit comes in and transforms your life. But they deny the gift because they are proud. They think they don't need God, but really, Satan is their God. They won't realize that they were worshipping Satan until they are judged on the last day, when every tongue confesses that Jesus is Lord. Then it will be too late. Then they will go to their eternal punishment.

But as for the believers, we are transformed; we confess our sins and are washed free of the filth of this world. This is the mystery of baptism. We are not washed with mere water. What does the Bible say? It says we are to be baptized *in the Spirit*. Because if you don't really accept the Spirit into your heart, you know what you get when you're baptized? A wet corpse. It's not until the spirit fills you that you are any good at all. If you think you do any good, that is Satan whispering his lies in your ear. Man can't do any good. Only God is good. Man can only do good when God acts through him.

It is by the sacrifice of Jesus, by his perfect example, that he redeemed us from the lie of sin. This lie blocks the hole in our heart, like a gate, and we don't let Jesus in. It isn't till we break

down the doors of sin by the acceptance of Jesus Christ that we can finally be free from the wickedness of this world.

The sermon continued, but Dominic had seen something that nobody else seemed to notice. Whenever the pastor paused for applause or amens, a man sitting in the shadow of the stage muttered some words into a microphone. Nobody heard him muttering over the PA, but they all reacted.

As Dominic looked at the credulous faces of the congregation, he wondered if they were hearing the sermon. They were really hearing the foreign tongue of that man in the shadow. But when Dominic tried to catch on to just one of those subliminal words, he found himself amenning with the rest of them.

But now the shadow man walked silently away without a single pair of eyes on him. Except for Dominic's.

Dominic followed, at a distance. The man walked through the broad doors, through the hall, and into the library. He set the microphone and a cryptic book on the shelf, then slipped into the back.

Dominic looked around, and found himself alone. He picked up the book, but didn't look at the cover, sensing that there was a symbol on it that might ward him off. He opened it and looked into a deep ocean of symbols. His head swirled, and he was filled with a thousand metaphors and poeticisms. He flipped through the pages and as his mind flared with millions of images, he decided to silence them by trying something. He pronounced what appeared a mere glyph. The air tingled. In the background, applause. He grabbed the mic and book and walked back to the sanctuary. He said another word into the microphone. Everybody gave a standing ovation, and even the pastor didn't seem confused to be cut off midsentence.

Dominic tried another, and now everybody sat down, looked into their hands, and started sobbing. What was this? He walked into the congregation, but nobody noticed him. He poked a sobbing man, but the man didn't respond. He said another word, and now a man stood up and began speaking in tongues while the church regarded him with rapt attention.

Behind him, the grey shadow man snatched his book, set his hand firmly on Dominic's forehead, and uttered six strange words.

Dominic started shouting, grabbed a Bible, and ripped it to shreds. Then he stripped naked and ran for the podium. And then all was dark.

*

The first thing he was conscious of was bright light.

There was a big blank before it, there were blanks and confusion shuffled in, but he definitely remembered seeing a building full of light. He was certain he was now in that building, and that he had somehow admitted himself here. He was also sure that he had been mad until this moment, and that he was at this moment finally cured. He smiled, and opened his eyes.

“Well Good morning Dominic,” said a warm voice. The man in the suit looked like benevolence itself, smiling like the broad sun. “I’m Dr. Alex Fellows, and you are at Resting Oaks Hospital. Do you know why you’re here?”

Dominic could only grunt. His voice didn't seem to be working.

“Mm. That's okay. You've been up for three days, and last night you finally collapsed. You probably won't remember a lot of what happened. It seems you've had a moment of crisis. I'm here to figure out how I can help you, and get you back on your feet, okay? We'll be meeting once a day to see how you are

doing – you'll be here for some time till you're ready to go? This is Nurse Karen. She will be doing your precautions today. She'll also tend to your vitals and get your lab work. Now get some rest. Wakeup is normally at 7 a.m., but today you should sleep in. Good to meet you.”

He left. Karen smiled. She was a chubby woman with brown hair, round gentle eyes, and a perpetual smile.

“Hello Dominic. You're probably a little confused right now, and that's all right. Things might seem a little scary, but you are safe here. I'm going to get your vitals, and then you can get right back to your rest.”

And soon, Dominic was asleep again.

**

The hospital was beautiful. Dominic came to realize that he had had a psychotic episode while he was studying in the library, and that the doctors were going to find out what was wrong and provide him with any medications he needed. *Such is life*, thought Dominic, and decided to make the best of it. Besides, he found that he actually felt great, much better than he had felt since he could remember.

The day after he had slept in all day he didn't feel tired at all. In fact, he woke up at 5 a.m., and walked out of his room. Down the hall, he came to a central island from which four hallways branched off. In the center of the island were two staff members: Karen and a burly man with a thick neck and a strong-willed gaze.

"Go back to bed," said the man. "Wake up's at 7."

"It feels like noon to me," said Dominic. "I couldn't go back to sleep if I wanted to."

"Okay," he growled. "Go into the day room so that you don't wake up the other patients. Don't turn on the television."

Dominic walked into the day room. There were two couches, a chair, a table with a chess board on it, a television mounted on the wall, a poster on the wall, which read “God give me serenity,” and there was a window, dark with night.

Dominic set up the chess set. It was missing pieces. He checked his pocket for spare change to set in for pieces, but found he had no wallet--or even a belt, for that matter. He looked around, found a Monopoly board game, used a dog-shaped piece to substitute the missing rook, a hat to substitute a missing pawn. And it was good.

He pinched the white queen, bored. And how hungry he was! What kind of food did they have here? He shook his head a little bit. What about work? And did he have any books to read? Did he have paper? And just what had happened anyway?

He looked up. A woman entered, dressed in a nightgown and holding a pillow.

“Goddamn snoring bitch,” she muttered. She looked at Dominic, snorted, put her pillow on the sofa and lay down, apparently to sleep.

While Dominic was considering that, a young black boy walked in, with a cone of hair and sharp beagle nose.

"Hey," he said.

"Hi, how are you?" said Dominic.

"Yo, I'm fine." The lady on the couch sighed violently.

The black boy shrugged. "What you here for?"

"I think I had a breakdown," said Dominic.

"Ahem!" said the lady, and started cursing under her breath.

"Hey, let's go wait outside the kitchen."

"So what are you here for?" asked Dominic.

"I can't talk about it," said the boy.

"Oh. My name's Dominic."

"Shawn."

They fell to silence. The door to the cafeteria was closed, but there were sounds inside, cooks preparing breakfast.

"What music you listen to?" asked Shawn.

"A lot of things," said Dominic. "Anything with a healthy electric guitar."

"Any rap?"

"Not really."

"I write some rap. See my stuff's different. Other guys always writing about subjegatin women. But I rap about respecting woman, -- loving 'em."

"Hello," said a new voice. They turned to see a pretty brunette woman. "I see I'm not the only one up early today."

"Shawn" said Shawn, offering his hand.

"I'm Ray, short for Rachel Speardal."

"Don't need last names," said Shawn. "Can't talk about 'em."

"Sorry," she blushed. "You're new here, huh? I've been here about a week. I'm thinking they'll let me go whether they want to or not, because my insurance is running out."

"You want to go?" asked Dominic.

"Well, I don't belong here anyway. I just needed some time to think things through. Now the doctor's just making sure everything's okay. But you'll find the food's really good."

Dominic saw a bandaged wrist under her long sleeves.

Soon they heard what must have been the couch lady shouting at somebody. Since the cafeteria was closed for another

hour anyway, they walked back. A grinning old man was crowing at the lady, who had left her couch and was pulling at her hair while shouting him down.

“It’s a weird crowd in here,” said Ray. “But most people are pretty normal like you guys. It’s just a place to get yourself together.”

The buff staff member told Gretchen to go back to her room if she didn't want to go to the “quiet room,” which she apparently didn’t, and reminded everybody to keep quiet until seven, because many consumers were still sleeping.

Seven o’clock came, which was shower time. And then the cafeteria was open, and soon it was buzzing with people. Dominic was struck at how orderly the place was. Perhaps the strange cases stayed in their room?

As he stood in line for food, he thought, *you are what you eat. Therefore, to be everything, you have eat everything.* After he smiled at the server and complimented her, he asked for a serving of everything she served. He got an omelet, bacon, sausage, waffles, a cantaloupe, two milks, an orange juice, coffee, tea, three flavors of jelly, honey, brown sugar, white sugar,

artificial sugar. He mixed the honey into one milk and the brown sugar in the other, and then — feasted.

“Hungry much?” said Ray.

“I just realized that I've been starving myself for too long,” said Dominic.

“Yeah, or maybe you have AIDs,” a voice mocked from down the table. He looked and saw a scowling blonde woman.

“Never mind her,” said Ray. “She's a shitstarter.”

“He has AIDs and they oughtn't to put him with us. He's a *fag*,” said the scowling woman.

“Actually, I'm just skinny,” said Dominic. “My name's Dom. Who are you?”

“Aleandra.”

“Oh? What does that name mean?” asked Dominic.

“Lioness,” she said.

“My name means Lamb,” said Rachel. “Ray is also sunlight, of course.”

“Yeah? Why don't go kill yourself again?” asked Aleandra.

“Why don't you just shut up!” shrieked Ray.

A staff cleared his throat from another table. Both women got quiet.

But after a minute, Ray said, in a voice so authentically cheery that Dominic marveled, "What does your name mean, Dominic?"

"It means The Lord."

"Oh, ho ho," said the old man who had taunted the sleeping woman, and another woman said, "No, no, it doesn't mean the Lord, it means Dominated by Nick, who is the devil. It's an evil name."

"Well, I'm done," said Dominic. "What's next?"

"Groups start at 9," said Ray. "Meds before that. We can do what we want till then."

"Do you have a cigarette?" asked Aleandra.

"I don't smoke," said Dominic.

"I brought in a pack, and the staff stole it. They took it and they won't give it back."

"I'm sorry to hear that."

It turned out the doctor already had him on a medication program, which surprised Dominic, since he thought that he was still undiagnosed.

"What's in the pills?" he asked.

"I don't know," said the nurse. "But you have to take them."

"Of course I will take them. But you've got a whole hive of meds over there. Do I get to try them all?"

"Only what the doctor prescribes."

"What's your name?"

"My name is Maya."

"Maya the bee?"

"How did you know? Nobody knows that cartoon. My mother named me after it."

"Well you are giving out the honey for this hive, so you had to be a bee," said Dominic.

"Open your mouth," said Maya, and looked in to make sure he had swallowed the pill.

"They're sugar pills," said Dominic. "That's why they work. They get in the brain by being made of sugar."

“I don't know what they're made of,” said Maya. “Do you know what group you are assigned to? Meetings start in five minutes.”

A staff named Dave, a grey-haired man, introduced himself. “Dominic, you are meeting in the central group down the hall. Now if you see me following you around looking at you, that's because I am. I'm going to do safety checks on you and the others every fifteen minutes. Okay, Dominic?”

“Thanks,” said Dominic, and walked into the hall. The chairs were circled, and seated at the head chair was a woman with a long neck, who looked like his aunt Diana. To his surprise, her name tag said, “Diane.” She had short brown hair; her eyes were mature and a little worried. He sat at her right hand side. The rest of the chairs were randomly filled with an assortment of consumers.

“Your name's Diane?” asked Dominic.

“Yes, it is. And you must be Dominic.”

“What's your last name, Diane?”

“Staff only uses first names,” she said.

“That sounds paranoid,” he said, and a few patients laughed. “Did you know that Diane was a virgin goddess? She turned a man into a stag and he was eaten by his own dogs.”

“No, I didn't know that,” said Diane, and focused on her clipboard.

“Can I get a clipboard?” Dominic asked.

“No, we can't give clipboards to consumers. It has metal in it.”

“How about paper?”

“Sure, you can get it from the front desk.”

“Okay, I'll be right back.”

When group began, everybody in the group was to give their name, and to say something that makes them happy. Diane took notes, and so did Dominic. He wrote down every name given, although some people refused to give names. Some had nothing to be happy about, even when Diana pressed.

“Now I want you to rate your mood on a scale of one to ten,” said Diana. They went around the circle, and most moods fell under three. Dominic's, however, was a nine. The breakfast had been wonderful!

“Okay, is there anything anybody wants to talk about?”
asked Diana.

“Can we talk about fathers sexually abusing their
daughters?” asked a middle aged woman.

“I don't want to talk about that!” shouted a glowering
man.

“We can talk about that if you want,” said Diana. “You
can talk about anything here. Bill, do you think you can let Amy
talk about her thoughts?”

“I'm not going to listen to this shit,” he said, and
stormed out, slamming the door behind him.

“Okay,” said Diana. “Does anybody else have a
problem?”

“I do,” said a skinny brown haired boy of about twenty.
“My girlfriend was molested as a child and it just hurts me to
think about it.”

“Okay,” said Diana.

There was silence.

“Do you maybe want to leave the room too?” she asked.

“No, its okay,” said Amy. “I can talk about it later.”

So they talked about stresses, and making time to relax, the importance of praying or meditating, and always taking meds as prescribed. Aside from studying the interesting personalities of other consumers, Dominic realized he didn't have a good reason to be here.

After a few days of meeting every admitted patient, writing down their name in secret, discussing their problems, and himself meeting up not with the good doctor, but with a head nurse, Ruby, he felt at home in this place.

It was Saturday in the day room, and Dominic was talking to a thirty-year-old man with glasses and a beard named John.

“You know, everyone wants to hate us because of who we are. You can’t even be yourself without the police coming after you.”

“How do you mean?” asked Dominic, looking over his notes.

“Like, just because you look at kids doesn’t mean you’re going to do anything about it.”

“Do you mean pornography?” asked Dominic.

“Yeah. I mean, the shit’s out there. People are *going* to see it. They should just end the internet if they want to stop it.”

“Do you think they should end the internet?”

“No. But people just want to make monsters and so they say ‘Oh the pedophiles, they’re destroying children’ when there are whole cultures that have sex between adults and children and everyone’s just fine. We put it in their head that they were abused and that it’s bad and then they go and think they were hurt. But if we said it was okay and normal then the children wouldn’t care and would even like it.”

“Did something like this happen to you, John?”

“My older sister did stuff – so what? I wanted her to. And she learned it from my dad, and she’s just fine. I liked it. And they want to make me feel guilty for liking it, like she was bad and corrupted me--and that it’s bad if people look at this stuff.”

“So you figure since you weren’t traumatized by it, no children are?”

“I’m sure some are. Some people can be really sick about it. But it doesn’t have to be that way. Some people are sick about sex with other adults too, and that doesn’t mean that sex is bad and we should all stop having sex. I think an old man with a young girl is a good thing, like wisdom and innocence

combined. The Greeks did it. We do it too, but we're repressed. We say it's so bad, and you're so wrong if you like it. But you can't control what turns you on. You've just got to manage it and be smart about it. You can love a kid and still have sex with them, you know? Society's going to wake up to this someday."

"Is this the reason why you're here, John?"

"No."

"Then why?"

"I got down. So they think I need meds. I didn't try to kill myself. I wasn't really trying to kill myself. I was just really down."

"You *should* kill yourself. It's people like you that make most of us have to come here," said Netta, a young black woman with smooth even face.

"Why don't you just shut up?" said John.

Netta looked to Dominic for support.

"Okay, Netta, I'm not asking you to approve of John. You have your issues, he has his, and right now we are just talking."

"Yeah," she said.

Shawn sat down for a game of chess. Dominic accepted the challenge, and they flashed through a game. Dominic's moves were instantaneous; Shawn's drawn out and thoughtful. Dom always won.

"It's the meds," said Dominic, "They're boosting my brain."

"You got the chip?" asked Shawn.

"What?"

"Have they put it in your head? Did they do the surgery on you?"

"No."

"Cause Bush has got the chip in his head. Don't trust the computer, that's the Beast."

"What do you mean?"

"Can't talk about it," said Shawn. "Can't say it."

Dominic looked through the day room window; saw a handsome middle aged man being admitted.

Later, he saw the man pacing the halls, singing loudly. The nurses looked displeased, but he said, "If you're going to keep me here, I have to release my energy somehow. I sing to

make myself healthy." And he continued singing deep-throated Germanic music.

"Hi, I'm Dominic. How are you doing?"

"I'm getting anxious," said the man. He wore glasses, and had stark intent eyes, like flitting lasers. "I've got to keep walking."

"I'll walk with you," said Dominic. "What's your name?"

"I'm Clark."

"Are you superman?"

"They try to make me into a superman, and they won't stop trying."

"Do you know the Supermen were Nietzsche's ideas, the men who crown mankind? And the Nazis wanted to kill the Jews to be the supermen?"

"Don't say that," growled Clark, and then, "Come here!" They ducked into the cigarette room, which was abnormally empty.

"What is this room, is it some sort of shower?" asked Clark.

“I think it’s a smoking room.”

“I tried a cigarette for the first time last week. My system’s so sensitive that those chemicals put me into the phase that brought me here. You know the Indians smoked to enter the spirit world?”

“You’re sensitive? And you’re not a superman?”

“You can’t talk like that and let staff hear you. Then you’ll never get out. They listen always. Do they have this place on camera? There, that’s a camera, but it can’t see this corner.”
He stepped into the corner. “You can’t say those things out loud because you know they might be true.”

“You don’t want to be here?”

“My ex-wife brought me here because I told her the divorce was a mistake. She said it was ten years ago and that I needed to get back on my meds.”

“So this is your room 101 where you prove your love in the face of torture.”

“Don’t say that. That’s dangerous. You can’t speak that way. Not if you want to get out.”

“But I like it here. The food’s great, the consumers have interesting stories. I think I’ve helped some.”

“I help too much. I hear a story and I get too involved. Everybody wants my help. Everybody needs to hear my advice. But it won’t leave me. I can’t keep taking on everybody else’s problems.”

“Just eat and be merry. You know, I eat everything now.”

“To *be* everything you have to *eat* everything.”

“Exactly,” said Dominic.

“Shhh! Shh. You can’t repeat this. To be completely human, you have to even eat humans.” He looked at Dominic with occult significance.

“Like the Eucharist?” asked Dominic.

“Well the extians stole that idea. That is an ancient idea. That was there when we first came to this planet. That’s when the first race was here.”

“Or maybe you could perform oral sex?” asked John.

“Hmm,” said Clark. “That would lead to quantum entanglement. That troubles me.”

“The people here can be interesting. Staff is interesting, though some patients have them outsmarted. And Ray is fun.”

“Did you say Rah?”

“No, Ray, as in Rachel,” said Dominic.

“I get vowel shifts,” said Clark. “Vowels shift in my ears. It’s the magic of the vowels. The Jews and the Arabs didn’t have vowels in their text, because magic was forbidden them. They put all their magic into God. But the control of vowels is how spells are cast.”

Something tingled in Dominic's ears. Spells?

“How do you cast a spell?” asked Dominic.

“I can’t show you here. I can’t tell you now. We’ll have to get it out later.” Clark was getting more and more anxious, rocking back and forth. Finally, he leapt from the wall, out the door, and was running down the hall.

A chubby girl with mousy hair fidgeted by the front door. Dominic said hello, she said hello. But as he got closer, he saw that her eyes were spasming from left to right.

“Are you okay?” he asked.

“Yeah. I just got off my meds, so I’m here. This happens when I get off my meds.”

“Look at me,” he said, and guided her cheek to him. She looked into his eyes as best she could, and after a few minutes of his stare, her eyes settled straight and stopped jerking back and forth

“Well, isn’t that the weirdest thing?” she said.

“I will call you Katrina. We are friends while we are here.”

“Okay,” she said, as he walked away.

Within the day room was another newcomer. She was thin, shy, bright-eyed, with a prominent nose.

“You look just like a doe,” said Dominic.

“Thanks,” she replied meekly.

"How are you?" he asked.

"I don't know. I don't know why I'm here!" and she looked panicked.

He held her hand. "Peace. You will be better. Relax and think of how calm you are right now."

She smiled and calmed down. "Thank you. And who are you?"

"I'm Dominic, who are you?"

"I think my name is...Brenna," she said.

"Dominic!" said Clark. He looked around. Clark looked stern. He gestured Dominic over.

"Yes?"

"You're not a doctor, Dominic. These people are here to see doctors. You've got to keep to yourself."

"Like you do?" Dominic gestured to the teenage girl whose foot Clark was massaging.

"This is Jenny. She's here for – can I tell him?"

Dominic already knew, but waited for her assent.

"She's here for an eating disorder."

"That's funny," said Dominic. "You look like you're in perfect shape."

"Yeah, well I had to come here. I don't know. Some times things just happen. But I'm really freaked out by the people here. It's like, they should have a place for people like me to go to. Have you met this weird blonde woman who just picks fights with people? What's her fucking problem?"

Aleandra, borderline, thought Dominic. He said, "It seems you've made a friend."

"Yeah, Clark is great. Too bad I can't eat with you guys. I've got to eat a special diet in my room--plus I'm on precautions."

A head nurse, Olivia, came in. She was about twenty five and beautiful. She smiled at first, and then frowned in her way at Clark and said, "What did we just talk about, Clark?"

Clark dropped Jenny's foot.

"Okay, that's better. I don't want to have to report this, okay?" She left.

"She looked really angry didn't she?" said Clark.

"No, she just wished it was her foot," said Dominic.

"Really, you really think so?"

"Well she's gone now, so you don't have to keep stopping," said Jenny, wiggling her foot for him.

"I'd better not for now," said Clark.

"So tell me more about spells."

"I don't know what you're talking about," said Clark.

Dominic looked at Jenny.

"Oh you can tell me!" said Jenny. "I won't tell anyone."

"He wants to know how to spell falatashia" said Clark.

"What's that?" she wondered.

"I don't know. That's why we can't spell it."

Olivia leaned in the room and said, "Jennifer, lunchtime."

"Oops. I'm outtie. But I'll see you guys later," and she was gone.

"Don't talk about these things in public," said Clark.

"Do you really think they will understand it?"

"They don't have to understand it. There are ears everywhere. And there are people here who are listening for

that. You have to learn to shut up. You are going to get killed if you don't learn to be quiet."

"Who would kill me?" asked Dominic.

"Don't look," said Clark.

"What?" asked Dominic, but Clark was busy reading a garden magazine. He looked up. There was a janitor at the doorways. Or at least Dominic thought it was a janitor. It was a man in a pale blue outfit. He was saying something under his breath, but nobody seemed to notice him. Dominic noticed that he had a subtle scar on his forehead. Some strange marking —

And then a flash of memories filled his head, and he was busy reading a week old newspaper, desperately ignoring the siren-call that the man was muttering. He marked his clipboard, and walked on.

"Don't follow him," Clark said without moving his mouth.

Dominic followed him. He walked directly through a crowd of people, but nobody noticed him, even as they coincidentally got out of the way just in time for him to pass, each for an apparently unrelated reason. Dominic watched as the

janitor checked every room, marking something in his book. He checked every room, that is, except one in the women's wing, where men were not permitted to walk down. He ignored it. Room 204. Dominic returned to Clark.

"Don't you respect your life?" asked Clark. "Listen when I speak!"

"I sometimes don't listen," said Dominic. "I once touched a Torah after the rabbi's aid told me it was untouchable. I don't think he saw me. I didn't want to touch it either. My hand just leaped out and touched it."

"You're a karma thief!" said Clark. "Do you see your reflection when you look in the mirror?"

"Yeah, of course. Why not?"

"Well that might be an illusion. You might not be seeing yourself."

"Do you see yourself, Clark?"

"Not when I am quantum cycling. I can look in the mirror and see everything behind me."

"What's in 204?"

“Six! That’s a powerful number. There is no room 204 here.”

“How do you know? That’s the women’s wing. We can’t go down it.”

“I’ve been in every room in this hospital. I know how to discover and stay within blind spots. I’ve been outside to the store and back, without anybody knowing. It’s really too easy, being here.”

“Why do you stay?”

“I’ve got to play the system. I can’t alert the wrong people. And you’ve got to be quiet about this. Do you see this? This is a book of inventions I’ve made. Do you know we can make a city under water? I discovered this stuff 30 years ago, but the army stole it from me. I am just now remembering the inventions I’ve come up with. Do you know why nobody will steal this book?”

“Why?”

“Look!” he pointed at a weird face in a wall on the cover of Clark’s homemade book. “They won’t know they’re avoiding it, but nobody can touch this book.” Dominic shrugged.

“You don’t have shoes, but they let me have my shoes without the laces. See this? I made these laces out of milk boxes. They call me 'Edison.' I invent everything I need.”

“How can I explore the different rooms in this hospital?” asked Dominic.

“You’ve got to know how to be invisible. Watch this.”

Clark walked out of the room and stepped behind a doctor. In a minute, he was out past security in the outer lobby. Dominic was mystified. When he was at last out of sight, Dominic returned to the day room.

He sat next to the Doe, Brenna. “Hello, gentle Brenna.”

“Hi,” she whispered.

“You feeling any better?” She shook her head no.

“There’s something you can’t remember--is that true?”

“Yes.”

“Okay, I’m going to touch your hand, and when I do, you will remember what you want to remember.”

He touched her hand. Her eyes widened and lit up.

“Oh,” said, “No!”

“Forget now!” he said.

“Okay,” she said, “But how did you do that?”

“It's okay,” said Dominic. “Don't worry.”

“A flower for a beautiful girl,” said Clark. And he handed an impatient to Brenna.

“From the front garden?” asked Dominic.

“There is no garden out front,” growled Clark. Dominic looked at Brenna. Brenna, however, was oblivious.

“Groups are meeting in ten minutes” said a voice over the PA system.

“How are we all doing?” asked Diane.

“Horrible!” said Aleandra.

“Horrible. Okay. Anybody else?”

“I want to go home,” said another.

“Okay. Some of you are interested in going home. We’re going to do our best to get you home as soon as possible. The doctors have to be sure your medications are right or that you’re on the right treatment so you can go home. Now I’m going to talk to you about relaxing. Do some of you feel like you keep working and working but don’t have time to relax? Knowing how to limit yourself is essential to maintaining that mental balance you need. How about we go around the room and talk about the kind of daily stresses we each go through.”

One by one, the consumers took turns relating the jobs and family stresses they went through. Aleandra talked at length, and had to be interrupted. Brenna whispered that she didn’t remember her stresses.

“How about you, Dominic?”

“I don’t have any stresses. I just work part time and study for the rest of the day. I have a coworker who calls me lazy, that I should do more with my time.”

“This sounds so familiar,” said Brenna.

The talked more about relaxation, and knowing how to say ‘no’ to doing too much, when suddenly Brenna exclaimed, “I remember now! I know how I got here. It was a hit and run! I hit them and didn’t stop to see if they were okay.” She was crying. “I went home and tried to commit suicide. I didn’t even check to see if they were okay. I didn’t even stop!”

Clark put his arm around her shoulders while the group murmured.

Later that day, Dominic cloaked himself the way Clark had, and looked through the records and stat sheets. The gist of it was this: Room 204, Andrea Verbatim, 18 years old, tended for by her parents, who are now submitting her for Adult Foster Care. Mental retardation, knows only a few words. Neither violent nor suicidal. Staying here till Dr. Jagger returns to Morrow Clinic in Carson City. To be transferred in seven days.

He replaced the papers and returned to the day room to think things through.

The next morning, many patients met early in the morning to talk to Dominic, to discuss their treatment, and sought advice regarding when to leave.

"Brenna is confused, and your 'doctoring' is confusing her more," said Clark. "She asked me if I was God and you were Jesus. Did you tell her that?"

"No. What did you tell her?"

"I said we all have God in us, but that I wasn't any more God than she was."

"She *is* confused," said Ray. "They checked up about the street with the hit and run. There were no reports of a car accident anywhere near there. I think she imagined all that."

"Did you change your watch?" asked Clark.

"No, why?"

"My clock was ten minutes behind yours. Now they are exactly entangled."

"That's odd," said Dominic.

"I've been travelling outside time," Clark added.

"I finally met my roommate," said Dominic. "He's an atheist. Which is weird because he's a head professor at Bible Word."

"Yeah, he's in for alcohol induced delirium," said Ray.
"He's really nice."

"Clark, can I talk to you for a minute?" asked Dominic.
They walked to the cafeteria. "How do you break a block spell?"

"Nobody here knows how to make a block spell," said Clark.

"All the same, how do you do it?"

"Are you trying to break my spells?"

"No. You know I am going to leave here eventually, so I'd like to know."

"Well the reptiles use a cryptogram that is unbreakable. But most minor ones require a key. When I was Rah I could break spells with my spermatozoa sun rays. That is the key. The man enters the woman. There is quantum completion in that. Every perfect work has one flaw in it. In the past, the masters would draw a perfect picture, and then smudge one part of it.

Because a completely perfect spell can be copied. You need to hide your perfection. That is the vice-breaker. You need to make the spell perfect and then you can break it.”

“Thanks,” said Dominic.

That night, after Dominic saw that everybody who was anxious was calm enough to sleep, and after Clark had disappeared, Dominic touched his head, his heart, his hand, walked backwards into his bed, unmade it, then sat on the floor and meditated all night. The staff came in periodically to flash lights in the face of sleepers to make sure they were sleeping, but they overlooked his bed.

At five, he cloaked himself and walked to room 204 in the women’s hall. The door confused him, but he looked closely at the outlines. He spent half an hour there, transfixed. Then he pulled a magic marker from his pocket, and drew a line down the center. Having satisfied the spell, he then opened the door and walked in.

Dominic was surprised to see that the woman inside was already awake. She was wringing her fingers and mumbling to herself. But as he walked in, the room dissolved, and Dominic smelled pine, saw the outline of pine branches above him, and through them, moonlight.

In the center of it all: Andrea. Full lips; full as the moon, her top lip as straight as God, her lower lip as round as Satan. The wind wooed with her humming; the trees pulsed with her humming. In her hands, a tapestry, nearly finished, beautiful even though obscured by the shadows. And intent on it were Andrea's dark dark eyes, as heavy as black-hole Hispanic eyes, or Brazilian beamers, that put the taste of caramel and dark chocolate in Dominic's mouth. She was as round and full as a midnight festival, her hair as dark as the sky between stars.

"Sit down, you poor wanderer," she said.

"Hi, I'm Dominic. I didn't mean to barge into your room in the middle of the night. I just saw that you had a spell on your door that the spy couldn't break, and--"

"Shh" her lips were doves. "This hospital is a place of rest. You are too full of worry. You do not know what you are seeing."

"What do you mean?" asked Dominic.

She looked at him sadly.

"Dominic, you are insane."

"Well I had a spell cast on me, I think. I don't know, I can't remember. But then Clark told me how to counteract it."

"There are no spells. There is no conspiracy. There is no magic. This is a mental ward, and you are suffering from a sustained delusion."

"What do you mean?"

"Tonight you crept into the room of a girl who never learned to talk. You believe you are having a conversation with her. You don't know that she is just babbling. Any normal person would hear you mumbling in a sleep walk to a girl who isn't even speaking in turn. Do you not see the madness in this, Dominic? She probably looks beautiful to you, but she is not beautiful. She sounds like your mother or sister, but she is raving. And you, the perfect innocent, you charming man, you

will take your meds and in a few weeks all this will be like a pleasant dream.”

“But you *are* beautiful. And this may not be a real woods around me, but Andrea, my sight of you is an eternal inhale. You are much dearer to me than the mother who was once my home. To me you are Andrea, woman, *the* woman, the face of the universe.”

“Do you know the name of the universe?” asked Andrea.

“No, I don't.”

“The name of the universe is Mother, and this blue circle you think you see on my forehead, this is the circle she wears on her forehead. It is the zero of everything. And you are Dominic, who wrote the Bible of his enemies.”

“Do you know me?”

“I have read you through the air,” she said. “And now you have found me out.”

“I don't understand,” said Dominic, “But this feels mere peaceful than my dreams, even the dreams that entertain me

with emotions I have never felt while waking. What are you?

Where are you from?"

"Gentle Dominic. Drink in the moment. There are nightmares ahead of you. The tree of knowledge grows from the graveyard. Death is the price of truth. You are the lucky one who is given the god-eyes of psychosis. Yet, you can be only as much as you realize you already are."

"Please, sing for me," said Dominic.

"You are out of your right mind, blameless boy. My song will quiet your racing thoughts:

Kalah darei mesahya

Karist eima faralla

Sooshee sunkay dahreima

Dusto von biqu to lada"

Dominic felt Nirvana through his body, felt blissful innocence and perfection.

In moments, he fell asleep.

“Dominic, wake up.”

He did, with music in his mind. He looked up at Clark.

“Your patients sent me. They've been in the day room since 5. And it appears you are coming out of your Godhood. Some rest for the wicked?”

“I am perfection,” said Dominic. They walked to the day room.

Ray, Netta, Brenna, and Shawn greeted him in the day room.

“Must have upped your meds,” said Shawn. “They can't get mine right neither.”

They talked of the new patients, of treatment plans, and then, sadly, of their own futures.

“Is it going to be like this when we leave?” asked Ray. “I mean, I've been here before. You meet people, and they don't care about you once they leave.”

“We won't forget,” said Dominic.

“Hello,” said a man behind them. It was Stephen, Dominic's roommate. “The famous counterstaff. Glad to meet you.”

They fell silent.

“I remember now where I've seen you before, Dominic. You haunt the libraries of Bible Word college, don't you?”

“I study there regularly,” said Dominic. “Fantastic library.”

“The best in town,” he said. “But you're not a student, are you?”

“Not an enrolled student.”

“Studying for the purest motives. The sacred truth. Hopefully when we get out, I will see you studying there again.”

“What do you teach?” asked Ray.

“Philosophy of religion, comparative religion, classes like that.”

“Don't they mind you being an atheist?” asked Clark.

“No. And I'm not an atheist. I'm agnostic. I believe God is beyond human comprehension. Trying to do things like prove he exists is blasphemous. We mere humans have to come to the

hard conclusion that we just can't know everything, no matter how urgently we seek the truth." He winked at Dominic.

"I'm an atheist," said Dominic. "A humanist. I believe the question of God is used to condemn humanity."

"But then again, we are told that God made us in his image," said Stephen. "That the greatest being in the universe loves us enough to die for us says a lot about the importance of human beings. You could say that human beings are what God loves most in the universe, enough for him to become one, and even that the universe exists so we have a place to be. Wouldn't you call that humanistic?"

"Not at all," said Dominic. "It makes us into faulty replicas of something nonhuman. It makes us into images of something else. It takes man away from man. We are told to love something that isn't part of mankind more than anything in the universe. We are told that God is good for loving us, when I think it should be expected to love us, and not something praiseworthy. Furthermore, God seems to want to kill us in hell, and to save us by faking his own death. This isn't humanistic. It makes God into everything and human beings into nothing."

“If you continue your studies long enough, Dominic, you may come to realize that education is a way for man to get away from man. But if you put your faith in humanity, that is good for you. You need to put your heart into what you feel is important. In fact, there are many humanistic branches of Buddhism which deny a personal God.”

“Of this, I am aware,” said Dominic.

“You might be surprised to discover that there are many who share your views, people from all the world religions, and that even those who believe in God aren't so different from yourself. But what is it you are up to here? Making the most of your stay?”

“Yes, learning and applying.”

“Can I listen in?” asked Stephen.

“That,” said Dominic, “Would be a breach of client confidentiality.”

“Well we can't have that,” smiled Steve. “Maybe I will see some of you fellows at breakfast.” And with that, he left.

That evening, Dominic and Clark played chess while Clark interpreted the hidden meanings of the daily news. There were embedded within it, Clark explained, within world-historical events and clues, the beginnings of great events, conspiracies, and hidden wars. Even the time that a given story was told down to the second had deep significant clues.

Brenna walked in, looking confused.

"I think this is for you," she said, handing Dominic a folded up piece of paper.

"Did you write a note?" asked Dominic.

"I don't know where I got it, but I didn't dare open it. I just know it's for you."

"Let me see it," said Clark, and grabbed it. He unfolded it and looked it over. "It's just scribbles. Are you sure you didn't write this, Brenna, and then forgot?"

"No, I didn't write it."

Dominic took it and looked. It read:

"Dominic. Don't believe me if I call you a boy. Mind of lightning, brow of thunder! What right have I to call you a boy, when you touch me as you do? At 10:30 you will see me, and I

will see you. The main meeting room. Don't wear your glasses.

Andrea.”

“Do you know what it is?” asked Clark.

“Maybe you wrote it and gave it to me, and that's why I gave it back,” said Brenna.

“Well its clearly not writing. Unless somebody wrote it with their foot,” said Clark. And then, without moving his mouth, “Did the man in the jumpsuit send it?”

“You guys worry too much,” said Dominic. “Look how a few scratches of ink shake you to the core.” He folded the paper neatly, and set it in his pocket.

“How gently you fold said ink scratching,” said Clark. Dominic stuck his tongue out at him.

At 10, Clark decided he needed to prepare for the next day with karma meditation. Shawn and the girls were also exceptionally tired, even though it was an hour before enforced bedtime. They bowed out, leaving Dominic to slip away into the meeting room.

Or he would have. But it was locked. There were only two doors, and each was locked. The windows on the other side didn't open, and how would he get outside of the hospital anyway? But if he couldn't get inside, that means Andrea couldn't either. Which meant that she would meet him at the door. So he sat in front of the window pane and mirror meditated.

At 10:25 he stopped, and looked around. Nothing. 10:29, nothing. 10:35, nothing.

He waited till 10:55. They would be checking to see if he were in bed at 11:00. He took the note out of his pocket, looked at it. But all it said was scribbles. Dominic considered. He had been feeling more normal today. The meds had been working. Maybe he had lost his seeing eye that could see through spells?

Spells? It was time to stop pretending to his head nurse that he was normal and admit it: he was delusional. Did he really think that Ruby didn't know of his mental state? Was she so stupid as to be duped by a psychotic?

He balled the paper up in his hand.

“You crumble my heart when you crumble my word. I faint with despair!”

Dominic looked up. Behind his reflection in the mirror of the plane stood the dark rich face of Andrea.

“Andrea! How did you get in there?”

“You mean you can break the spell that Thepo put on my door, but you can't pick a silly lock?”

The door clicked, and Dominic's heart lit up like instant noon. He slipped in.

His hand in hers, and he looking down into the darkness of her eyes. They were blanketed in shadows, and warm as the heart of earth, breathing into each other.

“I counted the seconds, Dominic.”

“Why didn't you get me sooner?” he murmured.

“I couldn't,” she said, and looked away. But he touched her cheek, turned it back to face him. She was mature and innocent and deep as an ocean wise--such a child of the Mother. He closed his eyes and anointed her mouth with a kiss.

The kiss was wisdom. He felt her even heart, felt the electricity in her lips which had charged her whole body, a

charge which had skirted the chaotic void of her womb, a hell of potential that threatened to break the hospital like pure nova. He felt her mind, a thousand riddles and contradictions, a mind which lay behind every mysticism, every religion, every metaphor – she was daughter of the Mother, the child of Matriall, and his heart sang out her name “Ayalloeu” the black of the black eye. Her madness was dancing and divine, her order the order of time's pillars. Deep, deep, deep, dark and deep was the kiss that broke the blind of Dom.

“I kept myself for you,” she said. “Ever since I was a child, I saw through the Maya of the Thepos, and I knew my own salvation was in madness, that I could only worship my Truth if I remained mad to the world. And you braved the world. How long did you leave yourself blind, Dominic? Did you just wake up for me? And how did you know I would be here? How did you know to find me?”

“I don't know,” Dominic said. “I only know that this is right and whole and now, and that is everything.”

Both their faces lit the room, sending a light of sleep on everybody else in the hospital.

“What do you know, then, about the world?” she asked.

“Only questions,” he said. “Who are the Thepos?”

“The theological poets,” she said. “You are a materialist, and now you know that matter is mother. But you should also know by now that human beings have been social from the beginning. Our mind is made to be hypnotized, to fall in love with the charisma of leaders. The thepos were the magicians who stole their fire from the mythologists first, and the religionists second, and who sang commands into the metaphorical mind.”

“How can I learn to sing like this?” asked Dominic.

“There is no need to. We have each other. The delusions of men should be left to their amusement, but we have found one another.”

He kissed her eye. “I live and die for truth. I live to wrest the power from self-deceit and delusion. Would you love me if I lived only for love?”

“I see you are a man!” she said. “And right now I want you to be as woman as me: living only for love, caring only for me. But no, I could not love you otherwise. I love you as you are, Dominic.”

They kissed, and clung together into the depths of the night.

Everybody slept in late that day, and everybody was happy. The whole group rated their moods points higher than previously. It was Sunday, and the consumers felt like family.

Even when Brenna left with her parents in the afternoon, during her discharge they were not too sad, but tender-sad; they wished her health, peace, and happiness.

That evening, while they were eating, Dominic felt the sun at his back. He turned around, and saw Andrea, out of her room during the day, for the first time since her stay. She walked with high head, eyes straight forward, dancer's grace.

"Is that your sister, Dominic?" asked Clark. "That's the first visitor you've had since you've been here!"

But when he took her hand, and loved it with the gentle of his lips, the entire table fell into consternation.

Phil walked up and exclaimed, "Did we wander from our room, Andrea? Let's get back. We'll bring your dinner to you in less than half an hour."

Andrea's voice was sword sharp: "Sit and do not hinder me now."

Phil gasped. "I'm sorry. I thought you were Andrea. Who are you?"

She looked at him. He sat down and looked at his tray.

"This is Andrea, from room 204," Dominic explained to his friends. "We've talked a few times."

"There is no 204--" Clark began, and then looked at Andrea and appeared troubled.

"Let me get you food," said Dominic, and headed to the kitchen. Andrea sat, looked after him, then leveled her eyes at Dominic's friends. They squirmed and looked at their food.

"Here you go," said Dominic a few minutes later. "As your nose has already told you, salmon steaks are on the menu. The rest you can take or leave."

Andrea smiled and began to eat.

Afterwards, Andrea and Dominic sat on the sofa, while the others talked quietly at the table. When Andrea retired for the night, they approached him.

"I don't trust her," said Clark. "There is something wrong with this woman."

"I agree," said Ray. "You have to make sure you are well before you get too close to somebody here. She may seem nice to you, but you could change your mind later."

Staff, however, was beside itself in amazement. Dominic overheard them saying, "Yes, that was Andrea. Yes, the mentally disabled one. No, her parents never mentioned anything like this. Is it latent learning? She spoke clear English. We have to keep Dominic away from her. Well, call her doctor, it could be we hit on some perfect combination of medications. But then again, this might not be a good sign."

Dominic was given a "ten-foot mandate" regarding Andrea. They both found this amusing. Around pillars, in corners, behind her shower curtains: kisses, hugs, muted conversations, pledges, trysts. Nobody knew what to make of Andrea, but over the next few days, it was agreed that Andrea should still go see Dr. Jagger at the Morrow clinic. And wouldn't her parents be delighted to see her transformation?

They weren't. They couldn't bring themselves to believe it. And when Andrea refused to say a word to them, they became skeptical regarding the whole affair. Dominic was summoned for questioning, but he only shrugged.

That night, Andrea entreated Dominic. "They mean to send me to the Morrow clinic, and this cannot be. My Father is there, and this cannot be."

"How can I help?" asked Dominic.

"It will be hard for you to hear this," she said.

"I didn't hear you."

"That's my asthma."

"What miasma?" asked Dominic.

"Exactly. Tomorrow. I need you to go to hell in my place."

"I don't understand."

"You can't understand nor do you need to," said Andrea. "But will you?"

"Yes," he said.

She pulled him into her breast, patted his head. Then she slipped away, leaving him confused and pondering in the dark of his room.

The next day was both the day Dominic was to be sent home and the day Andrea was to be sent to the Morrow clinic. Dominic knew that they would be reunited soon. You don't find love just to lose it a day later. Such love does not get stolen by circumstance.

Dominic had only his papers to take with him. He wished goodbye to his friends, and they mourned as if he were dying. Though he had the email addresses of Clark and Ray, there remained a futility on their faces.

Andrea was lead by nurse Charter to the center desk to prepare for pickup. Phil gestured for Dominic to come to his room, away from her.

"He will not." Andrea was ice. Every staff member became silent. She walked up to him, turned his head, kissed him, and right when his lips parted with hers, she breathed in sharply and pulled out Dominic's breath.

“Dominique,” that is quite enough, said Phil. Dominique bowed her head apologetically. “You have good intentions, but Andrew is not ready for this. Here, get her to her room. Andrew, Andrew. Okay, breathe into your hands. He has asthma, get his meds.”

Andrew gulped in the respirator, struggled to call out Dominique's name, but couldn't remember it. He jumbled his speech.

“Don't get excited, Andrew. We aren't taking you anywhere dangerous. We just need you to be calm and relaxed, and we are going to meet Dr. Jagger, okay?”

Phil stayed by his side; the papers were signed and the taxi prepared. As Andrew was escorted through the front doors, he looked back at somebody he had seen before, a middle aged man with glasses, who shouted out one last thing: “I told you so!”

*

The air was alive. Andrew didn't understand the idle gab of the taxi-driver, who seemed to talk for the sake of talking, but he understood the man's body language. Andrew felt the God of the air, the Holy Spirit and its many demon-words living in and through the cab driver's mind. Andrew moaned.

He didn't know where they were heading. He only knew he didn't want to go there. Within two hours they finally arrived at the Morrow Clinic. The bricks were painted white, but were tainted with rain. Along the front door was a scribble a patient had left behind which would have been illegible even to somebody literate; it read: *Welcome to the center of the universe.*

Admittance required sitting in the ambiance, feeling the plays of power flowing from secretary, to undersecretary, with staff members filtering in with the inevitable regularity like stamps of a typewriter. Somebody took a photo of Andrew and wrote down his name. He was led to his room: thankfully alone.

Andrew didn't know of the chaotic womb which was newly humming inside of him. He couldn't hear it for the

unending cries of the prisoners--or *where was that cry coming from?* He curled up on the bed and fell asleep.

The next day involved both standard tests and not so standard tests, he got a brain scan and new med orders. Dr. Jagger was not back in town, but Andrew was assured he would do just fine till then. Then they would assess him and prepare him for adult foster care. A few employees expected him to talk as he had at the other hospital, but Andrew couldn't.

For *level three* and *level four* patients, the central lounge was allowed. For *level two* patients, they could only leave their personal rooms accompanied by one-on-one staff. *Level one* patients were constantly monitored and even restrained when necessary. Andrew was *level three*.

And so here he was in the central lounge. In it were clients playing cards, clients watching basketball, clients drawing symbols on paper. Andrew smiled. This wasn't so bad.

"Andrew," he intonated to a group of three clients.

"I'm Daniel, I'm Ezekiel to my left, and I'm Michelle to my right," said Daniel, a gray haired man in a green sweater. He

bore a cross on a necklace. His eyes turned back and forth. His eyes said *back and forth I turn over the world, and never do I find a home.*

Andrew felt the spirit between these three. There was another somewhere in here: an Elijah. Andrew touched Daniel's chin, caught his roving eyes, and read: *His name is El, and you are his son. Seek no further, but join the mill.*

Andrew sat down with them and shuffled some cards that were waiting there. Ezekiel and Michelle argued about who owned Europe as of 1923.

"I was, was, beaten. And I was a dog for it," said a man who was hugging himself, walking by. Michelle looked up at him as if he had slapped her.

Andrew cut the deck and without looking held an ace of hearts towards Michelle. She responded: We are the worms of society, and so I know I am *queen* in my heart of hearts. And El was here from the beginning, and he is the beginning.

Andrew reshuffled the deck. He took out a card, set it down, and pointed at Daniel. Daniel said: *You choose not to judge me because I am already judged by one greater than you.*

Andrew was clearly getting nowhere. He handed the cards to Ezekiel, who immediately dropped it, and then grinned and blew on his forefinger. *We can tell you nothing. The guilt-harvesters are coming in two days. Then you will have the answer to your question.*

He had had enough. This place was clearly filled with nothing but hopeless cases. He would wait two days and see what came of it.

**

Andrew was liked. That is, nobody had any serious delusions against him, and that was always good. Dr. Jagger baited him and baited him to talk, but he wouldn't. The tests were inconclusive, but it was clear that Andrew wasn't a threat to himself or others. He was a prime candidate for an AFC home, and he could do it in his hometown, where he could see his parents on a regular basis.

Andrew was happy enough about all this, what he could understand. He had nearly forgotten about the "guilt-herders" the others had mentioned. That is, until they turned up.

They were volunteers who were studying in the field. Their names were Joshua and Clete, and they were brothers. Joshua was a handsome man with long hair, a light beard, arrogant mannerisms awash with charm. He was also a youth pastor at his church. He was studying to be a psychiatrist.

Clete was the younger. He was muscular, mocking, and witty. He was on missions at the same church as his brother. He was studying to be a nurse.

Andrew looked to the client Daniel, who seemed to know the most. *Clete sleeps around. With clients when he can. A whore to all the religions. He is the most trustworthy of the two. Joshua is the vampire. Wonderful charm.*

Andrew disregarded all the nonsense. He said, "Hi, I'm Andrew."

"Hello Andrew," said Joshua. "How are you?"

"Mmm," he said.

"That's good. How do you like it here so far at the Morrow clinic?" *You are God's people,* said Joshua. *You are the sick who enter heaven first. I love you as the only honest examples of what men really are.*

"Food's not good," said Andrew.

"Depends on what you're used to. I am partial to it myself." *Tell me why you deserve food at all. What wrong have you done to come here? What poisonous guilt have you been brewing, so I can milk it?*

"Oaks!"

"Oh, you were at Resting Oaks before. Well Clete, come here, he's been to our hometown." *Blood!*

“You've ever been to Starbucks? Our brother Adam is still out there, plugging his way through school.” It all snapped into place.

“My name is Dominic!”

The brothers looked at each other, shocked. The clients all seized back at once like startled serpents.

“My name is Dominic Emerson Seer. I have been brought here by mistake.”

“Code blue,” said the white-clothed attendant. He wrestled Dominic to the floor. Dominic felt the sharp of a needle in his left buttock, and in a few moments he fell asleep.

It would have been three days of solitary if Dominic were in prison. But in fact, he was in the loving arms of the hospital, so it was three days of quiet time. Whatever the case, his mind didn't seem to slow with all the lull, but to spin faster and faster. He could still hear the air a little, but it only breathed threats. The patients were plotting on his life, which was fine, but then again, so were the staff, and that was fine too, since it gave him something to think about.

First came the changed meds. That was weird. Wouldn't they just ship him back Resting Oaks, where he would get a proper dismissal? These new meds he didn't trust. But he took them all the same. What goes in, must go out again – and it was all sugar anyway.

But the nurses kept needling him, the tests got more and more vigorous, and finally Dominic figured it was time to apply some Clark moves.

When the nurse came in at 7 p.m. to give him his meds, she was fidgeting with fear. Her demon was burdening her. So

Dominic leapt at her and kissed her clean on the mouth. Well, that absolved the demon, but now she was on the floor screaming--which was fine with Dominic, because he meanwhile was flying through the hallway. Then he signed left, and turned into a custodian. He was yelled at to beware a free agent, and nodded.

What was it Andrea had feared here? Oh Andrea! Dominic's heart hurt. But wasn't it her father who ran this hospital? El. There was no way to go out of the maze without going into its center, like a double spiral that spiraled to the center before spiraling back out.

He found that every door was blocked, and his disguise was disintegrating. He stopped at a fire extinguisher and took the key. He said: *I embody perfection*, and opened an unmarked side-door.

Darkness. Silence. Stairs going down. He ran down, and then listened at the door. Cool music from inside. He opened the door. It was a doctor's lounge, but nobody seemed to be around. He slipped through the back door, ransacked a locker, and became a doctor.

A panel besides the door gave a skeletal map of the hospital. But where would El be? No doubt he would be both the proprietor and a patient at once. Would he be in one of the patient wings? Dominic doubled his fingers upon his temples and talked to himself.

Janitor.

He flew through the wings, using the doctor's set of keys, turning left, right, down, through, till at last he found the basement.

The hall was swamped in riddles and symbols. He couldn't move a hand-span if his mind were not freed by mania. With every step of the hall was foreboding, *turn left, back, don't pass*, and in turn his mind had to judo through it: El of hell, hellos, bellows of the furnace, bell of war, Baal of sun, ball of fire, bull, terrible center bull—

It spoke. *Child, descendant, sun of el, second, follower, less, lower, not him, borrowed, derivative, the creative.*

And then Dominic saw his childhood vanish. He he became the uncreated. He had held his father as an infant, his father's father in swaddling clothes. Dominic was the fatherless

of the mother, the Third Eye of the All, the center of the sun--and such thoughts as these charged him with power.

Empowered thus, he bolted at the blockstopped door at the end of the hall, and burst through it.

Inside, a calm room. Lights. Classical music. And on the bed, a terrified man, covered in wrinkles, waving his hands desperately against the intruder. El.

On his forehead, the mark of repression. The entire hospital was shaking with El's hand gestures, and Dominic heard dozens of men rushing down the stairs, down the halls. In seconds they would have him to destroy.

He grabbed a book from the desk, and scribbled upon it the mark of El. Just when he finished writing it, it disappeared from the paper. Dominic held it up to El. El sat down calmly on the bed, laid himself out, and fell asleep.

Dominic walked amidst the crowd of staff and policemen. He held forth the El. They parted. He walked through. He walked up the stairs, following the scream of alarms. They wordlessly opened the doors for him as if unaware he was present.

Within a few minutes, he was outside the door, free of the hospital. But now the name of El was too heavy for him to carry any further. He looked back at the hospital, wary.

Finally, he ripped up the name, and stuffed the strips of paper in his mouth. He chewed and swallowed. And then Dominic was gone from this earth.

*

The logic of the words had just hit his stomach when Dominic saw the landscape rustle like a blanket being billowed by two large hands. Then the blanket was pulled completely from under him, and he was found standing on the skirt of a large purple mountain. He knew to climb.

So up the mountain he went, like a goat, up its steep serious face. He sometimes scaled sheer cliffs, rising with inevitable determination like a voice spoken at the bottom of the sea ascending towards heaven.

Atop, he looked down upon the world. He saw Gods and heroes, the threads of fate, the worms of karma, the great Mythosphere. Where was he to find *his* place? He looked to the sun.

The sun burned yellow and insulted his eye. But he continued to stare. Tears ran down his cheeks, but he continued to stare. Then, having pierced the three veils of the maiden, he saw the originary words on her forehead. Five of them, the Five of Man.

He sang them like three singers, and a great wind picked up, pulling his hair wild from his head, till it flew out long and longer like sun rays across the sky. At last, the wind caught him up like a mother her child, and he was swaddled in his golden hair. He supped at the nipple of the universe, and warmed to the silk of her teat. He drank his fill and then jumped free, through the air, and rode the wind through the sky, over the wide expanse of the face of the earth, gusting over worlds and places.

**

Standing before the metal monastery, which was black as pitch and sounding out like an anvil, he said "I am perfection," and grabbed the word he spoke like a sword in his hand. In he went.

His eyes did not blink as he waved the sword like a ribbon, slashing the artillery of books, the volumes that hurled at him from the shelves. Two fell next to him, opening on the ground. From them, two ghost authors glared at him, projected like holograms above the pages, breathing fire at him. But his sword was a ribbon, and it caught the fire up in a great shield around him. More authors alighted from the pages of other books: saints and philosophers breathed hate at him, scowling at his audacity. The greatest guilt spitters and religious founders, the greatest thinkers and professors, all breathed arrows and missiles against him, but he caught them in his great spinning shield, and burst back their own pages with the fire they had shouted.

Finally he arrived at the door that had troubled him so much before. His blade snickered and burst the door to splinters. Inside hung webs and webs of tapestries from the walls. He snickered his blade and a double headed eagle was cut from the fabric. In its threaded hands: a globe. Dominic twice folded it, and place it in his pocket. The treasure was his. Now home.

Under his door panel — licks of flame. He opened the door, heard the lightening fast arpeggios of harps within. The hum of Aum, the throw of Hallelujah, the sigh of Vivoce, all winged through the air. Flames on the wall, but the floor was the water of a perfect undisturbed pool, bottomless and blue.

He swallowed the ribbon sword, walked upon the surface of the water. Ripples sounded like bells as he stepped toward the center of the room. The great chrysalis shell in the center of the pond broke, opened like the steeples of cupped hands. The pearl within beamed at Dominic.

“Andrea.”

The Goddess breathed. “You've returned to me,” she said.

“You abandoned me to hell,” said Dominic.

“I abandoned hell to you. There could be no hell where Dominic stood. When you breathed your soul into me, you breathed also your word. I will forever sing your praise.”

They embraced.

"Dominic," she murmured. "You hold me as soft as a midnight snow."

"Mmm."

"So soft."

"We are twin born of the Goddess," he said.

"Where this wisdom?" she asked.

"I drank in the milk of the Mother."

"And now you will give it to me," she said.

"To live is to create. Life is in creating. Love is a form of creativity. Language is a form of creativity. The flow and flux of matter is the place of man. We are the masters of language, parents of every God, the inventors of each word and tongue. We are Man and Wife. Life is all."

She slipped from her feather robe, pulled his soft face into her bosom. He nuzzled her wide areolas and hummed into her heart.

His fingers were shadows over her body, as light and quick as darkness. His fingers through her long lush dark curly hair. He traced the perfect circle of her brow, the infinite zero of blue, and felt its coolness. The blank infant of her brow, that

furrowless blankness, that purity of her brow, and it was a second sun, the holder of a black totality within.

Her lips were overfull, Satanic with desire. He tasted her lower lip, tugged it with his teeth. They touched the tongues of their love, and she flicked her tip like a serpent, sending electricity clear through his body, like a bolt-bursted tree.

She laid back, and Dominic pulled free from his clothes. He lay into the nakedness of the Goddess. Lava was her blood, plasma her breath. She exhaled suns. She parted her legs, parted her lips, and he was at her door in love. With an exultant breath, the walls had melt, and he sank into the warmth of bliss.

They loved through the soft of the night.

*

Dominic slept for five days. When he awoke, Andrea had left. The house was neat, orderly, swept. On his desk: library books, overdue.

He looked at them, curious. Then he called work. It turned out work had gotten word of his health issues and had temporarily taken him off the schedule. They would get him back in an apron as soon as he was ready. Dominic said he was ready immediately.

“Well Jenny just called in sick, and she's looking for somebody to fill in for her. Are you sure you're ready?”

“Yes,” said Dominic.

Work was as he left it. Customers were rude when they wanted to be, polite when they wanted to be. His coworkers cajoled him with questions. He answered honestly, unashamed.

“If you ever need anybody to talk to,” said Adam, “You can talk to me.” Dominic shrugged. There wasn't much he needed to talk about.

The bell dinged, and Dominic answered: "Welcome to Starbucks, this is Dominic. What can I get started for you today?"

"Just a minute."

"That will be two fifty."

"No, I didn't order anything, I just want a minute."

"Here at Starbucks, we charge by the minute," said Dominic.

The customer laughed, and so did his coworkers. But after the order was through, Wendy, the boss, asked: "Did Dominic actually make a joke? What did they do to you at that hospital?"

The library was also as he left it. He returned the late books and his fees were waived. Then he scoped the aisles. Some of his favorite books were missing. When he got to a dark corner in the back, he saw a place where a door had recently been bricked over. Other than that, same old library. Dominic inhaled the smell of old book.

He picked up a volume by Nietzsche and read at random: "Live in seclusion so that you can live for yourself. Live in ignorance about what seems most important to your age." He smiled. His friend was also right where he left him.

"Domino!" shouted Alexis as she leapt on his back and squeezed him in a huge hug. "They were right, you're back! How are you?"

Dominic broke her hug, brought her hands together, kissed her cheek. "Lexipro! I missed you," he said.

Alexis gave a sharp intake of breath. Paused. "You missed me?"

"Sure, I did."

"Wow, you've changed. You've never said anything like that before. You know, I hunted for you like normal, but you stopped showing up. Your work said you were sick, so I visited your house with a get well package. Nobody was home. So I kept going back, just to see, and then one day this weird woman answered the door. I guess you know her, or she knows you, because when I asked for you, she got fierce like she was going to chop me up right there. Dominic, who was that?"

"I don't quite remember. Somebody I met at the hospital, I think. Her name was...Dominique."

"They must have sent her to fill in for you," Alexis winked. "So you never gave me feedback on my poems, but that's okay. I sent it to my mom, but she must of just gotten dumped by her boyfriend, because she's volcanic lately. She asked a lot of questions about you too--I don't now why. And so I just sent my stuff out to some editors and magazines. Nothing back yet, though. It's like, you work for years and years and you get zero in return."

"Never be discouraged," said Dominic.

"I've still been writing, actually. Some 'Where the hell did you go?' poems. You must come see." She lead him by the hand. Dominic followed.

**

“So what exactly happened in there?” asked Alexis.

“I think I just had a breakdown. Maybe its genetic, my dad was the same way, I hear. It's nothing serious.”

“So are you on meds right now?” she asked.

“Not really. I should schedule a meeting with my psychiatrist.”

“I wish I could see one myself,” said Alexis brightly. “I'd just give her a pile of poems and say: dig in!”

Dominic looked at her face. He looked at her shelf. He closed his eyes and let a little bit of inlight shine out. Then he gave the notion up.

“You have to tell me about this Dominique. Did you hook up with her at the hospital?”

“I don't remember much. I don't think that sort of thing happens at a mental clinic. What did she look like?”

“Like Juno holding a hand full of thunderbolts!” she laughed. “Maybe she's this crazy girl who is going to kill me out of jealousy.”

"Hmm."

"I don't want to be mean when I say this."

"What?"

"Maybe that's why you were so quiet. Like you had a little repression, and you just needed to let it out. Maybe this was the best thing for you. So now you can let others in." She smiled.

"Hmm," he said. He looked at Nema's book. Then he said, "I think I'm going to do some research on the internet."

"That was abrupt! Are you going to look up your illness? What is it you've got anyway?"

"Originality," said Dominic.

"Of course, darling. What poet can resist it?"

"What did your mother ask about me?"

"Oh, I suppose she thinks we're going to hook up or something. Because she asked about your background, and where I met you, and have I seen you lately, and where did you go. Maybe she's getting bored and wants to pretend to be a mother again."

"Does she still go by 'Nema Prose'?"

“Sure. She got famous with that name.”

“Read me those poems you were talking about.”

“Okay,” she smiled, “you asked for it...”

The internet didn't have much to say about Nema Prose. It talked about her professional status, her bibliography, a light biography. Dominic wasn't sure what he was after, which meant he would never let it go till he was sure--but then, why not just let this one ride? He needed to get back in step with reality.

Dr. Alex Fellows was glad to hear Dominic was doing good, and apologized for any mix ups they had. He also got Dominic on a medicine regime of an antidepressant and an antipsychotic. When Dominic asked about any patient named Dominique, Alex said that he couldn't discuss other patients.

And then it was easy. Go to work, go to the library, go for walks, listen to Alexa's poetry, give fruitful advice, take the meds, see a case manager between doctor visits, continue with his philosophy goals. Dominic could again say “Life is beautiful,” and feel the truth of it.

After a few months of this, Dominic felt his philosophical system was coming along quite nicely. He may never find a publisher for it, or even a friend who would understand it or care to try, but it was his private joy. The day he sent it out to the agents, he sent it out as a first born son to college. "Do your best," he said. "Whatever happens, you will never let me down."

The agent on the top of his list was a New York city agent named Thomas Kurst. When that same agent wrote him back within ten days, Dominic was at first elated. Then he considered how light the envelope was and knew that it was a generic rejection slip.

"That's the first one to put on the wall," he said. He pulled out the paper. It was strange, with a texture like a twenty dollar bill, and even with a watermark of a double headed eagle holding a globe of the world. It was apparently ripped out of a book, since the left edge was frayed. Whatever language the script, it wasn't English—except, of course, for the violent red letters of marker written over the width of the page. They read:

"We're Pregnant! --Andrea."

With that bit of gospel, Dominic was able to wrench open a nest of memories – so much so that he decided to call in for a few days of work. Pregnant? Andrea? He recalled her image, and breathed in deeply. Andrea! The Goddess! But what was she *really* like? Hadn't she been mentally ill? Retarded even? Or wasn't that also a delusion? And now he was a father? Or maybe this was her delusion. But how had she sent him a letter marked from Mr. Kurst? Had she somehow intercepted his mail? Was she in fact stalking him?

Dominic picked up the ripped book page and gave it his first thorough study. The words on it were not English, and appeared to have no vowels (at least no circular shaped letters), but somehow, he felt their meaning. There was some trace here of how he had first gone crazy.

That night he took double his medication and tried to forget about it. Still, he didn't destroy the paper. Not yet.

The next day, as he swept the coffee shop floor, Dominic contemplated possibilities.

"It's the old Dominic back!" his coworkers explained, and he smiled at them.

"Deep in thought," said Alexa that night. They had been watching a lot of movies together lately. He was always careful to hand her hands back to her when she tried to take his, and to deflect her kisses to his cheek. But she was graceful in rejection, and did not complain. Dom was Dom, and she would wait a week or a decade, but she would have him in the end.

Dominic began to mirror meditate again, to focus his mind. Finally, he picked up the pregnant paper and read it all through. A flash of the five signs of the sun broke through his mind.

He tripled his medication that night, but still couldn't sleep.

That week was dangerous for Dominic. Twice, garbage trucks ran lights and nearly dashed him off his bike. Then his bike was clean stolen, altogether. On the walk home, he was mugged by three blank-faced boys. Probably high or something. He didn't care. He sang to himself the rest of the way home.

When another literary agent wrote him back, he hefted it up. Too light. He threw it away without opening it.

All was good, and there was no need to study the pregnant paper. Just relax and live life simple and easy. And then he got an email. It read: "Perfection is easy." That was all.

But now Dominic was curious. He recalled the words of the pregnant paper, and though they weren't English, he transliterated them and typed them into a search engine. No results.

Then he typed the words into the address bar. A page came up, symbols.

"The Poets" read the page. There was a picture of a lamb held by a shepherd. Was this a Christian webpage? He tried the links to the pages. There was a list of poets on one page: Domeceus Versuluez. She-Who-Is-Not-Mattria. Quetzal Seersuck. IOIOI. Eberlin Reed.

Then, strangely, below the roll call was a link: *begin*. When he clicked on it, it requested password and identity. Hmm. He recalled the symbols of the sun, which were vowel

symbols. The paper was only consonants. He chose IOIOI and wrote in the corresponding consonants for password.

A new window opened up, a new link. There were symbols that he felt would have driven him to forget, would have forced him to close the system, and even lead him to self-destruct. But he knew the five vowels of the sun, and so read these symbols in a new way.

There was a link to pictures of the members. No group photos. He saw Domeceus, and recognized him as the pastor's father from the church. He looked up not-Mattia, and recognized who must have been Nema Prose. Quetzal was the bird of paradise through the drive thru. Eberlin was the blue janitor from the hospital. As for IOIOI, there was no picture, only a sign. Dominic could not penetrate it.

The weird thing about the pictures was that they were all obviously taken when the subjects weren't looking, as if by a private investigator. Were these poets aware that they were the subjects of this website? Or whose website was this?

He searched links of articles, but found only more and more symbols. His unconscious read them and filled them with

sun vowels, but he couldn't put into words what he was learning.

That night he returned home and wrote a letter to Mr. Kurst. It only had a reversed block symbol on it, which, when written in English, read: come to me now.

Dominic worked, studied, and played like normal after that. The accidents and bad luck increased, but he cheerfully ignored it. Still, beyond his peaceful composure, he felt a great thickening of imminence, so much so that he didn't even blink when he opened the door to his apartment to see the Goddess staring right back at him.

“Andrea” he said.

“You call and I can't but answer.” Low child voice.

Beautiful. Words that stick to you like chocolate to greedy hands.

He had her head in his hands in seconds, without a hint of doubt, as if this were natural and expected. He turned her head, kissed.

“I am yours,” she said, matter-of-factly.

“You must live with me,” he said. “Here. Now. You will never leave again.”

“No,” she said. “I will not.”

And now his heart grew five times its size, and his chest swelled with joy.

He led her to his bed, sat beside her. He put his hand on her stomach.

“Ours?”

“You are my first and last lover, Dominic. My body was made for you. My womb was made only for your son.”

“It is a boy?”

“Our own precious union,” and she nuzzled him.

“I don't even know you,” he said.

“You know me more than you know anything,” she said, and he felt that it was true.

“You left me a second time. Where did you go?”

She drew back, looked him in the eyes. “I needed to clear the way. I've killed who needed killing. I've also foiled a thousand plots against your life, Dominic. I am in fact an angel of protection over you. The thepoes are raging against you.”

“Are we safe?” he asked.

“They are blind. They do not even know who you are any more. I've netted them, put them to sleep with my light, broken down their defenses.”

“Do they meet together? Are they having board meetings on how to kill me? And if so, why in the world!”

“No,” said Andrea. “They are not conscious of you as you are of them. They are merely fingers of the collective unconscious. They do not even know that they are thepoes, or that there is a worldsoul which they work for. They are blind avatars. The Holy Spirit realized long ago that its great deceptions are only possible if its prophets are blind. That is how they are so dangerous. You could say, in effect, that the mind of every man is against you.”

“I don't understand.”

“You are a new word in the world, Dominic, and I am the same. We are the sin against the Holy Spirit--unforgivable. You said you would learn their song. But there is so much unconsciousness even in you. It took you three months to call me. And even then, you sent your first inquiry to my second name.”

“Let's live in quietude. I will work for our family. We don't have to change the whole world.”

“That's what I wanted and want. But you don't mean it. You will have it all. I know you. You don't stop seeking, Dominic. And that is what makes you dangerous. Even now I lust for that power and that bold assertion.”

He looked at her now, as a man looks upon his wife. They fell in each others arms and would not again be drawn apart.

They decided to name their son Gabriel. With the insurance benefits from Starbucks, they afforded a doctor. Soon, Andrea was swollen like a pear. Her broad nipples grew even wider and darker. Her skin glowed.

Work was good, studies were good. Still no good word regarding his book. Alexis had decided on having some time to herself. Life was peaceful.

But in the dark of night, Andrea went loose to kill and thwart while Dominic studied the stolen page intently. He came to know the code of the newspaper, to see the hidden connections between events. He discerned the scar on history his lover was carving. He saw the immense network of the poets, and the stranglehold they had on the creative throat of the world.

In every newspaper, through the television, in the sermon, he heard the refrains of the Gatepost. Their influence was ubiquitous.

One day, while Dominic was practicing his electric guitar, Andrea looked up from her needle and thread, and the hackles of her neck were raised. Somebody knocked on the door.

They opened it to see Adam, Joshua, and Clete. Their was an aura of sanctity around them.

“Hi Adam, what's up?”

“Oh, nothing much. My brothers were visiting from out of town, and I was stopping by to see if you could cover my shift. You really need to get a phone in here. Nobody answers the public phone you use.”

“Would you like to come in for a moment?”

“Sure.”

Joshua and Clete had flashes of recognition, as if this moment were planned and calculated. Clete would not tear his eyes from Andrea, and when he caught her eye, he smirked. She breathed hatred.

“So, this is the fiancée?” said Adam. “Looks like you have a nice little family on the way.”

“How have you been feeling?” asked Joshua.

“We're doing excellent. Life is beautiful.”

Silence.

Finally, Andrea said "We would like you to go now.

Dominic can't cover your shift tonight."

"That's too bad, Andrea," said Joshua. "But we'll do just fine." He made no movement to leave.

"Well, we have business," said Dominic. "You'll have to go."

"Actually, we would like you to come with us," said Joshua. Clete leered at Andrea.

"Why?"

"Dr. Jagers would like to resolve a few matters with you. It will be only a moment."

Dominic looked at the window. There was a police car and an ambulance. Dominic smiled. "No, that won't be happening."

There was a knock on the door, and then the door burst open. Three police men barged in, guns leveled. Yet, they said nothing.

"Dominic, we would like to resolve this issue without any harm to you," he gestured towards Andrea and smiled.

Dominic was five vowels and a hundred consonants. Instantly, the room pulled back like a blanket, and they were surrounded by a great blue. Below their feet: stone. The cops looked around frantically. Joshua and Clete, however, were undaunted.

Joshua went unconscious, rolling his eyes back. His body sagged like a scarecrow, yet was animated like a marionette. He danced up on one leg, ballerina style. His mouth didn't move, but his tongue uttered the dark words.

Andrea was hand on stomach, reaching back for a weapon. The cops had opened fire on Dominic, but the guns just clanged like a gong, and then melted into red puddles on the ground.

Joshua was a word, and a circle of demons surrounded them. Dominic pulled the ribbon sword, made it sing around them. Then the ribbon flashed into Joshua's dead mouth, and his tongue was slit down the middle. Joshua fountained blood and spoke no more.

But now Clete had grabbed Andrea. He had wrenched her arms into a lock behind her. She shouted and struggled. He pressed against her.

Then Andrea hummed blue. She shut her eyes, and opened them as two beams of light. She pulled free of Clete, held out her arms, pointing upwards with two fingers each, and span around unmoving, like a statue turning on a pedestal.

She focused her eyes on Clete, who was grinning even now. She threw her arm forth, and grabbed him by the neck. With a shake of her hand, she had broken his neck. He fell as lifeless as the body of his brother, but could not himself be animated.

Then Dominic spoke the words, and cleared the sphere. The ambulance collected Joshua, who had somehow broken his jaw. Clete had broken his neck. He was dead. The cops had no idea what had happened, and forgot it by the time they were in their cars. Adam was completely clueless what had happened. He only knew his brother had been hospitalized on his trip over to see him; the other might even be dead, so he needed the day off to visit them in the hospital.

Dominic and Andrea were alone, and Andrea was shrieking in horrified. The terror of creative collapse had ruined her voice. The baby within her was dead.

The church music hadn't changed since Dominic had been there before. In fact, everything was the same here. Domeceus sat where he always sat. They advertised the same old new books in their bookstore. They collected the same missionary collections.

The sermon began:

“What is the Gospel? The word means 'Good News.' Have you shared it lately? Who have you told about the Gospel? Maybe the reason you haven't shared it is because you don't know exactly what the good news actually is. What's the big deal? Why did the Apostles willingly die? The good news is that it is okay that we are sinners, because we will be saved anyway. We don't have to go to hell. Jesus was perfect so that we wouldn't have to be. Who here could fulfill the Sermon on the Mount? It says whosoever looks at a woman with lust has committed adultery. Men: you are all adulterers. It says if you feel angry, you are a murderer. Who of you isn't a murderer? Let's try this: raise your hand if you are perfect.”

The congregation looked around. Nobody had raised their hands. Except one. Dominic raised his hand, and as people murmured, he stood up.

"I'm sure you've forgotten at least one sin," said the pastor. "Pride." The congregation laughed.

"Yes," said Dominic. "I am proud, but that is no sin. What is the opposite of pride? Guilt. You are all guilty, and even this is not a sin. What is a sin is that you use your guilt to pay for your perpetual sins. There is no divinity in you. You are the Godless of the earth."

The congregation murmured. Domeceus appeared and was spelling as the air crackled with his magic, but Dominic brushed it off with a word. Domeceus in shock fled to the inner chapel.

"True faith is faith in yourself. Every other faith will kill you. You need to trust yourself, your own humanity. Put your trust in your eyes, your I, your eye. Have love for nothing else.

"You require Pride, which is the acceptance of yourself, the approval of yourself. Your guilt is a sin because you abuse it. You are the guilty of the world. You go to hell because you

believe in hell. Your belief creates it in your private after life -- and it bleeds all over your life here as well.

“You do not realize that life is for living. Meaning is life, life is meaning. Give your best, give your wholeness to this life, and sacrifice nothing.”

Stephen, the professor from the hospital, approached Dominic and guided him, leading him away from the disturbance into the inner sanctuary. A row of seated professors considered him.

“A young Martin Luther,” said a fat professor with a gray beard and black rimmed glasses.

“If you have a message,” said Stephen, “You should teach it in its proper medium. You won't reach the world in such a manner as this.

“And would I reach it your way, professors? You read the great minds and waste your life criticizing them, but you yourselves lack genius. Your intelligence won't save you. Without the creative I, you are merely echoes.”

They murmured

“You are responsible for the mind of the world. That is your place. You educate the men who rule the world. Know then the distinction and responsibility of your task. If you knew this, you would not hinder me.”

“Do not hinder him,” said Domeceus. He opened a back door into the central meeting room. Dominic followed him. Within, the leading Thepoes had aligned around a great round table.

They never said a magic word. They knew it was useless. Domeceus spoke for the group:

“Welcome Dominic. We couldn't kill you. What do you want from us?”

“The word of the *Lanos*.”

“You wish to make life,” said Domeceus. “And this we wish too. We have the wisdom you need, but you could not understand it without knowing your own name.”

“I am Dominic Emerson Seer.”

“You are IOIOI.”

The Poets closed their eyes and murmured

“You are the center of The Delusion. Without you, we would not exist. Your unconscious mind is our bible. Everything we have done to you and for you is on your command. You organized us and you called us to meeting today. Tell us then: why do you want to lead us so openly? When things are going so well, why do you honor us with a new tradition?”

Dominic looked over the group. He knew them all. He recognized them.

“You have chosen a new religion? A new way for the people. But then you must become God of it. You must learn to say the Full Words from beginning to end. The *Lanos* is not meant to be spoken, and will cost you your voice to utter it.

Dominic: leave the child to the grave. You have assembled us for the first time. It is time we begin a new age.”

Instead, Dominic, intoned:

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He hummed the close. They all hummed with him.

Domeceus handed him the Book of Life, and Dominic understood it at a glance. He knew the *Careeso*, the *Dorava*. He also learned the *Lanos*.

He looked over the pantheon, and knew he could lead them to a new historical age.

Instead he said: *Babalus*. When translated, it means:
perpetual amnesia.

The Thepoes looked confused. They walked out one by one. They would never recognize each other again. Domeceus recognized nobody. They had forgotten all their magic, except the Motherword--that alone would stay and would change everything.

At last, Dominic intoned the *Lanos*, saying "*Kareishia*." His voice was pulled from his body, and he became mute. God had said his last. His inspiration became the revived spirit of the child and spiraled out of the room and into Andrea's belly.

Gabriel was beautiful. He was born with a halo of curly blond hair, but his eyes were as dark as his mother's.

Dominic smiled wordlessly. Andrea interpreted: "A blessing on our family. A blessing on mankind. Our love is the world's love."

They kissed and held each other.

The newborn looked up at his dad, opened his mouth, and said "Kareishia!" They stared dumbfounded that the child could talk, let alone that his first word would also be his last! He had spoke the word of revival -- had known it by instinct. But what would it do and what did it cost? Would the child be mute like his father? Andrea and Dominic looked at each other in alarm, but were immediately relieved with the child spoke again, adding:

"Dadadadadda!"