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Counterculture

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COUNTERCULTURE

By

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B.A. University of Michigan, 1995

A THESIS

Submitted in ~~Partial~~ Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

(in English)

The Graduate School

The University of Maine

May, 2001

Advisory Committee:

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COUNTERCULTURE

By Rande Daykin

Thesis Advisor: Elaine Ford

An Abstract of the Thesis Presented
in ~~Partial~~ Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts
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May, 2001

CounterCulture is a creative thesis written to **earn** the degree of Master of Arts at the University of Maine in spring of 2001. The short novel tells the story of Cannister **Barnes**, a young man who **goes** to England in the late summer for study and briefly catches a glimpse of a young woman while he's lost in the winding **streets** and paths of Eton. **His** trip is **also** marred by a dreadful experience in the London Underground, in which he **sees** an indigent man in a wheelchair roll **himself** into the path of **an** oncoming **train**. Before returning to the States, however, Cannister finds that the man has left behind a little red book, and Cannister claims it **as his own**. He carries the memory of **this** trauma, the image of the young woman, and the red book all back with him to **America**.

Back at home, Cannister finds **himself** being forced to confront problems in **his** life he'd rather do without—namely, the relationship with **his** partner, Amelia, **seems** to be falling apart. Things are made worse by the fact that instead of taking action to either help or hinder these problems, Cannister would rather read **the** red book he absconded with back at the Underground. It appears to be a fictional account of shady scientific

experiments, strange goings on, and other odd events. Cannister is drawn again and again to the book's narrative. **His** life at the University, **as** well, **begins** to falter; absorption in the book's story leads to a few missed classes, to procrastination and un-**graded** papers. A **close** friend he made in England comes to visit him and expresses interest in the red **book** and its meaning. Upon the friend's departure, Cannister, continuing to read onward, discovers that the **book** details **his own** young life, and he finally decides to travel back to England in **search** of **his** own history, and in fact, **his** own humanity.

CounterCulture explores a number of themes, **many** of them related to the reality of identity, and what shapes it. Cannister **Barnes** represents a **peculiar** icon of a mad society that has lost any **sort** of hold **on** what it means to be what we are. His personal search is representative in its commonality, but antithetical in the unique character of Cannister's past.

Dedication

**For Jack Wilson,
who got me to thinking.**

Preface

Why

1

“Why do you write?”

For some reason, **this** was a very popular question during my first year in graduate school. Colleagues would sit in chairs, either leaning back with their arms crossed (psychologist) or leaning forward, elbows on **knees**, peering intently into my eyes (interrogator). I'd never been asked the question before, not that I can recall, and while I should admit that certainly **these** examiners made me **think** about the issue at hand, I never really did become comfortable with the question. Often, that first “why” was emphasized, that final diphthong creating an uncomfortable (but dramatic) pause in which I could squirm, knowing **full** well what was to come next.

For clarity: I **think** it's a fair question. People involved with the arts tend to be intensely curious about whether or not their fellows share their own particular brand of psychosis. It's only natural to want to **talk** about what interests you with people who share those interests. But too often, maybe, the question is asked while expecting some definitive answer, some rational reason that can be boxed into a category and examined against other reasons. Writing is intensely personal: the story that you have to tell is an extension of yourself, even if the work is a complete fantasy. The *telling* is personal: how one chooses to present the story **also** speaks to one's identity, both **as** a storyteller and **as** a human being. These are fairly basic observations. I won't spend time here talking about why I write. I don't think there's necessarily one answer or another.

The question that ought to be asked is, "why did you write this?" That *seems* to be something we can discuss. There is always a genesis, a process, a craft... or there should be. Those are **things** that a writer can **talk** about with ease. Those are **things** that might be **illuminating** to another.

2

Simply put, Counterculture is a novel about its main character, Cannister **Barnes**. He recalls at one point in **this** story that someone once told him that every writer's first novel is autobiographical. That part, I think, is true. But in a sense, everything a writer writes is autobiographical. Certainly a novel's purpose is to say something to someone. Usually it's an observation about life. This could be (and **has been**) argued, I'm sure, but at its heart, the novel is a long story that attempts to **set** forth some basic truth. We are defined by the boundaries of human and religious strength: Robinson Crusoe. There is loneliness in **the** terrible chasm **between** youth and young adulthood: The Catcher in the Rye. Responsibility, and ownership, comes with creation: Frankenstein. These are essential truths about particularly popular works. The beauty of the novel or any story is that **as an art that's** defined **by** a readership, the meaning and truth evolves by ~~the~~ interpretation of its audience.

If there's an essential truth behind CounterCulture, it might be that we're defined **by** what surrounds us. Cannister is human—regardless of what comes to light by the end of **the** novel—because the reader **objectifies him as** such quite early on. He is presented clearly at the **beginning** of the novel **as** the protagonist. Not simply because he is present at the novel's **opening**, but because of **his** heroic attempts in the first chapter and **his** constant, repetitive questioning, "How did I **get** here?" —which **serves** both **as** a nod to the novel's progression **as a** whole, but **also as** a connective device that's universal

in its commonality. We all want to know our own answers to Cannister's question.

Whatever happens in the **book**, the first quarter demands that the reader place Cannister inside certain boundaries. He tries to save a life, so he's human. He is capable of great, passionate love, without reason or ~~sense~~: he is human. He is deeply flawed (he sleeps with the **gypsy** woman only to deny it consistently later **on**, even to himself): he is human.

The other **aspects** of Cannister's humanity are defined by the idea that that very humanity is called into question. The reader **will** notice that those **things** that society uses to define humanity most often — whether erroneously or not — are the foggiest issues in the **book**. Religion, sexuality, and **social** class are all issues that become murky **as** they **pertain** to Cannister Barnes. Perhaps what causes these **issues** to remain unresolved is the not-so-gentle insistence by the author that these are **unreasonable** qualifiers **to** define human behavior. And of course, by novel's end, the reader finds that a **similar** anomaly has **been** staring her in the face all the while: that Cannister is not, in fact, "human." Let's get back to that in a moment.

Cannister, we find, is **obsessed** with time. Why? For one thing, the novel takes place at the **turn** of the century. For another, Cannister is a being outside of time for most of the **book**. The fantasy world in which he finds himself when he discovers the girl with the summerstorm **eyes**, is oddly anachronistic. He bumps into The Bard himself while walking down its **streets**. In Part **11**, Cannister spends most of **his** time either daydreaming or lost in the world of the journal, which effectively **takes him** back in time. **His** relationship is falling apart, but **this** does not seem to be a driving force in the middle half of the novel. There **does**, in fact, seem to be **no** driving force at all in the middle of the novel. The **section** is motivated purely by **two** dramatic devices: the "**will he-won't he**" question (if it's ever really a question) of whether Cannister **will** leave Amelia or stay, and the "did she-didn't she" question of Amelia's **affair** with Ted. The women inside

Cannister's world are what define that world. The four female characters in the novel (not including Mrs. Krupple) each represent the four seasons. Placing **two** lines inside a circle, after **all**, most easily represents time. But the greatest measurement, the steadiest measurement, of time is one's heartbeat, and the straight line of Part II's dramatic progression is consistent with the flat-line approach Cannister takes to **his** life during that fall of nineteen ninety-eight.

But **this** is academic. What motivates the greater **part** of the novel is not craft, or my **own** vague attempts at symbolism. Cannister's relationship with Amelia is the heart and **soul** of **this** book. If there's one thing **that's** managed well in **this** creative process, it's the depiction of that stagnant area that we all face in the twilight of a relationship. Within the suffocating dullness of that relationship, the question of Cannister's humanity—and that of **his** distance from spirituality—disappear. Part II is not interesting because of car chases and murder mysteries... although at one point I had included just that **sort** of thing, my attempt to "spice **things** up." Part II is defined by the agonizing slowness of that relationship's demise. The journal entries, by themselves, are not terribly exciting, but the reader is drawn to them because regardless of the thematic descent of the narrator (the nameless beggar) of those entries, there is movement, and it is refreshing in the face of **so** much inaction on Cannister's part. Rafael is a relief because he forces Cannister to live, if only for an evening—to react to someone, to anyone. The narrator, the "mad-scientist" of **the** red book, slowly de-evolves. He loses everything and is cast out of society... I'll leave it to the reader **to** read judgment into that or not. But that story becomes more interesting because at least there is some sort of progression.

Another truth of the novel is the idea that we are either searching for something, or telling ourselves that we've already found it. The **book** certainly draws a line between these **two** groups of people. Cannister ultimately leaves **his** world in America to go back to England because **his** search is for a family, or **an** answer to **his** origins. At the end of

the novel, he finds that answer, the end truth of **his** existence. It nearly kills him, but again, for the simple humanity of that powerful, senseless love. He can only really pursue **the** girl with the summerstorm eyes once **his** first search is over. And note too that any sensible reader cannot choose to believe he would actually *find* her again... in London, no less. It is when Cannister comes full circle, once again standing on a bridge looking out over the water, that he finds **his** particular journey complete. The novel doesn't worry about the **girl's** name, or her mystery, or even whether or not she's available. This is in part because these are questions that any rational person would **ask**. Cannister's powerful belief in love is the **subject**, and the object that occasions that belief is, **and** should be, nameless. She is a fantasy, of course, and she, like every other character in the **book**, is defined by her surroundings—which are fantastic and unbelievable. But in **the** end, Cannister *himself* is a fantasy in a world of reality, and it is only fitting that they should **meet** again. If it must be done under the auspices of an intruding, omniscient narrator, then I'm OK with that.

What intrigues me most about Cannister **Barnes** is the very fact that **his** essence — **his** humanity — should be called into question at all. But it can't be disregarded that it is Cannister, after **all**, who is the “Half-Man” of the novel's first chapter. Thematically, **the** structure of the **book** toys with the idea of Cannister's identity: it is he who plays the title role in the **first** and last chapter. **The** progression of the novel is such that by the end, when we know for certain that **our** hero's identity **is** questionable, the title of that chapter is Cannister's name, a reflection of Cannister's own declaration of identity: “My name is Cannister Barnes.” Cannister evolves from the half-being of the **beginning** to the fully realized character at the end, even **as** — like the narrator of the **journal** — **his** character is factually deconstructed for the reader by slowly revealing that he is not fully human.

I'm not completely sure that the novel answers the question of Cannister's humanity, because the story doesn't necessarily deal with the important questions of

what makes a human being. As I said above, structurally the novel deceives the reader by allowing **his** opinions of Cannister's humanity to be formed before he **has** all the information needed. But **as I also** stated, the "important" questions about spirituality and the **soul** are left unexamined in the text. Cannister, **like** our society at the millennium's **axis**, is distanced from God to the point of **being** not even **His** creation, and though it's made clear that an attempt was made at **socializing** Cannister to be Catholic, there is curiously no evidence of the adult Cannister having religion at all. Doctor Passer appropriately **assumes** the father role once **the** beggar from Part I commits suicide, but he is powerless over Cannister's free **vill** in the end. Similarly, the all-important question of sexuality—too often associated with God and Creation—is also glossed over.

The end result is a main character with whom the reader identifies on a human level but is—scientifically speaking—not human at all. This might be considered a comment on **our** millennial society, how it echoes the spiritual distancing that people felt in the Victorian era with the advent of Darwinism and the new questions that arose concerning humanity's **origins**. The New Science here, of course, is Cannister **himself**, though he doesn't know it. He is **the** Everyman looking for **his** place in the world while **also** functioning **as** the stumbling-block **so** many moralists **see as** a threat.

3

All of which does in no way answer the original question, "why did I write **this?**" The conception here is a course I took in Victorian Literature at the University. The **issues** we addressed in that fabulous **class** are issues prevalent in our society today, at **this** new century's dawn. Feelings of spiritual abandonment; the pell-mell rush into sciences we seem to fear **more** than accept; the necessary re-defining of **Woman** by the male society around Her; and the driving force of humanity striving to achieve a new

social class—all are found either directly or indirectly in the text. They were the motivating factors behind the original version of **this book**, and they **still** lie hidden within. If they don't appear apparent, **that's** a good **thing**, and due largely in part to the influence of my advisor, Elaine Ford. The difference, I suppose, between a novel that's driven **by** thematic **issues** and one that's driven by story is the difference between a good novel and a bad one. I'm not entirely sure into which category **this** falls, but hopefully it leans more towards **the** good.

And, in the end, it **turns** out the novel is **still** about showing us life. As **this book's** epilogue says in its last line, we can learn things about **our own** world by looking at the world of others. **The** novel demonstrates emotive echoes of the Victorian age, but doesn't have to be read as a Victorian novel (something I **once** believed). Cannister and Amelia may **speak** to the greater truths about the *safety* of an old relationship, but it could **also** speak to the bravery needed to define what is safe for one's own world (as Amelia does). Just **as** any novel's essential truth is redefined by a different audience, I'm assuming that different readers will take from it different ideas, which is really all **an** author could **ask**.

Which, to the best of my ability, answers the question "Why did I write **this**?" I **wrote** it to show **something** about life. If every novel contains autobiographical elements, then ultimately I wrote it to show something about my life, **as** well. Really, **though**, it **turns** out that the question echoes another, put forth in the pages following: "How did I get here?"

R.D.

April, 2001

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•

And of **course** I'd like to thank Kirsten Moffler, whose unending intelligence, **comfort**, and strength helped me through more panic-attacks and times of **strife** than either of us counted **on**.

•

Without suffering, there would be **no art**, but without her, there would be a lot more of the suffering.

*Rip looked, and beheld a **precise** counterpart of himself, as he went **up** the mountain :apparently as lazy, and certainly as ragged. The poor fellow was **now** completely confounded. He doubted his own identity, and **whether** he was himself or another **man**.*

Washington Irving

The Sketch-Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.

Table of Contents

DEDICATION.....	iii
PREFACE.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	..xi
I. The Underground.....	1
1. The Half Man.....	2
2. Witchfire.....	15
3. Lost.....	29
4. Whitchoate.....	44
5. Passengers.....	63
II. Orphans.....	78
6. Dinner Party.....	-79
7. The Ice Queen.....	93
8. Pictures of Todd.....	108
9. Games.....	123
10. In the Autumn Leaves.....	136
11. The Visitor.....	151
12. Rafael in the States.....	163
13. Ties.....	176
14. Past Lives.....	186
15. Leavings.....	200
III . Evolution.....	214

17. Rafael	230
18. Meetings	246
19. Cannister Barnes	265
Epilogue	272
Biography of the Author	277

PART I

The Underground

*Undoubtedly it **awoke some** memory in him, too tenuous, perhaps too general, to trace to any source in his past; but it unsettled him and haunted him, **by** calling to **some** hidden self he hardly knew existed. He said it to himself: It is the stupidest thing, but that girl attracts **me**.*

John Fowles,
THE FRENCH
LIEUTENANT'S WOMAN

Chapter 1

The Half Man

1

Before the ambulance, and the little red book, and the stranger with the dark complexion — before all of it there was the slender woman with the summerstorm eyes. At that moment, though, there was only Cannister, standing in the middle of Tower Bridge in London and wondering how the hell he'd gotten there.

Cannister Barnes lifted the cigarette to his lips and took a drag. The movement of his arm reminded him of the ache in his shoulder, and he squinted his eyes against the dull pain. He thought he must look full of angst. He didn't really think he was being followed, but he did think that if someone were watching him just at that moment, he would like to look as though he were being followed. Cannister had a small shock of dirty blonde hair. He turned that shock to the London wind and set his jaw against the gray of the Thames, thinking for the millionth time of Dick Van Dyke in that movie, and how he made those gurgling sounds with his mouth. He was wearing the shoulder bag that his girl-friend Amelia had given him two years before. His broad shoulders were snug in his navy blue jacket. He imagined himself as looking like a sailor, or someone who might have just returned to Mother England after being overseas for a particularly long period of time. Cannister Barnes was none of those things. He was an average American boy, taking five weeks in England — a trip that was almost over. He had never been overseas before. He was not being followed (*us far as you know*, he reminded himself), nor was anyone watching him (*as far as you know*, he reminded himself again).

Cannister —except for his peculiar name— was normal. It was a bracing thought to have on his way to the **airport**, his somewhat exotic journey almost over.

He smoked quietly, at times setting his **teeth** to the wind, **sometimes** simply **smiling** sweetly to no one but the great, gray and wide river below him. He checked his watch and grimaced. If the tube was late, he might miss **his** flight. Amelia was always telling him he was too worried about the passage of time. He knew it was unlikely he'd miss his flight while waiting for another train, but still...

Cannister turned on a heel and flicked **his** cigarette out into the river, wondering *if* some particularly prideful Englishman would yell at him for doing **so**. Cannister, his hands fitting easily and deeply into the pockets of his jeans, plodded **off**. There was a **tube** station just ahead; he had seen the red line and blue circle on his way across the wide, gigantic bridge. It was another cosmic joke of **his** overseas trip that he had spent all morning looking for London Bridge, to have a cigarette there, and then to find Tower Bridge instead, following its large garrets and gables that he could just witness over the myriad buildings of London proper. **His** teeth were actually cold, and it seemed odd that *this* late in the spring such a cold wind would be blowing here in the city. He stopped for a moment **to** pull out his handkerchief, and when he took it away from **his** face after a good blowing, he found the usual **inky** darkness there, a product of the giant city all around **him**. The grime filtered its way into **his** nose unnoticed, and Cannister wondered what vintage Londoners, who worked here day after day, must see in their mucus. How odd that it should be such a structured, terrible, and beautiful place **all** at once.

Hurrying now, Cannister's heavy-soled shoes clopped along the clean cement of **the** bridge, the steady flow of traffic moving to his right like something alive. Two double-decker buses breezed past him, one right after the other, and there followed a foul-smelling wind that made him wince. A yellow McDonald's wrapper was carried **by** the wind and hugged **his** calf, and he had to twist it off **his** leg with a scowl. A small

ketchup stain, like a kiss, was printed on his otherwise clean jeans. He brushed at the small tomato kiss with **his** handkerchief, swearing quietly to himself.

He was on his **knee** when he looked across the street and saw a man standing across the Bridge, his arms down, watching him. For a moment, Cannister thought he recognized the image—the **tall**, somewhat dark-looking man with his arms straight at his sides, seemingly facing Cannister (though with the traffic rushing across his field of vision it was hard to say). But when another bus rumbled-brushed past, the man was gone. Cannister shook his head. The madness of the commuter's woes, the worry about being late, was causing him to believe his own spy-fantasies. **That's all** it was. He looked down at his leg. There **was still** a dark hint of the red that had been there before, and for just a moment Cannister **Barnes stared** at it, the world **growing** silent around him, **as** though **that small** echo of a **stain** reminded him of something so important, like a dream that tells you the future. But then a small London Taxi honked at a jaywalker, and the moment was past.

Back **on his** feet now, Cannister **trotted** a little more hurriedly towards that sign that will lead him down below the earth. His satchel bumped steadily against his back, keeping some kind of rhythm to a beat perhaps **only** felt **by** inanimate **things**. His broad, strong shoulders easily slipped between the passersby, and his charming, bracing grin disarmed the weapons of distrust of the **young** women who catch him **running**. For all intents and purposes, Cannister Barnes was well on his way. He still **thinks** he'll catch his **train**.

His dark feet slowed for a moment before he descended the **stairs**, even then, **perhaps, sensing** what Cannister himself, who was less a thing of motion than those things that carried him **along**, did not.

Is it the fear of the basement, forever etched in our memories of childhood, that **makes** the subway such a strange universe? Is it something else? Do we **see** the monsters that we **used** to, their scaly tentacles somehow etching their way across that dark semi-circle, even **as** we watch for the train? Do we wonder who in their right mind would build *a train* in that world, where darkness is all around and those same monsters surely lurk and lie in wait? What of those young men who build the tunnels? What of those men who first had to descend into those caverns, and hold their **axes as** they **swung** at the rock, the whole time their hands sweating **as** they **swung**, again and again, trying to make **nothing** where before there was something, and **nothing** again before that.

Perhaps it is that fear, that insatiable knowledge that **something** indeed lies in wait in the darkness, that makes people lean forward and peer into the tunnels, waiting and waiting for a train they know **will** come. Catching their breath during those few seconds where the wind warms down the tunnel a little faster, easing its way forward before the face of the great Cyclops, its one blaring eye screaming at whatever might lie in its way. **We** lean forward, hearing the rattle of its claws, seeing the initial glare of **its** looming eye as it reflects off the tiles of its tubular prison. We know it's a train, but we **suspect** —oh how we love to **suspect**—that just **this** once it will be the thing that used to haunt us, and we can face it with our five hundred dollar suit and hold up **our** briefcase in a charge that **will** surely **unhorse our** opponent... we **lean** forward, and *if* we were to fall, if we were to **lose our** balance...

Would the last thing that errant knight **sees** be the eye? ~~**Or**~~ those parallel **lines** **running** in **threes** below him, trembling too at the coming of the beast?

When not working on the research that occasioned **his** journey, Cannister had spent most of **his** time in England daydreaming about knights and castles. He felt churlish about it, **as** though his breaking the English culture down to merely a **trumped-up**, big-budget version of Idylls of the King was somehow an insult. Yet when surrounded by the palpable histories soaking out of every stone of Windsor, he was hard-pressed to avoid it. Being in London, the birthplace of the literature he had devoted **his** short life to, made it worse. Even then, moving with light steps down into the London Underground, **his** mind was spinning **off** into further adventures, imagining that somewhere below there would be a rectangular opening hidden behind the wide, colorful paper of a **poster**. **Cannister** would discover **this** gateway accidentally, **as** all mystic portals are discovered, and beyond the passage there would be rolling hillocks and curled remnants of abandoned abodes. Cannister, suddenly required to play the role of knight-errant, would soon learn from a dying old **man** that the evil Dark King ruled the land, and many of its inhabitants had left their **homes** for **nothing** more than the promise of a better life in the Magical Lands to the East. Cannister would then confront **the** Dark **King**, who would be hiding out with Cannister's unknown mystical brother, a twin lost to him years before...

A commuter shouldered **his** way past Cannister at an angle, apologizing even **as** he moved **off** down into the sea of people, and the imaginings faded away into a more serious study of **his** present surroundings. The Underground was unusually crowded for mid-morning (**based** on **his limited** experience), and Cannister was trapped between travelers on the steep **stairs** that led down into the cool tunnels below. He turned **his** attention to the posters lining the **stairs**, hearing only half-consciously the murmurings of **trains rushing** through the world beneath **him**. He thought about how Todd had once

wanted to set up a booth down in the Cambridge subway station, selling maps at outrageous prices to the more timid college freshmen, Todd was always looking for money, always looking for a way out. Out of what, Cannister asked Amelia one afternoon, after something Todd had said made **him** particularly angry.

"Out of this," had been her response. Amelia was *curt* when pressed **into** subjects she didn't like. Cannister had pressed regardless.

"What 'this?' What 'this' do you mean?"

Amelia, glancing at **him only** for a moment to let him know he **was** on dangerous ground, simply shook her head. Cannister remembered the afternoon easily, because it had been shortly before they'd moved in together. Had he been looking for a way out, even then?

The throng moved forward in inches. Cannister hated being held up on **stairs**. He felt uncertain, unable to find **his** footing when he wasn't moving along the risers. And there was the danger of being pushed forward by the crowd that was bunching up at **his** back. There **was still** daylight back there, **the** gray clouds visible past the line of heads that rose at an angle upwards behind **him**. He faced forward again, taking the next step **as** the people **began** to move more steadily. He wondered what the distraction was. He knew he was obsessing, but again he worried about missing **his** flight. Cannister had ridden on planes **by** himself since he **was** young, but the experience gained somehow made **him** no less anxious about **airport stress**. He couldn't call Rafael again, couldn't **impose** on **his** friend to keep **him** company, because he'd already said **his** good-byes the previous evening, and Cannister didn't want to face **him** again, to go **through** it a second time. It was tedious, for one **thing, like** the line he found himself in at present. But even that was picking up **speed, so** maybe he could make it **on** time after all. He was already a day later than he was supposed to be. Rafael had seen to that.

Gently, in tiny baby steps, the crowd descended. He could see the platform now, and thought he could just make out the reason for the crowd's slowing down. A man in a wheelchair was at the bottom of the stairs, neatly blocking the path for hundreds of English commuters who were **too** polite to **object**. Cannister groaned aloud. From the small **glimpses** he got from the gaps between shoulders, he saw the man holding what looked like a small metal tin. He was waving it back and forth between the men and women who skirted **his** bulky chair, but without much luck it seemed, since even **as** Cannister neared he couldn't hear the telltale clinking of change.

An instant of pity pierced **him**. More steps were descended. As he came closer to the bottom of the **stairs**, he found that the crowd was moving more easily, **as** the physics of the bottleneck demanded. Cannister saw that the man wore a heavy blanket that effectively hid the lower **half** of **his** body, and a long, dirty-gray beard that appeared to have chaff caught in its strands. The color and length of **his** beard made him seem older than he apparently was. **His** youth was somehow belied by the appearance of **his** skin, which was mostly clear of **lines** but **dirty**. He kept **his** eyes **trained on** one shaking hand in **his** lap, which jittered back and forth over the scotch-patterned blanket with the unerring randomness of a jumping bean. Hidden beneath that arm, Cannister picked out the crinkled dun brown of a paper bag, and knew there was a bottle inside. The wheelchair itself was old-fashioned by the day's standards, with huge, unmanageable-looking wheels and straight, metal **lines** sticking **this** way and that, which looked almost medieval, though that was probably only the effect of **his** fantasies, seeping into **his** real life. Cannister felt somehow touched **as** he approached, the man's white, **wiry** hair thinning on top, the man's giant chair slowing the progress of society around him. There was a metaphor there, but Cannister ignored it, watching **as** the passersby swept by him, **unfeeling**. Once in a while a sleeved or suited arm would reach out and drop change into the **tin**, but it clanked hollowly, the moneys too few and far between.

Cannister felt moved beyond what he could explain. He wanted to reach out to **this** stranger, wanted to connect to him somehow. He couldn't tell if he was being **giving** or morbidly curious. This was **the** sum of **his** life, the confusion that even haunted him in the States. This was what that witch from the Park must have meant.

What would **this** Samaritan do? What could he do? He would never see the English bum again. There would be no guilt involved. Money would simply go towards more **booze**. These, too, were dictates of the preconceived notions he kept of the homeless, but surely he was less affected in **this** case than the Londoners around him. He was on **his** way back home, back to Massachusetts, and **this** man would soon **enough** be **behind** him, be in **his** past like the strange events and experiences of the past five weeks. It was nothing more than Cannister's literary mind, creating symbolism out of nothing at all, creating meaning out of random, disordered events.

So when he reached the bottom of the **stairs**, he turned **his** head, feeling shame, and passed by, allowing **the** throng **-thinning** now that **this** reminder of human frailty was no longer before them—to sweep him away towards the turnstiles and beyond that to the great silver **beasts** that rumbled through the **earth**. He heard **a** train approaching the station even then, knew **by** picking out the **lines** in the crowd before him that he could be on it with only a modicum of shoving. Soon, he would be safely nested at Heathrow, waiting for them to call **his** flight, waiting to be swept **off** across the sea.

Cannister made it **as** far **as** the gate, close enough that he could identify the color of the booth jockey's eyes, before he turned back. What the hell else would he do with the five-pound note in **his** wallet? He'd have no use for it after only **two** hours' time. Fighting against the flow of the people, he made **his** way back to the **stairs**, stopping only when he found that in that short space of time the beggar had vanished.

Cannister looked around, cursing, for a moment. He felt absurd, a character in the horribly long novel he'd been trying to write for more than three years. But like one of those characters, **he** was unable, once he'd started, to turn away from the task he'd given **himself**, the path he'd chosen to follow. He stared around **him** for a moment before deciding that without taking the **stairs**, the man must have come behind him, sliding somehow on those ancient wheels, and gone down the platform. He might have missed **him** somehow in the passage, but between the **stairs** and the ticket booth there were no escape routes. Cannister **turned** around again and made it to the booth jockey once more, paid for his ticket, and swung his way through **the** turnstile.

The platform was less crowded than the path leading to it, the result of many commuters already boarding the packed cars. Cannister took a step towards that direction (the mechanical voice ordering him to mind the gap, **his** favorite feature of the Underground), then looked around again. **H e** felt pulled, ordered in **a** way that belied his general feelings of agnosticism. He knew it must be the effect of the witch's words from the night before, resonating with his **initial** impressions of the homeless man's chair. Cannister peered **this** way and that before **he** saw the telltale signs of the indigent: a group of people avoiding one dimly-lit corner of the platform, quite near the tunnel's opening. Cannister made for it, slipping in and out of the crowd with **some ease**, keeping his arm on the shoulder bag to keep it close to his body. He could drop the five-pound note off, spin on his heel, and **still** leap through the **train's** narrow doors. It would be that simple. The witch's **throaty** voice moved with him through the crowd, and he heard her message to **him** then, clearly, **as** though someone nearby were speaking aloud:

Circles and Lines. Those are your signs.

And then he pushed through a group of students and there indeed was the homeless man, bent over double, puking on the cement floor of the platform. Cannister

turned away, **feeling his** own stomach turn. One of the **students** nearby spoke up in a loud voice "Oh, that is so *dis-gus-ting!*" and Cannister almost moved back to the **train**. The doors were jittering, closing and **opening** again **as** a few stragglers forced their way through. It would **be** gone in a moment. Rather **than** moving, he stood **still** and watched the doors finally **close** solidly shut, heard the mechanical voice garble out the next stop, and watched the great steel **tube** move away, the hot wind **following** it like the breath of some awful, buried god.

The **stench** of the man's vomit came at him. It smelled strongly of alcohol. Cannister buttoned **his** navy jacket at the bottom, drawing it over **his** pockets, **set his** mouth, and turned around. The man was hunched over, coughing so that **his** lips pushed out **as** if to blow smoke **rings** from an invisible cigar. Cannister stepped towards him. The **beggar** hadn't been able to move **his chair** away from the splatter **on** the platform, and Cannister skirted it **as** best he could.

"Sir?"

The man coughed into one balled-up fist. The **tin** was gone, but **the** other hand still gripped the crinkled neck **of** the paper **bag**.

"Sir? Are you **all** right?"

The man turned and looked at him. **His** eyes grew wide. He stared at **him** for a **full** minute. Cannister stood **frozen** before **him** **feeling** the cold sweat of discomfort under **his** arms. **His** hand was clenched around the five-pound note, and he realized with shame that he had meant to throw it at the man and **run**. **Was** he blushing? He **stared** back at the man —who, it turned out upon close **inspection**, seemed older than Cannister first thought, he might **be** in **his** late forties, but no more than in **his** mid-**fifties**—and waved **a** hand stupidly before **the beggar's** eyes.

"Sir? You OK?"

“Oh God,” the man said in a voice graveled with something surely unpleasant. **His** left hand stopped its shaking. He remained completely **still**, his upper torso frozen, his lips **still** puffed out from the coughing fit earlier. There were **specks** of vomit in **his** beard, which would remain there for longer **than** Cannister cared to think. For the space **of** that minute, Cannister kept eye-contact with the beggar, seeing that his **eyes** were an unusual shade of lush green, and he was once more reminded of **his** escapades in the Park the night before. He was ready to **turn** away when the man took **his** hand down from **his** mouth, let go of the bottle with his other, and slowly wheeled an inch or **two** towards him.

“Oh... Oh, Jerry? Is it you? Is it really you?”

Cannister breathed out in a rush- For a moment, he thought that **this** homeless Englishman had recognized him, had remembered him, which was the source of his amazement. Now, he clearly saw that it was only insanity. **Or** early senility? Cannister knew little about medicine. He breathed in again a moment later **as** the man reached out for **him**, his filthy hand grasping at the **air** near Cannister’s own.

“Don’t.. .” he said it without **thinking**, and the man stopped in mid-roll, his eyes **still** fastened on Cannister’s own. **They** were just **as** wide, but something in them changed, and Cannister looked away uncomfortably. He’d gotten into something he shouldn’t have, and he kicked **himself** for following some odd moralistic urge that was undoubtedly nothing more **than** misplaced penitence. **The** rest of the commuters on the **platform** were ignoring the scene, allowing the American to deal with the stranger who chose to drink his way out of **his** misery.

“You aren’t, are you?” the man’s voice was a little bit more clear, and Cannister **turned** back to him, wary lest the man should reach for him again. The stench of alcohol and something deeper **still** swam about them, and Cannister backed away a step, not

quite **willing** to follow whatever rules of decorum one followed when confronted with mad homeless men in tunnels. “You really aren’t him, are you?”

“My name’s Cannister,” he said. He glanced around him again. There were **two** English bobbies at the other end of the station, talking with an official-looking gentleman. Cannister knew exactly what they were discussing. He turned back to the beggar. “Look, I think they’re **going** to kick you out of here. I wanted to make sure...”

“You’re **an** American? **An** American boy?”

Cannister nodded and the man reacted violently, **his** face **opening** up around the **mess** of beard and drawing in breath so that in a heartbeat Cannister knew he was going to go **off** coughing again, and he stepped back, but **this** time trying to block the policemen’s view of the character. Soon enough the man was bent over again, and something in the sound of **his** harsh, barking outbursts sounded painful and broken. The man looked up for a moment, **his** eyes **still** closed, and then bent down close to the blanket again before coughing one last, final **hack** that sent a spray-pattern of blood around the chair. It reminded Cannister, oddly enough, of kindergarten. Something about finger-paints. Alarmed and feeling sick, Cannister moved towards him again.

“Listen, is there anything I can do for you?” There was murmuring in the crowd behind him, and he knew that they were sensing the coming of another train. He glanced behind him, saw the **train** official pointing in their direction and **turned** back to the beggar. Even in **his** concern, he wanted more than anything else to peer under the blanket, to see if there were legs beneath its folds or not. “I think they’re coming to evict you. I want to know if I can help.”

The man looked up at him, and Cannister, shocked, took another step back. The man was **crying**. Tears ran down **his** dirty cheeks and created maps of clean, peach rivers down the contours of **his** face.

“I’m dying, Jerry,” he **said**. “I’m dying and I’m all alone.”

“I can’t...” Cannister looked around, helpless. What on **earth** could he be looking for? A way out? He thought once more about penitence, about Amelia. “I can’t stay. I’m sorry, but I just wanted to make sure you were...”

The man nodded. He didn’t raise his head to meet Cannister’s **gaze**. “I understand. You go on, Gerard. I’ll be **all** right.”

“I’m not Jerry,” Cannister said. He sounded, to **his own** ears, like an asshole.

“I know. I know.” The man nodded, **speaking** to his blanket, and turned **his** chair slowly away, Cannister heard the trembling of the tunnel, felt the nervousness of the people, felt how excited they were. Someone had spotted the headlight in the darkness to the right. Someone had seen the train on its way. The beggar **was** rolling his chair towards the wide, yellow **stripe**, and Cannister knew in an instant what he was going to do. The hot gush of **air** was coming from the tunnel even **as** he moved forward, eliciting **an** indignant shout from a well-dressed woman he pushed out of **his** way. Closer still, that sound of hissing and hushing, the rickety-rickety-rack of the train coming **down** the track, and the man was moving closer, picking up speed **as** he **rolled** himself along. **And** Cannister, seeing the wheels of the man’s chair reach the yellow **stripe** with no intention of minding the gap, **seeing his** own hands reaching beyond their grasp to stop him from **killing** himself, seeing the behemoth emerge from its tunnel, rushing towards the platform...Cannister wondered how it was he’d **gotten** there.

Chapter 2

Witchfire

1

Gray. Every day he'd spent in England had been gray. And now Cannister looked out the window and saw that it was gray again. This was his country, right? This was the homeland, the island that his forefathers had **sailed** from, arriving in America with **tall** black hats with buckles on them. And now Cannister had arrived with nothing but **high** hopes for this glorious **country**, and how did it treat **him**? With clouds and rain and more clouds. Not **even** a mysterious fog that might shroud the town of Windsor in a mysterious light. Not even that.

Cannister was going home that day. He had packed the night before, talking with Amelia on the phone, telling her how much he **missed** her and how badly he wanted to be with her again. **She** responded with dispassionate **phrases**, her voice speaking to a distance greater than the miles of cable and wire stretching between their phones. Not at **all like** the pining waif who cries for her sailor with a candle in the window.

"You're arriving when?"

"Should be **six**. ~~Or~~ five. I don't know." Cannister was looking for a wool **sock** to match the one in **his** hand, **only half** paying attention. "Someone said you lose an hour. Something about the jetstream."

"**So** is it five or **six**?"

"Five. Five o'clock."

"You sure?"

"I guess."

Amelia sighed. She was sounding less and less like a woman anticipating her lover's return, and more like someone at the end of their vacation, arriving home to remember that they'd put **off** cleaning house until after the trip. Cannister opened **his** mouth to say something about it, but then closed it again. He glanced out the window and saw that the evening once again was **turning a** somber shade of **nothing**. The lights of Windsor blinked anciently around **him**, the castle **still** towering overhead, watching over everything.

"You **all** right?"

Amelia snorted, the signal that Cannister had **asked** a foolish question. "Of **course I am**. Are *you*?"

"Sure," he lied. He turned and glanced into the mirror. **His free** hand held up a **pair** of underwear to **his** cheek, held it there for a moment like a courtly lady daubing at tears with a **scarf**. He was going out there to look for her again that evening. For the last time. He had only one more chance to find **her**.

Amelia's voice on the line was thoughtful. **Curious**. "You know. Because that last e-mail you sent. It sounded **off**. Not you."

"E-mails don't sound like anything, Ames."

"Fuck **off**. You know what I mean. It didn't read like you."

"That's because the white-coats replaced me with a robot. They want to study **your vulva** for socio-erotic **purposes**."

Amelia ignored **this**. "You sound funny. You sound different."

And that was their relationship, wasn't it? Each of them trying to second-guess the other? Wasn't that what was wrong with everything?

"I don't. I'm not."

But he was. He was different and he was going to find her that evening.

Cannister shook the night's memory away, coming back to the present and again finding **himself** staring out at the gray light of Windsor, the castle now in daylight. He'd been behind it the other day, but now it **was** out there, off to the west, looking out over Eton with **nothing** but disdain for him and approval for **all** the English boys. He hadn't found her. **His** life here in England was over and he hadn't found her.

Go after her again. Find her. Go looking for her by the trains. Isn't that ~~where~~ you were the other day? One more time.

Cannister stared out the window, hearing but not hearing the voice inside him. He had time before **his** flight. He would just **go** out and **get** a cup of coffee, maybe a roll. He'd just **take** one quick jaunt through Windsor before he had to ~~take~~ the train into London and leave **all** of it behind him.

Just a cup of coffee.

2

path heading subject header

from: cannes@Eton.uk.edu

subj: where am I

to: ames@harvard.edu

Tuesday, September 2, 1998

Dearest,

This will probably be my last **email** from the UK. Research has faltered the last week or **so, even** with Rafael's "help" in checking out that place down in Bath. Which reminds me, something odd happened the other

day. Remember I told you about the white-coats? I saw one of them the other day up here in Windsor. I'm nearly positive it **was** he. He was on the **street** outside **this** place I go to that's by the old church, called the American Restaurant (think I've told you **this** before). I was passing by on my way to the **train station** when I just caught sight of him, ducking into one of the funny little alleys that seem to pepper **this** village. The thing is, I know he **saw** me. I made eye-contact and everything. I raised my hand for a hello and he just turned down that passage. Don't you think that's strange? I'm pretty sure I didn't break anything. I was only in the lab's library, after all. Remember I **DID** joke about stealing one of their little beakers the last time I **wrote** to you, but now I'm **thinking** about their checking my e-mail so let's just drop **this**... too weird, you know? Very Eraser.

Otherwise there's not much to tell. Shoulder **still** hurts and can't for the life of me remember bumping into anything. Rafe says I must have done it **while** stoned. Usually I don't forget **stuff**, tho. **Speaking** of Rafe, he's **been** acting different for the last week, but I'm guessing he just doesn't handle good-byes that well. Good. You know me with that **sort** of thing. We've really become **quite** close. I'll **miss** you most of all, Scarecrow, and **all** that. He wants me to go to **this** rave-thingie, very mysterious about it, but it's **the** night of my departure date. Rafe says he can work out the ticket **stuff** (Over the past five weeks I've come to understand that Rafe is **hooked** UP. I **think** there's big money in **his** family), but I don't want to mess with it. I will, of course, let you know if I delay.

That's **all** for now, **Ames**. I miss you. Everywhere I go in this **town** there are faces that seem like yours. I'm looking forward to being near **you** again.

Yours,

Can

3

I'm never **going** to **see** her again, thought Cannister. Never.

He stood outside in the gray chill, and even though it was just August, he kept his hands deep in the pockets of his jeans. The usual herd of people were mooing towards the station, and their fine shoes and pressed pants spoke of nothing but cattle to Cannister, who had long ago promised **himself** that he would never be like those people who went to work every day and hated every second of it. For a moment, standing against the cold, he wondered if he was keeping that promise.

Still, there was something romantic about the workforce, even **as** they looked down upon **him**, with his coat and jeans. He wore nice shoes but they **still** knew he was an American. They **still** knew that there was nothing about Cannister that belonged in England except his last name. They knew those **things** and they looked down their noses at **him**. They did it because he wasn't English, but they did it **also** because they knew that he was a student, that he didn't have any money, that **he** came from questionable backgrounds. It was like the States, but these people had the courtesy not to say so to his face.

She's not here, he thought to **himself** again. She wouldn't be at the one spot where he'd first spotted her. But he knew he would never find it again. He knew that the **street** he'd turned down that afternoon was **as** lost to him **as** she was. It seemed to

Cannister, standing there and looking out over those people, that the world was full of lost things. He set his shoulders against the sudden cold he felt.

"Can! Cannister!"

He turned and Rafael was struggling his dark self through the crowds. They could tell he was one of them, and the masses moved out of his way accordingly.

"What's going on?" Cannister asked the young Arab. Rafael gazed back at him, confidence shining outward from his striking eyes. He was wearing beige corduroys with what looked like an exceptionally wide wale, and a black tee shirt with a denim oxford over that which seemed to somehow reflect his shocking blue eyes with unusual clarity. Rafael wore a goatee, but he was one of the few young men that Cannister could think of who made it look somewhat respectable. It might have been the money that you could smell on Rafael like his finely applied cologne. Rafael was deep in oil; not showy in his wealth, but wearing it comfortably, like an old sport jacket. He shook for a moment, perhaps feeling the same chill as Cannister, and grinned, his white, perfectly straight teeth gleaming and making the gray day somehow brighter. Cannister had worked with Rafe for not quite two months now on their research project at the Eton School for Penguins (as they jokingly called it), and for some reason had not realized that Rafe was gorgeous, a better looking mart than men had a right to be.

For a minute, Rafe regarded him with those blue eyes while his grin continued to shine. He shook again, laughing, and then reached out with both hands and clasped Cannister on the shoulders.

"It's like you just got here, man."

"I know. Feels like it, right?"

Rafe nodded. That grin persisted. "You taking off soon?"

Cannister shrugged. "I'm all packed."

"I **think** you ought to stay." He made a little dancing motion. A man walking by in a **dark** gray suit turned **his** head to watch the young, handsome Arab **do** a two-step out on the cobblestones by the stores. Cannister's **eyes** followed Gray-Suit until he disappeared among the other cattle.

"I can't **do** it, Rafe. I can't."

"You can." **Rafe**, like a magician, flipped **his** hand up in the air and there was a **small**, envelope-sized pamphlet of **papers** caught in **his** fingers. **On** the flap was the red, white, and blue **insignia** for British Airways. "I made sure of it."

"You didn't."

"I did."

"My girlfriend's waiting for me. She'll be at the airport."

"You have all day to ring her."

"She'll be so *pissed*, dude!" Cannister **said**, smiling already despite **himself**. He realized **as** he said it that he sounded more excited than regretful, and that was half the decision right there. He was pretty sure the girl with the summerstorm eyes wouldn't be at the rave that Rafael had made sure he would attend, but there was always that chance. Cannister, of course, didn't know how much ground **this** party would span, no more than he knew that in twenty-four hours he would be attempting to help a crippled man he'd never met before. "I can't call her now, anyway. It's like after midnight there. I'm pretty sure she went to **bed**."

"You'll take care of it, man," Rafe said. "You always do."

Cannister swallowed, thinking of the party already, **trying** even then to put Amelia and what she would say out of **his** head. "Do I?"

When he saw the fires, at first Cannister was scared. He wondered how they had done it, how they would **get** away with it without getting arrested. The Long Park stretched from Windsor Castle to Dunningham, and the path supposedly wound from there all the way south to the **sea**. It was a **trail** that Cannister would have loved to take once, a long time ago, when he was more adventurous. For now, the only things he saw were the fires and the darkness hidden **between the** old trees that were scattered around the ancient lawns. Rafael had tried to explain to **him** how they managed the police, how they could party there after dark, but Cannister was too jumpy to listen. Pot always made **him** excitable, for some reason, and he'd done a huge bong with Rafe before they'd left the apartment and passed easily along the **streets** of Windsor, down past the shops and restaurants, past the ancient church, and finally along the narrow roads to **the** park. Once there, Rafe had broken into a **run**, and Cannister had to follow. Rafe was quick and agile, and a few times Cannister stumbled where Rafe seemed to merely float along. But now they were far from the castle, looking out over the **hills** and the **trees**, seeing the brief, scattered glow of the small **bonfires** that were **peppered** along the darkness. The sight of those fires reminded Cannister of something, but the thought eluded **him** and he was already jiving and shaking to the music he could only just feel.

“God, it’s beautiful,” Cannister said.

”Never stay in one place too long,” Rafe said. He was bouncing at the **knees**, just **a little so** that he **seemed** to be somehow floating instead of standing still. In **his** hand were a few **tabs** of Ecstasy. Cannister took one and placed it in **his** mouth, feeling the delicious burst of saliva, adrenaline, and shivers that always passed through him—the speed of life—when **he** popped pills. “Always keep moving. That’s the trick. Some day they’ll come and hit all the fires at once, and then we’ll be screwed.”

“Maybe tonight,” Cannister said, not really sure what Rafe was talking about.

“Maybe,” Rafe said. He stopped bouncing, stood perfectly **still** for a moment, and clasped Cannister’s shoulders again with **his** broad, strong hands. He forced Cannister steady, keeping **his** eyes focused for just a moment. Cannister could **see** a fire somewhere past Rafe’s left shoulder, and it hid, coyly, behind Rafe’s ear when the slight breeze moved its **flames**. “**You** enjoy yourself tonight, man. I took you here **as** a going away present, you dig?”

“I dig.”

“I mean it. I want you to *revel*, you **know?**” And with that, Rafe suddenly lunged forward, silken and liquid like an asp, and kissed Cannister on the mouth. Cannister kissed back, unable to help **himself**. Rafe’s lips were gentle and smooth, and tasted vaguely of cinnamon and something else he didn’t recognize. Maybe cloves.

“Good-bye. **You** write me now.”

“**I will.**”

And then Rafe was gone, slipping into the night like a shadow, and then Cannister was running down the **hills**, towards the **fires**.

5

He met the witch half an **hour** later. She was gyrating and moving her **arms** up and down by a fire that was sandwiched between **two** ancient trees that twisted and curved their **bulks** like misshapen **giants** in the night. She had long, long curly black **hair** that seemed to river in upon itself **again** and again, **so** that he thought he saw **shapes** there **as** he watched her. He had found a group of Americans, and was sitting cross-legged on the ground **as** they came down **off** some acid, timing himself so he’d be sure to follow Rafe’s advice. He’d been watching her for five **minutes**, and **only** when she

opened her **eyes** and found **his** own did he realize that there was a fierce erection pressing against the denim of **his** jeans. She wore a long skirt that swished along the ground and made patterns in the loose dirt that he could only barely *see* by the dying light of the poorly made fire. She was barefoot, but she wore a thin black **shirt** with half-sleeves and large, circular earrings that caught the flames and reflected their flickering passion back to Cannister. She maneuvered over to him.

"**You** find me attractive, American?"

"I find **you** hot. I find you roiling in the **seas** of a boiling passion **unknown** to me."

"You're a poet."

"I used to be. I wish I could write you. I wish I could write you into a poem that would entwine with my own words."

She wavered like a snake, like a **belly** dancer **m** some strange country who carries secrets beneath her skin, and lowered herself so that she half-stood, half-squatted beside him. He could see her nipples beneath the thin material of her **shirt**, hard and pressing against the fabric. **His** cock moved, brushing not uncomfortably against the denim again.

"If you desire me, you have to allow me to *see*."

"Are you blind?"

"You have to let me **see** what's inside **you**." She reached forward, **still** balancing on her bent **knees** so she looked like an Indian dancer. He held out **his** hand, not sure how he felt, **knowing** only that he wanted **this** woman. He wanted **to** be with her, to rut with her on **this** night that was only magic and wicked and strangely **unreal**.

"What's your name?" he asked.

The gypsy (for surely, surely that's what she was, nothing else) **smiled**, her **lips** were dark and thin but **sensual**, as though their power were hidden. "**You** have strange lines, American."

”How do you know I’m American?”

“You have a brother.” She raised her head and licked her lips, and her dark **eyes** caught Cannister’s and held him, captivated, **speaking** of secrets that were written on meshing skin.

He smiled. “No. I’m an only child.”

She didn’t react, didn’t concede the mistake. She only smiled back at **him**, her **eyes** lowering. She took her index finger and moved it along his skin. The Ecstasy made it brilliant, made **his** palm explode with power and light and remarkable lines of color that seemed to radiate themselves into him like worming parasites.

“A brother. You **two** are **similar**.”

“No,” he said again, but hushed. He was weak, and shaking from **his** desire, from the need of **his** passion.

“I see a dark man, he follows you. And a woman. A woman you desire who eludes you. She is like the picture of an angel.”

For only an instant, he remembered the girl with summerstorm **eyes**, and he was shaken from the **spell** that held him. Would she **be** jealous? Would the girl hold **this** encounter against him? Best he should leave. Best he should **go** now before damning himself to not ever knowing her. He **moved** to take **his** hand away, but the gypsy traced **his lines** again, and the shiver brought back the power and force of his erection. He stayed.

The gypsy was looking up at **him** now, and for a moment he thought she looked sad.

“What’s wrong?”

She shook her head, and then dropped **his** hand. She had stopped moving, and she lost her balance and fell over, landing on her ass in the dirt, the same dirt her dress

had been drawing upon. He reached for her, but she held his hand and pulled him down to her. He was startled to find **she** was crying.

“We’re almost there, American.”

“Where? What’s wrong? Are you **all** right?”

“The millennium draws near, and there are **lines** between the years, American. Can you feel them? Can you **see the** way we’re divided?”

He didn’t feel like being philosophical. He reached around her, his fingers moving gently along the first high curves of her buttocks. **They** were hard, **muscular**, and she didn’t shy away from **him**.

“Can’t we get away from here?”

“Parallel **lines**, American. Lines and Circles, those are your signs.”

He was afraid he’d lost her, and he was **getting** nervous about **being** at that fire for so long. Amazingly, though, she stood and reached down, helping him to his feet. She leaned up on tiptoe **so** she could whisper in **his** ear. He was amazed at how much dark hair there was, it shadowed around her dark complexion and made deep patterns in the firelight around her shoulders.

“Take me. Take me away from here and let’s lose ourselves in the garden. Hide me from the years, American. Hide me from what we’ve already lost.”

“Fucking A,” Cannister said, and led her away into the night.

6

Did they make love, **our** Cannister and **this** mysterious gypsy woman? Did they *run* from each other under **the** rising English quarter **moon** and hide and seek along the soft **grasses** of the park, where once **kings** and **queens** had played? **Look** for them among

those tall, horribly ancient trees, which curl and hump **their** way upwards to the **stars**, those same **stars** that shone on royalty that once cavorted here long before. **Look** for the lovers, **twining** and grabbing and **running** again, here in the fields where a young Prince once took **his** life, and was written out of history by **the** blue-bloods who kept scandal from their subjects — much the same way Cannister will surely **keep this** from **his** Amelia. Look for them here, under **this** small dale, where the **grasses** rise up by the lake, where those of higher **station** ride their horses and look out over their England, and look at how **the** gypsy straddles our Cannister, pulling her **shirt** open and allowing her breasts to darkly be free, allowing him to sit up and strain to reach them with **his** ecstatic kisses. They are commoners, but they still lie and fly and fuck here among these grasses, along the paths and winding circuits of **this** park, **this** glorious area where once, long before, **two** other people played **as** well.

Separated from each other **by** centuries, these **two sets** of lovers, they mirror each other. One pair a little more clumsy, strictured **as** they **are** by **the** mores and constraints of their time, the other moving and thrusting against each other, helped by the drugs, crying out to whatever gods they still feel they cling to. Watch, if you feel you must, **as** Cannister **grope**s her, holds on with sweaty hands to **those** high, strong breasts, untingured by **lines** or marks, and forces **his** way into her, mingling **his** desperate **gasps** with hers. **They** merge and quicken and then dwindle, and the **stars** lower their **eyes**, and the other couple, **ghosts** now, look on in horror at the wonderland to the poor their Eden **has** become. They shudder **as** Cannister climaxes, crying out and gripping great handfuls of grass from the ground as she **giggles** and smiles widely, her white **teeth** **finally** glimmering their praise to the moon. She bends down and stretches out **her** tongue and captures

one

Singular

bead of sweat that is clinging to the fine hairs between Cannister's nipples, and then she rises, allowing the folds of her dress to fall over her muscular legs once more. She leaves him there, **as** those ghosts hide their eyes and shake their heads, as he **lies** amid the **grass**, praising God for England, the high **beginning** to seep from **his** body.

Did they make love? **These two** strangers **on** an island that held strangers before? Did they **run** and quicken and meet, here in **this** dark garden? **Or** did Cannister imagine it? Did he dream it under the **stars as** the **gypsy** easily kisses **him** to sleep with the tanned song of promises of love, before reaching **into his pants** and **taking his** wallet? Did any of it happen at **all? Or** was it the faeries? Cannister **looks** up in the night, lying on **his back**, feeling somehow spent, **as** though a part of **himself** is **still** somewhere else in Britain. He **opens his** mouth and mimes the question,

how did I get here?

He'll **ask** it of the sea, flying overhead, tomorrow.

Chapter 3

Lost

1

Dear Amelia,

I know **this** would be easier if I just **wrote** you an e-mail, but I didn't want to take that route. This seems more **personal**, and therefore harder. Have you felt **us** drifting? Have you felt us moving **so** slowly but so steadily apart? We're like glaciers, Amelia, and even if Todd were to show up at my door with a bribe to stay with you, with presents like **magi**, I **think** I'd have to say no. I **think** there's nothing left there that **makes** sense. Once we were together for a reason, it **seems**. But now, I don't know. I thought **you** needed me because we shared a bond, a common absence in **our** lives, but **you** don't seem to have that. Since Todd's come back from the West, I've felt **as** though you don't even need me. I'm not suggesting that there's dark secrets **going on**, or anything incestuous. I just wonder if we didn't get together because we were lonely. But you're not lonely anymore, Amelia.

Remember a couple weeks ago, the night **More** I left, when you took me to dinner. I was **trying** to **tell** you what **this** trip meant to me. I was **trying** to tell you that there was something I thought I might find here, something I might discover. I don't know what it is. I **still** don't. But you watched the candles; I saw your eyes following **the** movement of the flames, and your ears...? What did they follow? You wanted to

talk about Todd and **his two** women, about how you don't like either of them. You wanted to **talk about** that upcoming position at the University. I wanted to talk about loss and home and family, and you **asked** me if I wanted more wine.

Rafael tells me that what I need to learn about myself is hidden within me. I feel I **know** him after **only two** and half weeks. I feel connected to him somehow. Certainly he's a good man. There's nothing between **us** but culture and money and even **those** are **things** that **Rafe** ignores. But he doesn't ignore me, not like you do.

And then I sit here and read these words and I tell myself I'm just **making it all** up. Is that possible? Am I coming up with excuses because what I'm really afraid of, what I'm really terrified of, is waking up and finding that I'm forty years old, that my life is passing **by with** the flurry of a windstorm **and the** days have left me **like** old memories of paper? Am I **making** you into a bad **person**? I feel **as** though I'm **trying** to write my way into **a** life I don't have, that I'm trying **to** manipulate you like a character. **And** what does that make me?

I don't know. I don't know **anything** at all, except that I won't send **this** letter.

Amelia Amelia Amelia Amelia Amelia Amelia.. .

Cannister crumpled up the letter, watching his handwriting dissolve in the folds and creases as he slowly mashed the paper between his hands. He sat back in his chair, staring out the window that was by his desk. The sloping roofs of Windsor were out there, each of them connected to the other, reminding him of that story by C.S. Lewis, the one that he'd read over and over again as a child, when he even then dreamt of being a poet. The gray clouds that day were somewhat dulled by the fighting sun, and rays floated in and out of the world like spotlights from God, each one catching hold of a soul before losing it again, lost in those hurrying clouds, cut off from their source by the speed of the wind.

"Frustrated poet?"

Cannister turned and saw Rafael standing in the doorway to his room. They lived in the same building, both of them being housed by the polite—but somehow so distant—Eton School. Cannister worked as a research assistant to pay his way through the Ph.D. program at Cambridge, helping out Professor Merritor with his collection and study of dating anonymous Victorian writings. Doctor Merritor was supposed to be there instead of Cannister, but murky Merritor family troubles (Cannister suspected it had something to do with the blonde undergraduate he'd seen for a while in Merritor's presence, and then suddenly had not) meant Cannister was flown off to Eton, free of charge and with a limited expense budget. He was supposed to be doing research but instead found himself to be dreaming of Kings and Queens, and ancient family histories he never thought of before. He found himself thinking of his relationship with Amelia, how it might have reached its peak three years before, when they first started dating, and how sad that was. The last thing he was thinking about was studying the notes on literature taken by late nineteenth century professors, each of them caught in their own glass cages of the past, stifling among the mysterious twisting alleys of Eton. Rafael was

on a similar project, but he was funding it himself. There were princes at Eton, but Cannister could not determine if Rafael was **one**. Those amazing blue eyes shone from **his** Middle-Eastern face like beacons. Surely **this** was a sign of blue blood if one was needed.

"Frustrated yes... ." Cannister began.

"Poet, no!" Rafe finished, and laughed, not unkindly. He slipped easily into the room and sat down on Cannister's green and white-striped loveseat. Regal English propriety meant that Cannister, though considered low class in Eton's eyes (he came **from** no royal or noble lineage, or really any known lineage at **all**), could not be deprived of Eton amenities. The tiny apartment they'd supplied him with for **his** two-month stay was nicer than anyplace that he and Amelia would be able to afford. Money was **all** around him, and a great deal of it was sitting before him now, slick in a dark tee **shirt** and **khakis**.

"I came **by** to tell you," he said in **his soft** voice. Rafael had an impeccable English accent, and Cannister wondered where he'd gone to school. "that I found something you might be interested in."

"What's that?"

"There's **this** center of studies down in Bath. Some kind of biological research, I don't know... ." Cannister saw that he was supposed to assume that science was not Rafael's strong point, but he wondered if maybe Rafael didn't **know** more about biology than Cannister could ever hope to learn. "Anyway, they've got **this** research library and apparently there's some classical section that's got some rather unusual literature. Um, perhaps even a notebook that's in Professor Carthage's hand."

Cannister sat up in **his** chair, **his eyes** alert. "Notebook?"

"Sure. Notes. In a **book**. **You** know." Rafe grinned, the insatiable joker.

Professor Carthage taught a mixture **of** Humanities to the penguins at Eton sometime

between 1860 and 1888, before he was fired for unexplained reasons. His writing existed all over the broken, fading manuscripts of the older collections of the Eton libraries and in some of Merritor's own holdings. The ~~fire~~ in 1908 had been localized, but **damaging** to some of the bookkeeping records. Cannister had gotten far enough in his research to learn of Prof. Carthage's interest in the sciences—the new Darwinism especially excited him—and Rafael's news perked **his** ears and made **his** woes over Amelia seem **less**. Merritor had ~~been~~ looking for script in Carthage's hand for comparisons to some old manuscripts that were apparently fables. **A** boon such **as this** would help out Professor Merritor, but would more importantly assure Cannister's continued employment and sponsorship.

"Where is **this**?"

"Just east of Bath, up in the **hills**. I've got the directions right here, if you want them..." he said, unable to finish his sentence before Cannister snatched the piece of paper from **his** friend's hand. "They're... they're a little sketchy, Cann."

"What do you mean?"

"They were rather put **off** to find that we knew about their collection. You know these **types**. Brilliant really. Old Dr. Johnson let me know these white-coats had it, but I think he wasn't supposed to tell, you get me? Rather a secret, you follow?"

Cannister frowned. "How did he find out? Isn't he a bit of a recluse?"

Rafael laughed, shaking **his** head. "I don't know, really. I guess he's just been around, you know? Johnson says they don't like visitors, but I called and they said they'd ~~let~~ you have a look. Sounds pretty ripping, don't you think?" Rafe's brown fingers were delicately working the pleat **on** the right leg of **his** pants. Cannister, suddenly and without reason, thought that Rafe was lying to him. He shook the thought away. It was impossible to think of **Rafe** in that way.

"It does sound ripping. Real cloak and dagger."

Rafael laughed loudly. **His** blue eyes caught Cannister's face for a moment and then shied away again, roving over the **books** over Cannister's desk. "Oh, I don't think so, Cann. **Johnsons** said they were private, but not that private. Out in the country, you know. You might really like the holiday, **Cann,** don't you think?"

Cannister nodded. He was envisioning discovering some buried secret, forgotten **as** literature in the world of laboratories and secret libraries. He saw himself hunched over one of Professor Carthage's manuscripts, finding some forgotten letters that shed light on those mysterious fables, saw Merritor giving him a new office, saw his grant money coming in by the truckful, he and Amelia playing in it like Scrooge McDuck...

Amelia. He glanced out at the buried lanes of Windsor, across **the** river, smoke rising from a few chimneys.

"You **all** right, Cann?"

He turned back and Rafael was gazing at him, **his** blue **eyes** boring into Cannister's features, and he wondered what **Rafe** could read there, what mysteries he might find on Cannister's face that he **himself** could not discover, no matter how often he studied his face in the mirror.

"I'm fine. **Thanks** a lot, Rafe. I mean it. This could make me. This could change everything."

"Don't get your hopes up, mate. You never know.. . it could just be a single sheet of paper with a picture of a dick on it. You know?"

Cannister laughed. He laughed until he saw the piece of paper he'd been writing on, crumpled and lying near the wastebasket. He turned away so Rafe couldn't read any more hidden letters of **his own** .

"I might take a walk," he said. "**You** want to come?"

Rafael, when he turned back to face him, was watching him, his blue eyes searching for something—the reason for the crumpled paper, perhaps. The jovial expression, a warm sense of openness, that Cannister appreciated so much in his friend, was for the first time in his experience not there, and Cannister felt a distinct, sharp pain at its absence. "No thanks," Rafe said. "I've got lots of work today, you know?"

"I know," Cannister said. "Me too."

3

Cannister, in the center of things, sticks his hands in his pockets and hunches over in his dark peacoat, his fine blonde hair tousled from the wind. He loves this town, this Eton. Its mysteries make him feel part of something older than he is, part of something that has history. He doesn't know why looking in the plate windows of shops makes him feel melancholy, but he knows that there is something about seeing the crests of long-dead English families that turns his mind to thoughts of wonder. They make him see fields he's never trodden and places he's never been. He turns away, unhappy and unsure, and wanders. The winding passages and alleys in Eton seem to stretch into one another, the tail end of one street feeding into the head of another, so that an endless circle of quaint English roads all seem to converge and co-mingle until there is only one long road, turning into a circle, endlessly and endlessly twisting upon itself, leading nowhere. Cannister takes these roads, his head following the cobblestones and the disjointed, narrow sidewalk he always trips upon. He keeps his shoulders hunched against the chill in the air that everyone assures him is unseasonable, and once he bumps into an extremely tall man with a widow's peak and a dark, thin goatee, whose nose seems to stretch into the atmosphere. The tall man beaks his head down, allowing Cannister to

pass, and only a few feet away does Cannister stop and look back, a frown creasing a small center line between **his** eyes, but the man is gone — swallowed by the curves and shadows and enigmas that seem to surround **this** side of the **Thames** . Cannister wonders, ~~thinks~~ about magic, and moves on, almost positive that the man he has **bumped** into is the spitting image of William Shakespeare. He **smiles** to **himself** about **this** for a while, glad to forget about Amelia, until he **looks** up — finally, at long last becomes aware of the world around him — and finds that he is completely, utterly, lost.

4

The **streets** all along and around Eton are winding, and narrow, and some of them run through the town in distinct **half-circles** and **curves** that never resolve themselves. The overlying **effect** to one who hasn't lived there for their whole life is one of suspicious physics — like a **hill** that only continuously **goes** up. **Cannister** **once** thought to himself that if he were ever to lose **his** way in Eton, he would never find **his** way out again. Luckily, however, Cannister possessed a quality he knew few other men **shared** . . . he could ask directions of anyone. He simply didn't have the patience to wait and **try** and find **his** own way out of whatever mess it was he'd **gotten** himself in.

Feeling not a little smug about just **this**, Cannister actually took a moment to look around him.

Wherever he was, it was beautiful. **The streets** and sidewalks were narrow and cobbled **as** they were in Eton, but here there was something fresher about them. The bricks and dull stones that lined the sidewalks were bright, **as** though they were somehow fresh. The clouds that had been smothering Cannister's mood **all afternoon** were breaking somewhere to the west, because brilliant rays of a deep gold were

illuminating the hidden colors of the rooftops high above him. The buildings, connected all in a row, stretched up three stories into gabled rooftops. There were no alleys but occasionally there would be a wooden barn-like door set in the wall nearby, presumably leading to a courtyard on the other side. There were flowerboxes on the windowsills around and above him, and across the street, on the corner of a building that split the lane across the way into a "Y" intersection, **was** a quaint outdoor café. A man of medium build, wearing a white tee **shirt** and rust-colored vest, was sitting across the street, surrounded by art—an easel and **two** cameras on **tripods** flanked **him—as** though he were attempting to not just capture a moment but **an** entire vista. Cannister watched him sketch, **his own** hands deep in the pockets of **his** jeans, marveling that the man wasn't **too** cold to hold **his** pencil in what looked like **thin**, delicate fingers.

As he watched, the artist turned to **him**, caught **his** eye, and winked. He **was** nearly bald, but **his** face was covered with tremendously thick, jet-black hair: eyebrows and moustache. **His** jowls moved like a **lion's** when he smiled at Cannister before turning back to **his** work.

And when Cannister looked back, **still** enjoying the light of the sun, hidden somewhere behind **the** buildings directly beside him **as** it played on the flats across the street, **he** saw her.

5

The girl with the *summerstorm* eyes. Here is the centerpiece of Cannister's trip in England. It happens not precisely in the middle of **his** journey... not temporally, anyway, but it happens fairly close to that time. She is captured **as** a singular moment in time, much in the way that the artist with the dark hair would capture her if only he were

able to fully achieve what he dreams of accomplishing. She sits, there at those wrought-iron tables, her eyes demurely lowered towards the magazine through which she is leafing. The café seems to hesitate—no, to hover—around her, **as** though waiting for that one finger, ivory and gentle like a piano key, to finish moving that page before moving on with their lives. A waiter, **his** white smock pure and untouched by stains, is at the table near hers, pouring water from a glass pitcher, its ice chunks tinkling against the glass **as** he pours. A cyclist **goes** by, one of the Eton professors, perhaps, wearing knickers and wool socks and a Scottish cap, but he is only a blurred passing moment in the foreground. Her chair is of the same ironworks **as** the table: ornate, with long curling artwork making up the back. She wears a white top that seems to just match her blonde hair, a strand of which captures the golden sun Cannister now imagines must be lighting **this** corner only for him. As he watches—oh reader, take a breath before she moves so you mightn't **miss** that soft purr of fabric—she lifts her arm and brushes a lock of that air back from her forehead and behind her ear, where it remains for the moment. A long gray skirt holds to her legs, which are not model-thin but slender for the common man and again—hold, reader, it might even be proper to lower your eyes, to keep **this** moment only for Cannister himself—she moves! Her leg easily **lifts** and changes, lowering and straightening slightly at **the** leg to allow the other to cross over it. And there, at that time, she looks up and meets **his** eyes, a small, tender smile already on her dull rose lips, and Cannister swoons.. .her eyes are the color of low clouds during a thunderstorm in July, impossibly clear even from across the **street**. And he knows that he loves **this** woman, that he impossibly, improbably loves **this** woman, so reader take a breath and sigh it out again, because you are witnessing those rarest of moments, when man realizes something he has not **until** that moment believed in. You are witnessing love—true, unbelievably powerful love—**at** first sight.

Cannister found to **his own** surprise that he was holding his breath. He glanced at the artist **as** he exhaled, feeling **guilty, as** though he had stolen something, but the artist was painting other worlds, was sketching other dreams —Cannister was not stealing **his**. He looked back and remarkably, she was **still** there, still turning the pages of her magazine. Her bosom breathed easily up and down, gently affecting the topography of her light shirt, and Cannister felt his **knees** grow weak. He never had weak **knees** before. He turned slowly in a circle. This strange place, **this** odd back road that surely must be close to the green fields that lie to the west of Eton, must have a name, for it was here that he fell in love for the first time. Cannister stopped turning and found himself suddenly self-conscious. How long had he been ogling her at that corner, his hands dumbly at his sides? How long had she been conscious of him, staring at her from across the lane? He had to do something. He stepped into the street.

The bicycle that ran him over was large and heavy, its rider flying over him with arms spread **as** though he might **soar** and **miss** the ground, or leastways land lightly on **his** modest brown shoes. **As** Cannister tumbled, he twisted so that he caught an instant picture: the cyclist, **arms** spread Superman-fashion, flying overhead, the brightening clouds above, with just a patch of clear blue over the cyclist's left tweed shoulder. Then Cannister was on the ground and alas, the cyclist **also** landed. The bicycle, its wheels **turning**, clinging to life, clattered somewhere nearby, finally coming to rest.

"Oh God," Cannister said, "I'm sorry. You all right?"

The cyclist, getting warily to his feet but bent at the waist, was waving one finely gloved hand at Cannister. He was **ruffled**, but Cannister couldn't see any blood, and he himself struggled to gain his feet.

“I’m frightfully sorry,” said the man. He was in his late forties, maybe, or **fifties**, and had thinning gray hair that was whitish at the ends. There were **lines** on his face, but this man was aging gracefully, those **lines** being somewhat dignified. “I should have been watching, shouldn’t I?”

“No no,” Cannister stammered, “it’s my fault. I just stepped right out.”

The Englishman came over and helped Cannister to his feet. “Please excuse me.” Finally, even the bicycle was still and the men were both standing upright again. “I beg your pardon. Gave me quite a scare, you did.”

“I. . . really, it was. . .” Cannister was reaching out to shake the man’s hand, but the Englishman was glancing around the ground, patting **his** tweed jacket **as** though looking for a **set** of keys. “I. . . are you all right?”

“My cap, I seem to have. . .” He glanced up at Cannister, sparkling blue eyes surrounded by etchings, **as** though the artist had **been** at work here on this man’s face, allowing him to age with character. “My cap was. . . I’m **sorry** could you. . . would you help me find it?”

“**Of**course.” Cannister immediately searched the ground and within a moment the cap was found, hiding ashamed beneath one of the wheels—still spinning slowly, slowly onward—of the bicycle. “Here it is.”

“Oh thank you. Thank you indeed.”

“It’s. . . it’s a nice hat,” Cannister said. He felt self-conscious then, all of a sudden, not sure what to say. The Englishman only stood there, fitting his cap tightly atop his silvery hair once more. “Uh. . .”

“Thank you, young man,” the cyclist said. He beamed at Cannister, the **lines** on his eyes lengthening like **evening** shadows. “About the hat, I mean.”

“**Yes**. . . well. . .” Cannister had become turned around in the scuffle, and facing east again, suddenly recognized the high flags of Windsor castle, waving afar, signaling

the way out of this strange alley and back to Windsor. "Yes," he finished, sounding like the dumb Yank this man must imagine him to be. He pictured, quite clearly, the man at the dinner table of some country cottage, **off** in the fields, sharing a plate of hot bangers with **his** plump wife, and complaining about the idiot he'd nearly killed that evening on the **streets** of... of wherever he was.

"Well..." The Englishman glanced down at **his** shoes, and Cannister, following **his** gaze, finally noticed the knickers, surprised despite **himself**. This man might have stepped out of one of the crumbling **books** he studied in the musty anterooms of Eton's library. "I really must be going. I do so apologize for running you down..."

"Really, it was my fault."

The Englishman was struggling with **his** bike, helping it up **off** the ground, mumbling something under **his** breath and addressing the cycle with caring apologies for its rude treatment. Cannister realized too late that he should help him, but then the bike was up, the Englishman nodding to him.

"You sure you're all right?"

In answer the Englishman treated him to a brilliant smile, teeth and *gums*, and then was atop **his** ride once more, wavering **off** down the bricks and cobblestones, straightening out as he gained speed. Cannister watched him go. He took a step after **him**, as though there were something he was supposed to ask this man, but then stopped.

The girl. He turned, starting to run, somehow already knowing that she was...

She was gone. Some patrons at the cafe were watching him, having **seen** the show on the corner opposite the café, but the girl with the summerstorm eyes was no longer there. He could clearly see the delicate teacup lying on the small table, and a china plate, holding down a sheet of loose paper that pulled and tugged in the small breeze that came down one of the roads.

He crossed the street, finding that something was pulling on his stomach, **as** though mourning the **loss** already. At the café, some patrons watched him curiously, this frantic American, as he pawed at the sheet of paper... surely a name, a mysterious number he could investigate, but it was devoid of clues. Only a few random doodles, mostly lines drawn in **ink**, a hastily drawn circle here and there. Nothing of use. He turned around again, looking in all directions, for a sign, but the girl was gone. He reached down and touched her plate, **his** finger coming away with a remaining crumb that might or might not have touched her **lips**, her delicate pale fingers, her chin.

There are ghosts that connect to us, that hold onto **our** lives though not invited. There are deaths we mourn when we have no right to, and prayers we utter when God has long ago lost interest in us, allowing, **as** Mr. George Michael once said, us to escape out the back door while his back was turned.

Cannister **Barnes** uttered a prayer such **as** that, but nothing in the empty **streets** around him bothered to answer.

7

Dear Amelia,

I'm **sorry**, but there is love out there, and I have found it, and not within the familiar lines of your face that I have thought of so often while here, across the sea. She lives, and exists, and sighs within my dreams and my heart, and while I have tried to somehow regain control of my **senses**, I cannot. I don't even really want to. She is everything, and I've never met her. I've no choice but to stay here, searching for *this* woman I was meant to love since my conception, and never knew it. I'm meant to stay

here in England, looking for her... if I have to **base** the rest of my life on the **slim** chance that she'll have me... then I have to do so.

What am I doing damn it I can't do this get ahold of yourself.
don't let this get to you you'll never send this you'll never find her its
just not done I can't believe whats happened to me I can't believe it I
can't believe it

8

Across the street from him stood **two** Eton boys, the older kind, and they were wearing their **penguin suits**. They were watching him, the American, and not all that discreetly. Cannister knew what they were sniggering at. He was crying. He'd been searching all week for the same roadside café, the same little village with its quaint window **boxes** and close streets. He'd **looked** in vain for older men who might have stepped out of some portrait, some old, tinted photograph from a **book**. He thought that if he could find that, he might find her. But it was gone.

The entire neighborhood was gone. He had lost her forever.

Chapter 4

Whitchoate

1

"I'll never find her." Shadows, flickering in candles. The rich, sweet smell of hash floating in the room. Rafe sitting in the shadows, the light flickering over **his** bare, dark torso.

"You'll find her. Windsor's not extraordinarily large."

"It wasn't Windsor."

"You don't look like yourself, my friend."

"It wasn't Eton, either."

"You look pale. Your color's **gone**."

"Magic, Rafe. Like Brigadoon or something."

"You need some rest. Stay in bed tomorrow."

"Can't. I can't. I have to **go** down to Bath to see those lab guys."

"Bed rest. That's what **you** need. A nice lie-down."

The room stretched out around them. The sun was lighting the great castle a bright orange. The round tower seemed to be peering straight at Cannister, its singular slit narrowed in analysis. It was across the Thames, but they could see it. It was in another world, but they knew which one.

"Never. She's gone. I can feel it."

"Not far, though, eh? It's only been a week."

"I love her, Rafe."

Haze filtered the light. Rafe swallowed, suddenly interested in the patterns of the carpet. Something changed in the room, like the sound of an air conditioner you only notice when it shuts down.

“I know,” he said.

2

InterOffice Memo:

From: **GOD411**

To: wilson88

This is, of course, a self-erasing message. Read carefully. I've reviewed the case you've sent me, and the further diagrams and charts, and I've decided that for now our best course of action is the one we've been following. **Yes**, I see the benefits of bringing the Subjects together, but for now the benefits of blind testing far exceed anything we might gain from your proposal. Please see the wisdom in **this**. Discovery of the Project will, I feel, spook our **boy**, and who knows when we'll **get** such a chance again? It was sheer foolishness to have listened to your predecessor in the first place, and mothballing the Project was the biggest mistake (in my opinion) I've made in the past ~~thirty~~ years we've been in business. Recent developments in the field (~~see~~ attached review of Corporate Competitive Advances) should tell us, if anything, that soon the pay-off will come. We can't ruin our efforts by delving into

morals and that sort of nonsense. All of which is moot. **Our** friends in the desert haven't been funding this for no reason.

Stop all this nonsense about free will. You've forgotten, it seems, the greater issues at stake here, and we simply cannot ignore them. I don't want to see you end up like your predecessor, Jack. I'll work everything out. I'll take care of everything.

3

Cannister generally disliked having to travel a long way by car, though less so when he was driving. At first, the trip from Windsor to Bath seemed unnecessarily long, at least on paper. But **as** he left the parks and tenement rows of his adopted town, his spirit began to lighten. Cannister had not ~~left~~ the shadow of Windsor's castle at all since he'd arrived, **unless** you counted the wide, green farmer's field that seemed to grow from nowhere behind the school. There, Cannister had spent a few afternoons, his back to Eton, **staring** out at the wispy white clouds on the horizon and thinking about England, about how it had all happened from there.

But the green hills and sporadic old **trees** soon made him forget almost everything, though occasionally he would pass a couple in a sedan and **think** again about the girl with the summerstorm eyes. The English countryside didn't roll past him... it flourished and lazily opened its arms to him. It allowed him occasional **glimpses of** what inspired so many **poets**, of what allowed so many others before him to feel its magic. If, on the way to Bath, England showed him —just for a moment— the true power behind those ancient **hills**, hidden in the patterns of those old, old trees, Cannister wasn't paying attention. He was reveling in the cloud-gray Citroen Rafe had allowed him to borrow. A

George Michael album played in the slick CD-player set in the wood-paneled dash. The speakers played George so finely, and ran their acoustic fingers slightly around Cannister's ears, nibbling there and turning him **on**. Halfway to **his** destination, all was right with the world again, and he was beating **his** hands on the leather steering wheel in perfect rhythmic synchronization to "Cowboys and Angels."

He felt old, somehow, driving along the scenic A4. He wasn't in years, but here he was, **going** on a funded research jaunt, driving a car he wouldn't be able to afford **himself** even if he struck it rich on the lecture circuit. He glanced into the rearview mirror (still off-put by being on the wrong side of the car, the **street**, the world) and looked at the shadows under **his** eyes. He hadn't slept well the night before, composing letters to Amelia in **his** head until **two** in the morning, the high wearing **off** slowly, **as** though clinging to him out of desperation for the **unknown**.

Dear Amelia, how are you? I'm doing fine in England except I've fallen in love with a woman, for the first time. **Love** at First Sight, can you believe it I can't. I can hardly string words together, because I'm becoming unraveled. I feel **as** though things have come undone around me, and even **as** I stand here, the tiles of the Earth are dropping lazily into the abyss, each one **turning** lazily over and over, as I wait in the middle to fall.

And the night would continue to move onward around him. He would throw out the letters in **his** mind and start again. With each letter, he pictured not **himself** writing it, but instead Amelia reading it, and he watched her face move and react as she read the ghost words that floated before him.

Dear Amelia, would you be so kind as to sit down? I love you. You know that I love you without question, without anything but my **own** heart. But now I've faltered, I've come to a crossroads. Please understand that **this** is not about you

But of course it was about her. He watched **as** she sat there, reading **his** letter, her pale fingers touching the page lightly, her second and third fingers keeping one corner trapped, even as the words fenced her in. She would sit down, and one hand would come up to cover her mouth, **as** it always did. Her eyes would show no emotion, they were unreadable. Her auburn hair would be tied back (she was doing the laundry, and stopped to get the mail on her way back inside from separating the colors—whites and lights, darks and towels) and her forehead would be clear and **as** she read that hand would come away from her mouth and her thick, heart-shaped mouth would be left in a silent "O."

Dear Amelia, I know that as you read **this**, you will cover your mouth, but please don't stop what you're feeling. Hate me, because though you must by now be aware I've done something wrong, it's far worse than that last time. I haven't cheated on you. Not physically. In a way, I suppose what's happened to me here is worse. I suppose that what's become of me will hurt you worse than before. I shouldn't say "become of me," I should say that I've done **this thing**, that **h a l l o w e d** **this** to happen, because these are my **own** actions, Amelia. **These** are my own words and **I a m** in charge here. Don't cry, Amelia. I know that weeping is often beyond you, but I remember those tears you shed that night at your Aunt and Uncle's house, and I remember your brother's violent

reaction. Don't cry but rejoice because now you'll be done with me.

You'll surely hate me forever and that's best, because never have I done anything in the past years to deserve your devotion.

And that was no good because he sounded simpering, he sounded **as** though he were begging for something, and he wouldn't go on **his knees**. He hated his friends in college, the way they would snake their way out of things, apologizing to their women and trying to get them to break up with them because they couldn't handle the guilt. Cannister had always said it would never be **him**. He always said he'd be brave. This was not brave.

He turned and looked at the clock. It was a quarter of **two**. He stared at the red number, keeping track **as** the last one kept changing. The night was settled around **him**, and he silently made up his mind to tell her in person. He would return to America and finish his business there and then return, finding the girl with the summerstorm eyes, and **telling** her his story.

He fell asleep, watching the numbers.

4

The town of Bath snuck up on **him**. Even lost in the restlessness he remembered from the night before, Cannister took great pleasure in what was **turning into** a beautiful country drive. He drove through the tiny farming community of Avesbury, remembering the mysterious stories that Rafael had told **him** about the stone circle there, how Rafe claimed to have sat in the middle during the rising of the full moon one evening and there felt a Presence. He told **this** story while high, and Cannister wasn't

sure whether to believe him or not. But he remembered Rafe speaking of the experience and using the capital letter "P" like that: Presence. He received a pleasurable chill, driving by what must be a mystical place and wondering about the mysteries of so ancient a place. From there, the road curved and twisted, his hair breezing in the hot summer air, and Cannister merely digested the view. As he drove westward, the hills rose around him, and he narrated good-bye letters to himself as he took in the sights and sighs of the land, occasionally catching great whiffs of clover in the rushing wind around the Citroen. And hours later, he was still lost in the majesty when he sped down a curving lane, hugged the corner, and suddenly slowed to a near-halt as the town of Bath uncurled from its hidden valley before him. He pattered along the lane, coming closer, not quite able to take in how lovely it was, how gorgeous. The sand and rosewood colored buildings caught the high sun and contrasted with the rich greens all around it. Cannister knew he was in love.

He parked in what he assumed would be a safe area for Rafe's car and strolled from there, his satchel swinging lightly on his shoulder. He wore khakis and no socks, and enjoyed the way his sandals clung to his feet. He felt very much like a pilgrim indeed. Everywhere he looked, he felt he was seeing crinkles in the fabric of the world, that he possessed magical eyes that saw through the Now and showed him the Then. Sandwiched between a modern storefront and a movie theater was a pale limestone façade that looked like a cathedral, possibly centuries old. Along the rising cobbled streets, interconnected shops displayed their wares in wide front windows. Besides the usual touristy business of small models of the bath house and cathedral were bookstores and tea houses, and Cannister took his time, walking by each one, staring into the windows and wondering at the sights within each one.

Rafe had given him directions to the laboratory that started from the bath house itself, because it should be easy enough to find. Just how Rafe was familiar enough with

the town to do it from memory was unclear to Cann, but at that moment he didn't have room for such thoughts. Moving easily through the lanes to the wide square that fronted the museum of the Roman Baths, he even forgot **his** melancholia about Amelia. He smoked a cigarette, staring across the square at the cathedral and the museum, watching hundreds of school kids on tour sitting on the fountain in the middle of the square and smoking cigarettes with their teachers. How lucky they were, Cannister thought, to **still** be receiving instruction, to not be going down these roads alone.

Cannister resisted the urge to go directly to the museum, to investigate the sight of the very history that had been buried again and again. He didn't know how much time he would have to spend at the Whitchoate Laboratory — or how little — but he reserved the pleasures of tourism for later, *if* he would have time. It had taken nearly three hours to get there, and he must have Rafe's car back by evening. Giving one last look at the ancient buildings, he turned and unfolded the small piece of notepaper, and moved off down the narrow lanes, following Rafe's uncannily exact directions.

How odd to be on the right path but be completely lost at the same time, he thought. Rafe's directions took him down so many small alleys and turning cobbled roads that soon he wasn't even sure where he was going, though he kept finding the landmarks and markers that Rafe had noted for him, so he knew he was on the right path. Moving carefully, **still curious** about the sights of the **town**, Cannister continued on **his** way. The sun was just dipping westward, and in many cases, the lanes were so narrow and **small** that the towering flats and shops on either side covered all but the tiniest strip of deep blue sky. Occasionally a spire or weathervane caught a slant of gold, but otherwise the sun ~~itself~~ was no help.

When he was halfway down **his** page of directions, Cannister stopped for another cigarette, realizing then from the dull ache in **his** cheeks that he was **grinning** ear to ear. He was greatly enjoying the mystery of **this game** he found himself in. It made

him feel like he was a secret agent. James Bond, and all that. He smoked, leaning against a gritty wall, glancing around at the shadowed stores around him. Some iron tables were outside one, and a few couples were having tea. He hadn't brought his watch, and Cannister grinned, thinking that he was without time. Again, the mystery of Avesbury rose to mind, and Cannister imagined that he was lost somehow within a mystery that was swirling just beyond his ken.

But eventually even that mystery was over, and he extinguished his cigarette and moved onward. At one point, he passed under a high, cement arch and out into a wider, open lane. The countryside around him took his breath away. He had been climbing steadily without being aware of it (he'd assumed the shortness of breath was his own child-like excitement that came from being on an adventure) and now the town stretched out below him, the deep green hills that surrounded it all covered in a light haze from the ebbing heat. Cannister finally realized another reason why he'd been smiling. The sun was out. The sun had been warming him all day, ever since leaving Windsor and traveling west, and he'd not even been aware. He strolled down yet another lane, found that he was approaching a giant crescent of expensive looking flats that served to mark another heralding point in Rafe's directions. He was close now. A quick jaunt downwards, over a small rise, and through another narrow lane (this one curving northeast, now that he'd gotten his bearings), and suddenly he found the address at the bottom of the page.

The Whitchoate Laboratory was, after all that, very unassuming. It stretched up three stories, sandwiched between unremarkable tenements on either side. There were no garden boxes in the windows, or special instructions outside. Not even a sign. The building was brick and there were white shutters decorating its simple four-pane windows. A small chimney could just be seen, crisp dark red against the striking blue up above.

Having no directions to follow, Cannister went up the steps and knocked on the narrow, white front door. There was no answer at first. He was about to knock again when the door was answered by a **tall**, thin man with striking dark eyes. He wore wireless round eyeglasses and his shining forehead seemed to crest to a peak. He wasn't dressed in a long, white lab-coat. He wasn't carrying a clipboard. He wasn't holding a beaker. He was dressed in gray pants with a complementing hound's-tooth jacket. **His** right hand hesitated on the edge of the door, and his left hid behind his back. He was crying, the unexpected tears running in great streams down his sharp cheekbones.

5

"I'm really terribly sorry," Doctor Godfrey Passer said once more. He apologized with the overwhelming effluence that Cannister had come to recognize **as** being a distinctly English trait. "**You** understand I was quite taken aback by the news." Doctor Passer had **been** expecting him, it seemed, but a friend had called with tragic news minutes before Cannister's arrival. Cannister, thinking only that his face must be red **by** now from the heat that seemed to rise from his embarrassment, found **himself** apologizing **as** well.

"Really, I can come back another time," he said. "It's no bother at all."

"Nonsense," Doctor Passer responded. He dabbed at his eyes with a bright white handkerchief. Though the man was imposingly **tall** with quite stem **looks**, even while upset, the gesture struck Cannister **as** being distinctly effeminate. "You drove all that way. You must **see** the collection, now that you're here. I'll have another of **our** team show you the way."

“I appreciate this a great deal,” Cannister said. The inside of the building was more in keeping with Cannister’s idea of what a lab should look like. Only the occasional thick-looking door broke the monotonous plain, white walls. Each of these doors was not provided with a knob, but a sterile-looking metallic keypad, with numbers and seemingly random letters in different colors. Cannister thought these were oddly sinister, and was once again reminded of his secret agent fantasy. “This might help my research quite a bit.”

As he spoke, Doctor Passer led him into a small common area, furnished with expensive-looking, high-backed leather chairs. A coffee table of dark wood in the middle of the room matched the deep, rich burgundy colors of an intricate carpet on the ground. The room, an oasis in the middle of the stark, white hallways, was a relief of warmth, and at the end of the room was a pair of wooden doors, shut, and Cannister thought he could smell the warm, musty odor of books – the recognition of which spoke to Cannister’s geeky background as a grad student. Only an English scholar would be excited at such a smell.

“Our library is through these doors. I’m afraid I don’t have the combination...” Doctor Passer waved a thin hand with long fingers towards the double doors, and Cannister noted that even these had a keypad instead of a handle. “So I’ll be sending another of our men down to assist you shortly. If you need anything.” And here the tall, imposing doctor reached out to take Cannister’s hand. The doctor pierced Cannister’s gaze with his deeply black eyes. He seemed to be searching for something in Cannister. Something he could not yet see. It occurred to Cannister then that he’d felt uncomfortable in Passer’s presence the whole time he’d been there, for no reason he could discern. It wasn’t the man’s open tears. Cannister had a close male friend in college who wept openly all the time. He was used to such displays of emotion. Rather, there was something else about Passer that made him... suspicious? Was that what he

was feeling? Rafe had never told him what corporation it was that **this** strange group of men in their unmarked building worked for. But Cannister knew enough about himself to know that part of **his** nervousness was in the strange anonymity these men kept here in **this** timeless hamlet. Amelia's brother, Todd, was always inanely **going** on about conspiracy theory and giant corporations that were running a shadow government. He'd wanted Cannister to write a book for **him** at one point. Cannister had let the idea slowly slip away.

Regardless of these feelings, Doctor Passer at last let go of **his** hand. "Anything at all," he emphasized. "You have someone find me. All right then?"

Cannister nodded, fighting a smile. He was struck with the funny thought that Doctor Passer was in love with **him**. Maybe that was it. "I **will**."

"**ALL**right. Fine." Doctor Passer nodded, smiled, and nodded again. Something he wanted to say? Something Cannister was expected to do? Oh God, was he supposed to have come with a donation? Something of that **sort**?

No. Passer smiled at **him**, spun on a heel, and strode **off**, wringing **his** hands behind **him**. Almost **as** if on cue, a young man in a shirt and tie immediately emerged from another connecting hallway that emptied into the common room, and smiled at Cannister **as** though they were old friends.

"Made it, did you? You're the chap from Eton?"

"That's me." Cannister was **still** being amused by Passer's odd behavior. "Your supervisor was just giving me the mini-tour."

"Ah." The young man, apparently done with pleasantries, brushed past him and quickly made a few small motions on the keypad. There was a small, solid clunk, and the right door pushed open an inch, **as** though opened from the inside. The nameless man opened the door all the way for **him**, stepped aside, and Cannister moved in, already entranced with the secret library, snuggled away in the middle of **this**

unassuming building in the middle of an unassuming row of flats. He was smiling still when the young man politely cleared **his** throat.

“We’re, ah, having some trouble with the locking mechanisms on **this** floor. I feel awkward, you know, bringing it up, but I thought it better to tell you ~~than~~ have you think. .” instead of telling Cannister what he’d have thought, the man spread **his** hands and shrugged. “But the doors will lock behind you. I’ve left a small radio on the table in there, and when you’re done, just press the “Call” button, and I’ll come back for you. All right?”

Cannister, only half-paying attention, nodded. The library was incredibly charming. The room was square, taking up **two** floors, the second of which circled the first so that one could see directly up to the ceiling. The only windows were high up on the second story, narrow and ~~thin~~ and covered with wire mesh. Two long tables stood in the middle of the carpeted floor, speckled with green-shaded brass reading lamps. The young man flicked these on for him. There was **a** small, one-person spiral staircase in the corner that led up through the second story “balcony.” Cannister thought it was eerily perfect. Just what he’d expected, **as** though he’d been there before.

“The works we think you’ll be interested in are on the second floor. I’ve left them for you on the reading table there. Just go up the stairs and to **your** right, and through those stacks” – he pointed up so Cannister could see – “and you’ll find it. Right.”

“Thank you,” Cannister said, quietly. One was always quiet in libraries.

“Splendid,” the man said. He wore a strange smile. Cannister thought he might have done something wrong.

“I didn’t catch your name...” he **began** with a smile, but the man nodded **as** though he didn’t hear, turned and moved through the door again, closing it behind him. There was another small, heavy sound, but Cannister ignored its import, heading for the

staircase, energized by the possibilities that waited above. He didn't mind being locked in. Not in a room such as **this**. He took the stairs at a sharp clip, **his** feet ringing on the metal risers.

6

Cannister found that he was lost in the world he'd expected to find in England. Here were the secret rooms with possible treasures, locked away in the middle of **this** strange company. He closed **his** eyes, once safely ensconced in the upstairs section where he was hidden from possible view, should someone burst in, and took a deep breath, holding it and **thinking** dreamily his enchanted thoughts:

Nameless library. Smells of old **books**. Whispers somehow of the men who have sat here before, leafing pages with thin fingers, **smiling** darkly at what was contained in the tomes around me. The ghosts not of **books** nor authors, but rather the readers themselves moved here, among these stacks, and I **a m** nothing to **them** for they are a part of history. I sit here, empty, quiet, and these ghosts look upon me, shaking their head. I am a trespasser, sitting here... letters all around me. Millions of alphabets, **strung** together from the words in each **book**. Crossing out the letters **as** they're used... how long? How long with a crate of pencils to mark down each twenty-six letter sequence, like whatever mysterious science they're surely tinkering with behind these walls? Spiral me, old ghosts, like those letters I'll spiral, **as** they keep me here, a prisoner, for centuries, trapped with you and Dr. Vicky's **odd** spiraling handwriting, recording secrets I'll never understand. Spiral me into a Sequence, too, so that I might one day unstring myself and discover, why... why I'm built **this** way. Why I think how I do. Why I will surely break Amelia's heart.

Cannister awoke slumped over the **books** before him. It felt at first that he couldn't raise his head, that he could **think** about raising it but that it wouldn't lift on its own accord. After a moment the feeling passed, and he looked up to find the light different **all** around him. How long had he been out? He wasn't sure. He looked down and saw, mortified, that he'd drooled on one of the ancient **books**. He dabbed at it with his sleeve, panic rising in his stomach, making him feel sick. Would they notice? Make him pay for it? How would he do such a **thing**? The book kept notes that dated back to the early **1800's**, and he would never be able to cover any damage he'd caused. He left it open, moving the lamp on the reading table directly over it, praying that the three connected spots he'd left (they combined to uncannily resemble Mickey Mouse's silhouette) would dry **by** the time the men came to put **things** right. He gathered **his things**, looking at the three of the old works he'd bookmarked with scraps of paper. Had he chosen these for a reason? He placed a hand to the side of **his** head. He felt as he did when falling asleep in the summer time: comatose and heavy, somehow carrying more mass than he ought. He rose and stumbled, feeling dizzy. What was wrong with him? He stood **still** for a minute or **two**, trying to get **his** bearings.

He descended the stairs, carrying the **books** he wanted under one arm — mainly because he felt he had to do **something**, had to come away with some resources so the trip wasn't a total loss — and holding onto the railing steadily with **his** other hand. **His** right shoulder ached, **as** though he'd run into something sharp. Was there a bruise

there? Cannister didn't remember. He found the radio and someone answered immediately, responding **as soon as** he depressed the red button.

It was Doctor Passer who answered. He looked just the same, but there was sweat on **his** forehead. Had he run down there to get **him**? Cannister blinked a few times when the doors opened, letting light inside with a rush.

"Yes! How was your research?"

"Fine. Good. It was fine." Passer allowed Cannister to exit after signaling for another young man behind him to take the **books** from under Cannister's arm. "I think it was just fine."

He stood in the foyer again, staring emptily at the fancy empty chairs, the strangely ornate carpet. He realized that he felt high. He put a hand to his forehead and it came away wet. Had it been that hot in the library? Passer's assistant was wrapping up Cannister's selections in plain brown paper, and the sound crinkled abnormally loud in his ears.

"I hope our modest library was of **some** use to you," Doctor ~~Passer~~ said. The assistant handed the packages to Cannister, who took them hesitantly. He was struck with the strong impression that the wrapping man was smirking at him.

God, Cannister thought, what the hell is going **on**? I think I'm having a flashback. Is that possible?

He realized that Passer was watching him, expecting an answer. Cannister opted for being polite. **"Yes. Yes** it was. I think I found some good stuff."

"Stuff. **Yes.** How splendid." And then he was being led away, down the halls that were still plain, **still** white, **still** sterile and somehow frightening. Cannister paced behind Doctor Passer's long strides, trying to **stay** in the middle of the corridor, somehow feeling sure that at any moment one of those nondescript, white doors would swing open and hands would reach out to grab him. He knew he was sweating again. He wanted

out. Passer couldn't show him the door fast enough for his liking. This, however, didn't seem to be a problem: Passer was moving so quickly through the building's maze-like hallways that Cannister felt they were almost **running**.

And then, blessedly, Passer was punching numbers into a door like any other, and when it swung open, fresh air and light came in, and Passer was handing him out onto the stoop. They stood there for a moment, together, Doctor Passer with his hands behind his back, looking down his arched nose at Cannister, still searching for something.

"I really can't thank you enough," he told the doctor, holding onto the railing by the steps. He was feeling better now, out in the fresh **air**, but still he was unsure of his legs. He tried one step down, putting his weight gently on that foot. It remained steady.

"Nor I, you," Passer said. He extended his hand again. When Cannister took it, it was clammy no longer, but still just **as** strong. "It was quite a pleasure meeting you, Mr. **Barnes**."

"Thanks. I mean... well, thanks."

Doctor Passer smiled. "Come back and visit **us** again, won't you?"

Cannister nodded. He looked down at his wrist, surprised to see that **his** watch wasn't there. Had he not worn it that day? It was hard to remember. He opened his mouth and closed it again. They stood there, Cannister looking up into Passer's striking face, the narrow lane quiet all around them. There seemed to be a pause over the world. Cannister blinked, feeling **his** ears straining to catch some noise.

"**Thanks** again," he said.

Passer smiled, and suddenly Cannister saw that the man's eyes were shining again, **as** they had been when he'd first answered the door. He turned, not knowing what else to do, and took the remaining **stairs**. He turned left without consulting Rafe's directions. He only wanted to get out of that stifling passage, to once again see the

country around him, to see the open **air**. He could tell **by** the color of blue overhead that it was late. How long had he been there, asleep? Is that the problem? Did they know already that he'd damaged their **books**?

He stopped before ducking into another small lane, and looked back. Doctor Passer was **still** on the stoop, watching him. He waved, and the figure of the doctor, made small by perspective, stood perfectly **still**, not moving, only staring. Cannister turned and moved on, feeling like **soon** he might **start** to run.

8

"I don't know... it's weird." Shadows again, flickering candles. "It's like I fell into a hole or something."

"Yeah, **an** asshole," Rafe said, and laughed at **his** own joke.

"I'm serious." Cannister took another hit **off** their shared bottle of scotch. It was late that evening, and he'd managed to make it back to Windsor without freaking out any more. Rafe had **been** waiting for him, concerned. Somehow, four hours had passed while Cannister had been in that library. He was upset that he'd lost so much time, that he wasn't able to see any of the sights, but he was more upset that he'd lost that time at all. It was odd. He wasn't one to suddenly fall asleep like that. Now, he was sitting with Rafe, trying to relax. He'd told him the whole story, and Rafe had listened, not once joking (except for the asshole remark) but rather paying close attention. Usually, Rafe wasn't too serious. But he didn't seem to doubt Cann's story at all.

"Well then."

"Well," Rafe concurred, shaking **his** head and smiling. Cannister smiled back at him. He had freaked out, but it was one of those things that made you *glad* to be freaked

out. Like if you see strange lights in the woods and tell all your friends. When he attended undergraduate school in Michigan, **his** friend Jeremy had told him about seeing those **lights** while camping — **Witch Fires**, he'd called them — and while it sounded like he was terrified during the experience, he was happy **as** hell to share that with Cannister.

“How do you feel?” Rafe asked.

”Sad.”

“Why?” Rafe reached for the drawer nearby that kept **his** pot, but Cannister shook **his** head. He was smoking too much lately. He needed to cut down.

”I’m leaving in almost a week. I don’t want to leave.”

“Because of the girl?”

”Because of everything,” Cannister said.

”I’m going to **miss** you.” Rafe said it **so** simply, so honestly, and it took Cannister some time that evening to get to sleep, thinking about the goodness of friends, of real friends, that helped one through the world.

Chapter 5

Passengers

1

Shock is like a tunnel.

Things came at Cannister in widening increments, **his** field of awareness slowly opening out before him to envelop more and more. At first, all he could see was the face before him. It was the face of a middle-aged woman and she was staring at him with eyes perfectly round. He became aware of her **stillness** next, her body unmoving and **still** behind the glass window of the **train** car. There were people standing around her inside the **train** car, **also** staring out at him. None of them were moving, and the first thought to stick in Cannister's mind was that it was odd that no one seemed to want to exit the train. Next, he became aware of the feet. There were three or four pairs of feet in **his** field of vision, standing scattered around him, and he raised his head and saw people bending down, looking at him. One, a gentleman who was wearing a smoke-gray suit, was actually moving his mouth. **His** eyebrows were turned up to make an arrowhead in the middle of **his** forehead, and worry-lines accentuated the man's face. His mouth was moving. Cannister stared at it, trying to make sense of **this, his** last event in England.

Why can't I hear?

He was sitting on his **ass**, **his** hands at **his** sides, and **his** right hand was burning so he knew it had been scraped up. His knees were up before him, **his** feet flat on the cement. He cautiously tried to turn **his** head, but stopped. He didn't want to look to **his** left or right, he found. Easier to stare straight ahead.

The businessman leaned in closer, his mouth still opening and closing, forming outlines of words. Cannister had a good view of the man's teeth. He looked downward, wondering at the **stillness** of **his** body. He moved his right hand, cautiously, and looked down at it (only at the hand, don't look to the side, don't look over there at the) and saw the palm was dotted with bright points of red, grainy dust spotting the flesh and clinging to the pebbled skin. It was beginning to smart more. How long had he been sitting there? Alarm was rising easily, uncontrolled, within **him**. A slow, murmuring static was rising in his ears. A word or **two** reached him, but **as** if from a great distance.

"... where..."

"...it..."

"...happen..."

Cannister's arms were trembling. He was beginning to shake. He sensed flurried movement in his periphery vision. The shadows **all** around **him** indicated a great crowd, and he became aware that something had happened. The awareness came slowly at **him**, dawning, so that he could hear it approaching him even before he had a chance to see the light of its memory.

Someone was speaking his name, and he turned just **an** inch, and saw, a few feet away, a single wheel. It was a mockery of a circle, and the spokes that had once been orderly inside it were sticking up and out every which way, spines to some wasted urchin. It was the **sort** of wheel that would belong to **an** older model wheelchair.

The rubber that had once circled the wheel had severed in one place, and lay beside the wheel in loosened curves, like a snake. Its end seemed to point to him.

Cannister had reached the chair in **time**. He'd laid **both** his hands on its handles. The beggar wasn't strapped in. He was **in** the air, for a moment, his **eyes** wide for the first time **as** Cannister watched **him** tumble upside down for an instant before the world before **him** was filled with steel and speed.

Blessedly, rather than see it all over again, Cannister passed out.

2

Dear Amelia,

I wanted you to know that I love you, but that we can't go on **as** a couple. This will come as a shock to you, but there's nothing that can be done about it.

I've been in this country now for about **six** weeks. My days have been filled like libraries are with **books**. Each leaf an hour, each word a minute, and **still** the time **goes** by too fast. I miss you, of course, but even though the feelings I have for you are **still** there — and you must believe me that nothing's changed in my heart for you — they have changed. It's cliched to say so, but I really do still love you... if you understand anything at all after this letter, please understand that. I do **still** love you.

There isn't really another woman, Amelia. Don't **think** that I've cheated on you again, because I haven't. What's important is that there **IS** another woman out there... I just haven't found her yet. She exists though. I saw her **as** if in a dream, a mirage. The curtain was lifted, if only for a moment, and there amid the mist was that someone I could love. And yes, I know this without ever having spoken to her. It isn't something I can explain, but that **VERY FACT** makes it the most important **thing** that has ever happened to me.

Just the other week, I saw this girl... and maybe she wasn't even there, I **guess** I have to admit that, too. I felt **as** though those same answers were all around me, **as** though all I had really been doing these past eight years was simply not paying attention. That the world was screaming its secrets to me the whole time but I'd kept the volume down. Well, I heard it that afternoon. I saw what was behind the curtain, and in that one woman I saw that there WERE answers and I could have them if I wanted.

I don't know *if* I'll send **this** letter. It sounds strange and unlikely and most of all it sounds cowardly. I don't want to be cowardly. I want to stand before you and tell you all these things, but I know that you'll do either one of two things: 1) you'll talk me out of this, reasoning with me **as** you like to do that I only have cold feet or something, or 2) you'll be so hurt or angry that I'll give up, that I'll take you in my arms and **this** feeling will once again be silenced by the void that stands between that **curtain** and the stage on which we walk.

The thing is, she might not even be real. I have to find her. Even if she isn't. Because if she's a symbol, then that's all right, too. If she doesn't exist, then she's a sign... the second one I've ever received, that there's something going on beneath what we know, and if I turn away from that again, I'll never know the magic.

I love you. I know that you'll hate me but in time maybe you'll see that.

I love you.

Consciousness came more slowly when he awoke again, but more complete in its totality. He was aware of the world around him, **as** he hadn't been before. There were **still** crowds of people, but they were standing back, away from him, removed from their suffocating power by wide, yellow **tape**, strung out waist high, and cordoning **off** an area of about twenty feet all around him. He was lying down, **his** head turned to the side. The people on the other side of the tape were staring at him, watching him. They weren't at all ashamed of their behavior. A flashbulb was going **off** somewhere, its brief illumination shattering the world in brief shocks of white. He turned **his** head away and faced the wall beside him. He was lying on a stretcher, the kind he associated with helicopters and airplanes. It was a flat, wooden board, but there was white, sterile-smelling cushion covering it and him. The subway wall was clean, free of graffiti, and Cannister stared at the blank tile. He could just make out the shadowy forms of people in the reflection of the shiny plates. They were surrounding him, crowding him, and for a moment, anger at the ugliness of strangers rose up in him. He swallowed, **as** though forcing it down, and tasted the acidic remains of vomit. He'd puked, at some point, and couldn't remember doing **so**.

His throat reacted to the taste in **his** mouth before he could, and he coughed, suddenly, violently, and the man appeared to him **as** he closed his eyes, that one instant of wide-eyed clarity shining in **his** heavy-lidded eyes an instant before.. .

In the picture in **his** mind, though, he wasn't sure if he'd seen the beggar's eyes or not. Perhaps he'd only thought he had: a moment of frightening hallucination in the instant of such trauma. Cannister coughed again, and there **was** a hand **on** the back of **his** neck, holding him, supporting him, warmly. He felt something turn in **his** stomach,

thought he might puke again, and tried to wave whoever was behind him away, but another hand reached down and steadied his arm.

“**Quiet. Quiet**, now. **Sshh.**” It was a man’s voice. The nausea passed and he lay back down, allowing the warmth of that strong hand to support his neck. He hiccupped then, instead, and without warning tears came from his eyes, running slickly down the sides of **his** head. They were cool, **swift**. Before he could react, a **soft** cloth was placed over his face, and it was lightly damp, cooling. He closed his eyes, accepted the care.

”Hush, now.” The man said. Was he a medic? A policeman? **When** the cloth came away, he opened **his** eyes. The man appeared over **his** face, upside down in Cannister’s vision, a short, blonde haircut clinging to a round face with kind features. **His** chest hitched again, and he waited, reading his own body to see if he would start weeping. But he found it was relatively easy to avoid thinking about what had happened. He could barely remember it already.

”What’s...?” He tried to **ask**, but the man, peering down into **his** face, shook **his** head.

”Right. You just keep **quiet** a bit longer. My name’s Paul, and you’ve had a **nasty** fright. We need to watch you just a bit, **all** right?”

“Am I all right?”

Paul smiled at him. His cheeks were red, perhaps because he was still bent over Cannister’s face.

“You’re all right, Mr. Barnes.”

“How do you know my name?”

“We read it on your plane tickets. They were right out of your bag.”

“I’m afraid...”

”**Shh.**” Paul straightened up, nodding to someone Cannister couldn’t see. “Shh, now. Just lie still, Mr. Barnes.

"I'm afraid," Cannister repeated, but Paul ignored him while he ran some **tests**. Cannister tried to keep his mind clear. The paramedic shined a light in each eye, checked his blood pressure, asking him a series of questions that Cannister felt relieved he knew the answers to. Then Paul was standing up, conferring with someone in a dark suit, possibly a uniform. Cannister, still feeling tired, closed **his** eyes, finding momentary solace in the dark.

4

Maybe it's not fear of the dark. Maybe the subway isn't a basement, stretching out lengthwise at parallel ends to our memory, hiding terrors there we can't see but can smell and hear. Maybe what scares **us** about these things is the *journey*. Maybe when that whistling rush of **air** comes down the tunnel, and we lean forward and hear the distant rattling that grows and grows, and we watch **as** the light begins to gleam on the tile walls they put up there—in the darkness—to fool us into thinking that our civilization stretches even under the earth in the those winding places... maybe then we begin to sense that we're traveling again. Maybe it isn't a fear of what might be coming for **us**, but instead a fear of what might be waiting for us, trembling and jittery in anticipation, **as** we speed onward, not **quite** knowing that there's something at our destination, but **sensing** it. We sense that each step brings us closer, each small **soft** footstep along that tunnel, and with each print the **thing** down there **sniffs** the air and claws at the ground and knows that we're a foot closer ~~than~~ we were before, and that we're coming we're coming we're coming, and before we know it, we'll be there, and then...

Then we **begin** to see the real fear. But let's not call it a fear. Let's instead call it anticipation. Because we wait for it, **as** well. It is not the thing that whimpers **as** we draw closer, but rather it is we who **begin** to tremble upon nearing **our** fate. And what scares us, what terrifies us **so**, is the knowledge that we *want* to get there, that we need to. That whatever it is down there, in the winding dark, that breathes and sighs and claws at the earth... what *ever* it is, we want to see it. The knowing is so much less frightening than not knowing, and as travelers we are in a constant state of extreme anticipation, knowing that at journey's end, we'll find what we wanted to. We'll see what we feared. We'll touch the **unknown**. But that driving need to do so, that irresistible urge to make it there and **fulfill our** senses... that is what causes our momentum and moves **our** dreams. That is what makes us travelers. And what **makes** us afraid.

5

The next time Cannister awoke, Paul was gone. He was **still** lying on the same stretcher, and **two** uniformed policemen were standing over him. Cannister momentarily took stock of **his** feelings, and then sat up straight. There was a flutter of flash photography, quickly quelled by another bobby who was standing inside the crowd, trying in vain to send people back on their way, although at first glance, Cannister could **see** that the station was mostly deserted by then. Passengers had been re-routed, he supposed, and sent on their way if **they** were causing a problem. There was, unfortunately, nothing to be done about the press. Upon seeing him sitting up, Paul, who was **still** nearby, came over to **him** and again ran a series of minor exams. Cannister sat **still**, answering the same questions **as** before, with a few new ones **thrown** in, apparently, for good measure. Paul would nod **his** head and say "Mm-hmm"

occasionally. Finally he stood up and nodded down at Cannister before moving **off** to a group of uniformed policemen standing off to the side. Cannister watched, feeling slow-witted and slightly tired. **His** mouth was dry. Paul pointed over to him and one of the policemen standing inside the cordon raised his eyebrows and came over to him. In one easy motion, the man squatted down before him so that they were eye-to-eye.

“Mr. Barnes?”

“Yes.”

“How are you feeling, then?”

He felt fine. The emptiness in **his** mind, the strange awareness that there was something preying on him that he simply wouldn't acknowledge, surged and faded, leaving him uneasy. He shook his head. “All right.”

”Dr. Vesper's checked you out and says you're well enough to go.”

Cannister looked around. The only officials he caught sight of were policemen. There were no other medical personnel on the scene, apparently. The train was **still** stopped at the platform, and he noticed a team of what looked like mechanics, but otherwise **things** seemed to be moving on. Things seemed to be progressing as they always had.

”You don't need to **ask** me any questions?”

The officer smiled. Cannister appreciated the attempt to be kind, or friendly, but he noticed that **this** was not a man who was used to being kind. The small, brass plate on his shirt named him “Collins.” He wondered if **this** Collins wanted to be there at all.

”No,” Officer **Collins** said. ”We've got a number of eye-witness accounts. All of them coincide. **All** we need from you is to sign a few forms.”

“Forms?”

Officer Collins didn't wait to explain, but raised a hand and proceeded to wave someone over. Another officer came over and provided three clipboards. Cannister

watched these things in a daze. **His** satchel and jacket were in neat pile nearby, and there was an object lying on top of them that he didn't recognize. There was a brief image that flashed in **his** mind, where he saw a man in a wheelchair rolling close by his bag, but then it was gone.

“Mr. **Barnes...**” Collins arranged himself nearby so that Cannister could look at the forms the man was holding. “This is a procedure waiver. This one here”—some fumbling **as** he moved papers around—“is an accident report, read **this** closely, please. If you disagree with the statements provided here and...” he leafed through the sheets of paper on the second clipboard. There was miniscule, closely-spaced type on all of them. “...here, then we'll have to question you, **as** well.”

Cannister looked up at Collins. Underneath the man's distinctive hat, **his** eyes were clear, staring into Cannister's **own**. Here, then, was another man who understood about time. **Things** in the Underground, after all, had to keep moving. Things had to keep moving right along.

“I see,” Cannister said.

Collins held **his** gaze a moment longer. “Right. And **this** last is a Statement of Propriety. It essentially states that you were handled fairly and with due account at the scene.”

Without another word, or explanation, the three clipboards were placed in Cannister's lap. **Collins** produced a **shining**, silver pen from his **shirt** pocket. “We're very sorry about all **this**,” he said, his voice quiet, **as** though ashamed. “Several people made note that you tried hard to save **him**. It was a brave gesture.”

Cannister nodded, his eyes on the forms, taking the man's pen in his right hand. He was shocked to find bandages there, applied no doubt by Paul. He remembered, only then, the state of his hand when he'd first woken up after the...

He shook his head, forced his hand to close around the bandages, and proceeded to messily scribble his signature. As soon **as** he was done with the first, Collins quickly took it away, handing it to another officer who stood nearby. There was simply no time for him to change his mind, to argue. It was clear enough in the way Collins hovered over him. He signed the accident report last, not daring to look at the closely-set type, knowing that the words would only serve to remind him of the event. He swallowed, closed **his** eyes tightly for a moment, but the wave of sorrow passed. He re-gripped the pen and signed his name on the last line. Collins snatched it away. As soon **as** he had, a man walked over with **his** things. Collins reached down and helped him to his feet.

Collins stood by **him** for a moment, his large hand firmly on Cannister's left arm, just above his elbow, holding him steady. **His** face was stern, though his eyes carefully watched him for any sign of unbalance. As soon **as** Cannister felt all right, Collins let go of his arm. Surprisingly, he helped Cannister back into his jacket. It seemed an odd gesture from **this** man. His satchel was handed to him, and he slung it over his shoulder, feeling a **dull** ache there. He knew he would feel soreness there in the morning.

Collins was handed something else, the last thing in Cannister's pile, and held it out to Cannister. It was a small, but thick, red **book**. Its pages were gilt-edged and there was a red strap, tying it together. It looked dirty and old, with some dark patches on the cover, just by where Collins was grasping it with his thumb and finger. Cannister had never seen it before.

"This is yours?"

"What?" He licked his lips.

"This was found near your **things**. Is it yours?"

Cannister glanced around the station. There were few people who were not dressed in uniforms. The mechanics and policemen stood around the empty **train** while a few Underground personnel spoke loud orders into radios. Collins continued to stare

at him, **his** gaze stern and impatient. Cannister reached out his hand, and took the book easily from Collins's outstretched arm.

"Yes, it's mine."

Collins, again, nodded curtly. He turned and spoke quickly with a man near **his** side and then started walking away, stopping only when he noticed Cannister wasn't following him.

"Come on, then." He beckoned with one hand. Cannister took a moment to put the strange book in his bag, feeling better only when he closed the outside flap and latched it again. He strode **off** after Collins, who was leading him away towards a flight of steps.

He followed Collins up the stairs, turning the corner and taking **two** flights, before stopping with the officer at another platform that curved around again. When he turned, he could **see** the different strains of daylight up above, and he could hear noise, the warbling chaos of many voices blurred into one. He stared upwards and Collins turned to **him**.

"Now listen, Yank," he said. **His** voice was not kind, or rude, but merely business like. He took Cannister's arm again. "There's a lot of people up there, reporters, mostly. They want to snap a picture of you. There'll be a lot of bright lights and people yelling, and you're not to let it bother you, right?"

"But..."

"Not **a** one, now. You were **a** good man down there, and we got **things all** cleaned up with your help. We've got a car waiting for you. I'll lead you **to** it, **and** you keep your wits about you."

Cannister nodded.

"Good. Mind me, now."

"Where are they taking me?"

“What?” Collins, already **two** steps up, turned, annoyed. He stared down at Cannister, obviously bothered that Cannister had said anything at all.

“Where is this car taking me?”

”To the airport. You’ve got tickets.” Easiest thing in **the** world.

“I missed my flight. I must have missed it, by now.”

“They’ll**book** you another. My word on it.” Collins went so far **as** to look at his watch. “Now come on. Come on, then.”

“But...”

Collins turned, came back to him. “Listen. I don’t have time for this. We’ve got a lot of work to do down there, a real mess to clean up.” For a moment, his eyes dropped, and Cannister saw enough to know he was sorry he’d said it. The regret passed quickly. “No one will follow you, they’re only interested in how much gore they might be able to show on the news this evening. You’ll be fine once you’re out of the city, right?”

Cannister looked at the ground. ”What was his name?”

“What?”

“The man. The man who...” He stopped, swallowed. **His** mouth was dry; he found that suddenly he was dying for a drink of water. ”What was **his** name?”

Collins looked at him. He shook **his** head. For a moment, there **was** no impatience, there was no hurry. There was simply quiet between them. “We don’t know. We might never.” Collins stood still for a moment longer. “A brave gesture, lad,” he repeated, almost to himself. “A brave gesture.” But then the moment passed, and Collins was businesslike again. “You going to be brave again?”

“All right.” Cannister made sure he had a good grip on **his** bag, nodded at Collins, and they trotted up the stairs together. There were people gathered there, but there weren’t **as** many **as** Cannister had expected. They were held back by police

officers, and it was relatively easy for Cannister to be helped into the waiting, plain black sedan. Collins said nothing to him. As **soon as** the door was shut, the car was moving, turning and weaving easily through traffic. Cannister looked back once, staring at the milling crowd slowly receding behind them. He kept **his** eyes dry for the entire ride to the airport.

6

The young woman at the service desk either thought he was cute or was simply especially nice. Whatever the case, she seemed genuinely interested in helping him find a flight that would take him back to the States without waiting too long. There was a coach seat leaving in four hours, or a First Class cancellation in **six**. Which would he like? A charming smile. The woman was pretty with kind eyes, and Cannister felt himself tearing again, but he swallowed hard, took deep breaths. He opted for the First Class seat.

He felt tired, sleepy, but wasn't able to sleep in airports. He explored **as** much of the airport **as** he felt he could stand before finally setting up a station for himself outside **his** gate. There, he waited, wondering at the things. Once, he rose and walked over to a set of payphones, thought of calling Amelia, and then put the handset down. He would call her from Boston. It was in the wee hours there, and calling now, he'd run the risk of her sleeping through the machine picking up.

At the end of the **six** hours, Cannister was settling comfortably in the wide, leather seats at the front of the huge Boeing. He **turned** and stared out the window. The evening was coming on, the irrepressible gray outside becoming lower and darker, more stifling. He was relieved to be going home, he found, relieved that soon he would be

back where **he** belonged. If he even belonged there. He thought of the letter he'd written for Amelia, and reached down and pulled it gingerly out of his bag. It was addressed only with her name. Perhaps he'd never meant to send it at **all**, realizing the folly of throwing something like that away for the briefest glimpse of a girl. He looked at it for a moment, and then tore it in half, folded those pieces over each other, and tore it into quarters. He stuffed the pieces into the pocket set into the back of the seat before him. When the airplane began to shudder, the giant turbines whining into their high-pitch, Cannister leaned his head back against the seat, settling in for the long flight. He opened **his eyes** only once before they were finally over the sea. He'd never found out if the man had his legs or not.

And soon after, Cannister was floating over the ocean, staring out at the sky and wondering if maybe he'd dreamt the whole thing.

7

Cannister didn't dream it. Halfway through the trip and nestled gently in the jet-stream, Cannister opened his satchel, looking for granola bars, and pulled out the red book he'd taken from Collins. He turned it over and over in **his** hands. It smelled **only** vaguely of some sweet liquor. **Rum**, maybe. He looked at it for a while, its image growing blurry **as** he fought the strong tears, **as** the giant plane chased the sun across the sea. He couldn't bring **himself** to read it on the flight.

PART II

Orphans

He looked at me curiously. "Who are you?" he asked.

*"Nobody," I said. "What about you? Do you **know** who you are?"*

*"What a question! Everybody **knows** that: **I'm a New One!**" he said.*

*That was exactly what I had expected to hear him say. I patted his head, said: "Good**for** you," and went off.*

I traveled through valleys and plains. I came to a station, caught the first train, and was lost in the crowd.

Italo Calvino
"The Dinosaur"

Chapter 6

Dinner Party

1

Amelia's car was quick and efficient, like Amelia herself. They were dressed up and Cannister was alternating between nodding **off** and sulking. The last **thing** he wanted was to go to **this** dinner party, but Amelia had insisted it would be good for him and he hadn't been back long enough for them to start fighting. He looked out the window at the evening sunset, reminding him again of autumn, and thought about Rafael.

"You're quiet," Amelia said.

"Yes," he agreed.

"It won't be so bad, will it?"

"Yes." He knew he was being churlish. He slumped down in the seat, **his** tie rolling in small fabric **hills** down **his** crotch and between **his** legs. He turned **his** head **so** she wouldn't catch him grinning. **When** she picked him up from the **airport** that **morning**, he'd been glad for throwing away the letter, along with any thoughts or desires for the girl with the summerstorm eyes. Amelia was there for him. She was real.

"You like Ted. **You** guys get along."

"If I'm **drunk** we sure do."

"That's not fair."

"He's..." he had to stop himself before going on. "He's just not all there."

“And you are?” Amelia said, and Cannister turned **his** head sharply, but her eyes remained on the road. She was pretty —it was what had drawn him to her in the first place. Her auburn hair fell to her shoulders when she let it down. Tonight she had it up in a tight bun, with a few stray strands askew. When it was tight against her head like that, the red seemed to fold in on itself, and in the bun it looked simply a light brown. Her hazel eyes were hidden by her pair of delicate, black-framed spectacles, which rested on a button nose—the shape of which resembled the sharpness of her chin. Her lips were small, but they were expressive... she’d been involved in theater once. She wore a loose, black dress that was pretty but conservative. It hid her figure, which she kept in fanatical good shape, an obsession Cannister didn’t understand, especially when she wore clothes that turned her shapely body into a formless tube. When she wanted to, she hid well from **him**. When she wanted to stay **secret**, he couldn’t break **through** her walls. She told him once that she learned it from her father, who had left her and her brother a long, long time before.

”That’s not funny.” He blinked at her. Indignant. Feeling like a child.

She nodded. ”I can’t believe you expect me to...”

“Stop,” he said. He turned back to the window, watching the sun set behind layers of September-purpled clouds, lines of which cut across the orange glow and seemed to shred the star. The **sun** was shredded and **things** were dying here in the States. He watched the dead leaves on the ground, at the side of the road.

They drove the rest of the way in silence.

"~~Of~~ course you know Ted," Mrs. Krupple said. The fact that Eleanor Krupple — the chair of the English department — liked Cannister was both a blessing and a curse. It was a curse for Cannister and a blessing for Amelia. She was often chatted up by Mrs. Krupple about that charming boyfriend of hers, and how polite he was, and well-read, etc. etc. Somehow, Krupple's crush on Cannister did nothing to further **his own** advancement within the shady ranks of the department, however, which was something he had yet to understand. It seemed to do wonders for Amelia — she was granted **two** fellowships last year **so** she could spend less time teaching — and yet Cannister himself continued **his** research unaided, **his** recent journey being the exception.

Cannister was not a fan of the English department. The difference between him and Amelia, **as** she was fond of saying, was that some day she would be offered advancement at the University, and he would not. She would pause when telling **him** **this**, and then say, smiling sweetly, that it was only because he didn't eat out enough. Any number of professors at the University continually hosted get-togethers, teas, dinners, readings, lunches, and in one case, a séance. It seemed sometimes to Cannister something like department policy. He **often** didn't go, and when they were first dating, Amelia had warned **him** this would not sit well with those in power. He laughed it off. **Things** were funny back then.

"**Yes**, of course I know Ted," he said, which sent Mrs. Krupple off into **gales** of hideous laughter. Ted stepped forward, ready for **his** cookie, **smiling** grandly and offering **his** hand in a chummy fashion. Cannister, already deeply resenting Amelia for dragging **him** to **this**, shook it. He tried to **squeeze as hard as** he could.

"Ah, old friend!" Ted **took** a sip of something in a plastic cup. Krupple never **used** her silverware on the staff. "How was your trip across the pond, **as** it were?" Ted chortled. He was the kind of person that found everything that he said funny, but he

was also the *only* person that found what he said funny. Cannister smiled widely, nodding, hating the man.

”You know, Cann, I was reminded quite well of my **own** Herculean odysseys while you were on your travels. Why, I ~~be-lie~~ that it was no more than 16**moons** ago that I went wining the *payee* in France you know.. .”

Cannister turned slightly, taking a sip of his drink, looking across the room at Amelia, who was watching him with a twinkle in her eye. She knew exactly what **was** going on. He pictured what she was wearing under her dress. She always made him leave the room when she put on her underwear. It was a game they’d been playing for a while now. He got to imagine it all night long, to guess in secret.

”Ah, France. How do they say it? La nation de *personnes qui hereux c’est tout!* I tell you, Cann, it was something else. I dare say I had many an adventure of another kind there, **as** well? You get me? Ha **ha**. *Les nuits q’avent plus d’amour!* There **was** this one bonny lass, you know, with hair that was flaxen like the finest gold.. .”

”Please stop speaking in French,” Cannister said. He was **serious**.

”Ha HA!” Ted barked, slapping Cannister on the arm and smiling his three-alarm smile. “You *are* the card, aren’t you? But ~~this~~ lady, this French Diana, she one day sold me a *baguette*.. .”

The evening **turned** like a clock of nails. Cannister looked at **his** watch.

3

Amelia’s car was **sleek** and quiet, like Amelia herself, and **as** they drove back from the **airport** that morning, she told **him** about how much she **missed** **him** and how angry she was that he didn’t call her to tell her he’d be late. She’d spoken sternly to **him**

about how she'd worried **so** much for him when he'd not gotten off **his** designated plane. He knew he'd made a mistake by not calling her mid-flight, but it had been an expense he hadn't deemed appropriate. Instead, he'd called her from Logan **airport**, and the frostiness of her words were only overpowered by the unmistakable relief he heard in her voice when he told her that he was OK. He'd waited outside for her to pull up, and when she did, he felt surprised at how emotional he felt upon seeing her, her face beaming and her eyes alight. He was only sure that she really was crying when she reached him and they gripped each other tightly for a **full** minute, maybe more. Amelia rarely shed tears, and he felt touched beyond what he'd believed capable. He knew the remonstrations would come, but only in time.

He was right of course. They were only ten minutes from Logan when she glanced over at him, her eyes putting distance between the contentment they'd both been feeling up to that point.

"You couldn't have e-mailed me? From the plane?"

Cannister considered telling her the story then, explaining to her what had happened in the subway, but then changed **his** mind. He didn't think she'd understand, or maybe even listen, and the incident had left him feeling different. He didn't want to create a disconnection between them so early after **his** arrival. He only looked at **his** hands and spoke softly: "I'm sorry."

Amelia shook her head, mostly at herself. "I know. I'm *sorry*." **They** drove in silence for half a mile while Cannister waited for it. Finally Amelia spoke up, "It's just that **this** is so like you that I just didn't know what to **think**."

She was wearing sweats. Her hair was pulled up into an unattractive bun on the back of her head, tight and secure in its wrap. Her glasses shone like mirrors when she turned her head, catching the sunlight **as** they drove between the **tall**, imposing buildings that surrounded the airport. Cannister kept looking at the clock, marveling at how time

was so malleable. **An** entire day had moved its way past him, shouldering him aside like a large man in a hurry.

"Anyway, I'm glad you're home."

Cannister smiled. He was comfortable there, in the car. Amelia had received a third grant in her second year in the program and had promptly invested it. The stock had blossomed and Amelia had bought this car... paid for it straight out. The seats swallowed him, accepted him into their arms. It was cool in Boston that morning, and the heater was warming him slightly.

"I missed you..." He saw the flash of reflected sunlight—caught in **two** rectangular squares—that meant she was glancing over at him. "I missed you a lot."

"I missed you, too," he said. He looked out the window, the fall day crisp, thinking of the girl with summerstorm eyes. He saw her in a **tall** building, turning her head to watch them pass, a pencil resting lightly behind her ear. He craned **his** head around to stare back at her **as** they passed.

"You all right?" Amelia asked him.

"Yes."

"You sure?"

"Yeah. Have you eaten this morning?"

Amelia nodded. "I had breakfast this morning after I got back from the airport the first time. It was hard to eat, though, because I was so worried about you..."

"Oh **all** right!"

"Well, I just meant..." she broke **off**. "I'm sorry."

Silence. Amelia passed in and out of the traffic **as** if she were invulnerable. Usually it made Cannister nervous. He was too tired, though, that morning. The morning rose around them, the light shining in only the highest windows in the towers above. The car drove through these aluminum passageways easily, drawing Cannister

away from the city. With each minute he felt **as** though none of it had actually happened. The wiccan girl with the fires, the place in Bath, the girl with the summer... but no. He knew it was real. He wouldn't let it be taken from him.

Amelia nodded to herself, carrying on some silent conversation in her head, not even paying attention really as she swung in and out of traffic, taking them farther and farther away from the world of airplanes. He suddenly was struck with the memory of the **two** of them on their second date. She was driving her old car, a smaller Honda with the upholstery starting to wear through, and they had held hands over the gearshift. The knob was gone and she'd replaced it with an old doll's head. It had been a good evening. They had laughed for a long time about their old toys, spurred on by the decapitation victim between them. He'd told her about **his** G.I. Joes and Transformers and she talked at length about Lite-Brite and Barbie and My Pretty Pony. There was a lot of laughter that night.

Swimming up through that memory came the gypsy girl, straddling him by firelight, working her **hips** down on him, her large round breasts shining by moonlight, her dark hair moving like currents over her shoulders.

"Penny for your thoughts," Amelia said.

"I was just thinking of our second date," he said. Boston was dwindling behind them, around them, waving **as** they left it behind. "I was thinking about how much we laughed back then."

Amelia was watching him.

"You remember that night? Remember about our toys?"

"I remember." She turned, staring straight out at the road. "Did you cheat on me again?"

"What? **Jesus**, Ames."

"Did you?"

"What kind of question is that? I'm sitting here being romantic."

"**Did** you?"

"No. No! OK? No, I didn't cheat on you. I'm sorry I took **off** my ... my electronic... locator band, too! I bet that really fucked up your reconnaissance, huh?"

She glanced at him out of the corner of her eye. Checking the rearview, she swung into the right lane for the exit, cutting off a large Dodge pick-up truck in a maneuver that —had he been paying attention— would have given **him** a heart attack. Perhaps she meant to give him one. "I can always tell when you're lying."

"Bullshit! You're not a..." He swallowed, staring out the side window.

"...you're not a witch. I'm not lying."

Silence. One mile. Two.

They were on the narrow road that would take them back into Cambridge, and just **as** he was watching the leaves, thinking about how soon they would **all** be on the ground and not in the **trees**—thinking about pumpkin pie and apple cobbler and turkey—Amelia suddenly slowed down and pulled over to the side of the road. She sat there, her hands still on the ten and **two** positions on the wheel, **as** they'd learned to do in Driver's Ed. It had **been** one of the things they shared on their first date.

"I want **this** to work." She stared straight ahead **as** she spoke, **as** though she were still driving. "I want **this** to work out, Cann."

There was a line of **trees** by the road. Beyond that, a field, worn and flat, neglected by some farmer long ago when it stopped pushing up crops. Far across the acres, a line of tall elms grew proud and old. The sun colored only the tops of their branches. He was struck by how beautiful it was. How amazingly beautiful.

"I want it to work, too."

"Do you?"

He turned, leaned to her slowly so the seatbelt wouldn't catch, and kissed her on her mouth. She opened her lips to him, their tongues carefully meeting each other like ex-lovers. As he tasted her, he suddenly saw that she was keeping something from **him**. There was a secret. Something had happened while he was away, and with a sharp pain he thought he knew what it was. As if sensing his intuition, she pulled away, keeping her warm palms on his cheeks.

"What?" she asked.

"Nothing." The pain struck again, slanting diagonally across his lungs up to his heart. He put his hand there, feeling warmth flow where there was no blood. "Nothing. I want this to work too. Let's make it. Let's make it work."

"I want that, too," she said. The force of her will, the knowledge that she wanted him still, was like a physical jolt, and then was kissing her again. He felt what he'd done to her, and he felt that if he were to ask her what happened, she would tell him. He didn't want that.

The car was quiet and trembling, like Amelia herself.

4

"... which of course means that Esther herself represents something far more appealing. How interesting, I started to think, that someone so virginal could represent something so complex. Her relationship with Ada is not a lesbian relationship, **as** such, but really something more.."

Ted's dinner was nearly untouched. Cannister's, however, was completely gone. He took a piece of bread and wiped up the remaining spots of gravy and chewed mouthily, the wad of cold dough making a large bulge in his cheek **as** he stared at Ted,

unbelieving. He wasn't even drunk. Mrs. Krupple didn't like alcohol except **as** a complement to the food. There had been only one bottle of a dry, flat Chardonnay to split among **six** people, and Cannister sat resigned.

"...you wouldn't think that Mr. *Hart* would give me very good marks.. **You** know how he is with his students. But there he was, complimenting **me** before the entire class. And here I was so nervous about my work in the department. But here's *this* man— *this* great man who everybody respects in **his** field —and he's complimenting **me** on my scholarship... I guess, well..."

"I guess you're just one super guy!" Cannister said. Out of the corner of **his** eye he saw Amelia **turn** her head sharply to one side, covered by an attempt to lean her head on her hand. It was her secret-agent sign that she was paying attention and he better watch **his** step. He sighed. "I mean, that's really great, Ted."

"Oh I know. I mean, when I first got here, you know what I thought? I didn't think anyone would really accept me. Can you believe that?"

"No," Cannister said, honestly.

"And now here I **am**, with *this* very intelligent man telling me that I'm just doing great work in *this* field, and..."

Cannister felt himself growing weary under the steady barrage of Ted's monotone drone. He propped up **his** chin in one palm, staring at the young man who continued, heedlessly, to lecture **him** on and on about whatever it was he thought he wanted to say. **His** mind wanted, he knew, to flit **off** into other worlds, into other dreams. He was not only exhausted from the trip, but tired from the rich wine that Krupple was serving that night. A nervous titter perked **him** up for a moment and he felt awake, but it was only trifling little Martha Gumsworth, the older woman who was doing comparative studies in Romantic Hero Myth. All around them were the sleepy trappings of Mrs. Krupple's designed elegance. He and Amelia, Ted, Martha, and

Wanda Smith all surrounded the matron of the house. The silver and the candles gleamed, reflecting and reflecting again their light on the dark cherry wood of a china cabinet across the room, set between two windows covered by light curtains, so that occasionally you could see the headlamps of passersby outside on the road. Somewhere, music was playing, and Cannister let himself be carried softly away.

A hand fell on his arm ("...you all right?") and Cannister jerked, his left arm coming suddenly away from his cheek where it had been held and landing on his knife, which flipped off his plate and turned one revolution before landing heavily in the vat of congealing gravy to Cannister's right. Cannister watched droplets of the thick brown liquid fly in a pattern, like fighter pilots, and land directly on the bosom of Mrs. Krupple's dress. He recognized immediately that if you were to draw a line between the dots of gravy, you would form a lopsided star. He felt himself ready to lose it, to laugh, and stood up straight from the table, almost knocking over his water glass in the process.

"Cannister Barnes!" Amelia said. She was something close to outraged, but in the wide look in her eyes, he saw concern as well, and he saw into that expression and realized that something of what they used to have still mattered.

"I'm... I'm sorry." Ted, for all his blather, was watching him with a look that was as mixed as Amelia's. But his concern was masking a kind of triumph. This would be a good story to tell, something that would make a difference in Ted's life. "I really am. Mrs. Krupple..."

"Oh, please, Cannister..." She was standing, all silver and grace, and placing a napkin against her chest as though she were embarrassed and might swoon. "It'll wash off. It's not even..." She tittered under her breath. "...a very expensive dress. I got it at Target, of all places."

"Oh, God, I just love shopping there, I just can't help myself," Wanda chimed in, and soon the people were all chatting again. Ted gracefully offered to go in search of

some club soda, and the thought of him dabbing suggestively at Mrs. Krupple's bosom made Cannister again see the wisdom in excusing himself. He moved easily through Krupple's foyer and out the front door, standing alone on the wide front porch. The Krupple place looked down a short **hill** to the road, and he stood there, giggling to himself and wondering idly if he wasn't crazy.

"You OK?"

Amelia came out, closing the door behind her with one slender arm. He smiled, almost laughed out loud, and then got himself under control. Amelia wouldn't take it well if he **started** losing it here. He nodded instead.

"I'm fine."

"What was that **all** about?"

5

July 22, 1970

The world is full of ghosts.

It's been too long since I've last written here, but here I am again. It sounds like confession ha ha. My wife and I have just moved to **this** beautiful town that **seems** to be carved out of stone. I went walking today, unable to believe my good fortune. Here I am, a bloke not yet **thirty**, and I have **a** marvelously well-paying job at **a** technological company. Isn't it **amazing**? Sheila can hardly believe **our** luck. The flat that W. has **set** up for us is simply brilliant! I just love it. I went walking through **our** new home today and **a m** constantly just amazed at the way history **seems** to jut out from every inch, every corner. This is truly the

loveliest place I've ever been in Southern England. **On** my walking, I decided that ghosts were everywhere. I imagine that people must not be able to see them. Maybe only ones who are touched. But they must be. How could you have a city like **this** one that is so completely filled with history and not have them wandering around **this** way and that.. .just everywhere?! I wandered the little lanes back and forth, finding my way to my new place of employment and back again a few times. There are moments when I worry about the **things** they want me to keep **from** Sheila, but how bad could it really be? She is the most amazing woman I ever met. I hate to **think** about keeping secrets from her. But they're giving me **so** much money to do the work I've always wanted to do. I can't leave that behind. Sheila is already talking about children. **It's** like a dream come true. Last night, in **our** new flat (which is spacious and gorgeous and looks out over the whole town), we sat on the bare wood floors and had a cocktail together, toasting **our** new life (Sheila, that racy girl, drank champagne, but only grape juice for me, of course!). And today, I wander these **streets** and notice **this** amazing, simply amazing new world I'm in. Yes, the world must be **full** of ghosts, because something about **this** place fills my spirit. Ghosts. I wonder if they follow us around? I wonder if they take a liking to us and go with us where we go?

I have to **run**. My wife is calling me and I hear that note in her voice. I love **this** new world.

“I *guess* I just nodded **off.**” Cannister **smiled.** “You know the effect Ted can have on me.”

”Come on, really. I saw that look on your face.” Amelia’s hand came up and rested on Cannister’s arm, and he once **again** recognized a remnant of the old feelings.

“What look is that?”

“You know.” Amelia smiled. “Surprise. A little scared. Shock. Like when you actually get it up sometimes.”

Cannister laughed out loud **as** Amelia’s mouth slyly rose at the comers. “Oh, is that right?”

”Yeah.” She kissed him, her feet arching **so** she could ~~meet~~ **his** height. “Yeah, that’s right.”

”You better watch it or you might **see** that look again.”

”I should be **so** lucky.” She sighed. They held each other, protecting one another for the time being against the coming chill of autumn that snuck its way through the **trees** peppering Krupple’s property. The stars were out, and the night air was crisp. They both watched **as** a car drove lazily by down on the road.

“You sure you’re all right?” She looked up at him, her eyes wide and dark behind her **glasses.**

“Yeah. Yeah, I’m sure.”

They stayed that way for a while, holding each other on the porch, looking out over the world, listening **as** the leaves shished together in the light breeze of an autumn night. He kept her in his arms, wondering how long they could stave **off** the cold.

Chapter 7

The Ice Queen

1

Red, red, red. My secret book is red.

The little red **book** that the dying man had given him in England was over three hundred pages, each one with small, neatly drawn handwriting **lining** the gilt-edged pages in finely executed straight **lines**. There were no page numbers, but he'd sat in the bathroom the previous evening (Amelia still allowed him his privacy in the **john**, a perk to their relationship that he was made to understand was unique **by his** few coupled friends) and counted them, curious at the very density of the writing. At times, the words were so compact on the pages that **two** entries were sandwiched there in columns. Whoever the man was, he must have grown up well-educated. Cannister wondered briefly if it was a sign of arrogance on **his** part to assume that poorly-educated people had worse penmanship.

The first few entries, **as far as** he could tell, were general. There were bits and pieces about meeting a woman named Sheila for the first time at a coffee house in London that the author mysteriously referred to **as** that "hidden cafe;" an entry that discussed his joy at having achieved **his** advanced professional degree in biology and medicine at such an early age; a couple lengthy discourses about different flora found recently on a walk through some park near Woking. Most interesting to Cannister about that part of the journal he was already unconsciously referring to **as** "the early years," were some entries that appeared to be an attempt at fiction. He found himself

drawn to these, wondering again and again about their strange appearance among the smaller diagrams of single-celled organisms and molecular structures and charts.

—What the fuck did you do that for? Nathan paced back and forth in front of the register, waving the pistol over his head. Angela knew there was a silver Magnum Special under the counter. Her **boss**, who was always half-pissed and pawing her like some fucking filthy warthog, showed her how to use it once. Angela knew that she could reach the gun, that she could easily blow the git away. She simply knew it. But she didn't yet. There must be

Always, these entries ended mid-sentence. Always, they seemed to be rag-tag elements of some novel or story. Never did Cannister find what might be the **beginning** of a story, or the end of the same. These bits and pieces fascinated him.

His eyes were brown, and his hands **stuffed** deep inside the pockets of his trencher, which was gray. He looked annoyed, and that made his heavy brow lower on his face, settling over his closely set eyes. His ears were thick and small. The stubble around his ears gave the impression that they were lower than they ought to be.

He was, in short, a man with whom one does not care to fuck.

An agent approached, his face the color of stewed **beets**. He wore a cap that read "Martin's Carry-Away," but there was something about the way

And Cannister smiled, reading on, knowing he would never know what way it was about, or what about it was odd, or different, or the same, or anything. Rather, immediately following that particular **entry**, was the diagram of a circular object that the author described as the "Gold Cell," with arrows and strange jottings and notes taken around the picture. The author was a fine artist **as** well. ~~His~~ pictures were always crisp and efficient pencil-sketches, each drawn clean against the light cream color of the pages. There were no tell-tale smudges to give evidence of an eraser at work. He got it right every time.

They were saved by *fifty* kilos of waitress, smoking the rest of her life into a deadly tumor was sucking at her insides like a parasite. She wore a pale green paper hat. She poured **his** coffee and glanced at **him**, her heavy eye-shadow repulsive, and he saw immediately what was welcome to **him** there, in that small place. He smiled at her, but it withered against her creeping death.

–Need cream? She asked **him**.

--I need to powder up, Molly said. She said **so** sweetly, stood up on the chair, and hitched up her stockings. She hiked up her skirt, exposing the cold steel that was strapped against her thigh. –I'll be right back, she said.

He watched her go, feeling cold fire that

Which was followed soon after by a page and a half of how the author's family was no longer with **him**, though he wished **his** "Mum" would be able to meet Sheila, since he loved her so (it was unclear in the journal to which "her" he was referring).

Cannister sat up straight, so suddenly that the small but thick book fell with a solid slap on the floor by his desk. He didn't need to look at the wooden-framed clock that Amelia had given him to put on his desk. The shadows and sunlight in the warm office told him that he was late. He picked up the clock anyway. It was 11:42. His discussion group for Merritor's Victorian Literature lecture had started forty-two minutes before. He launched himself out of his chair, grabbing **his** satchel and stopping only to pick up the **journal** from the **floor**, pausing to make sure the dust had not marked its dark red covers. He placed it easily within **his** sack before running out into the hall.

And nearly directly **into** Ted Chambers. He shouldered his fellow on the right side, and both students spun and tumbled in the hall, **books** and papers dropping from under Ted's arm.

"Hey! Where's the fire, Cann?" Ted smiled at him, using all his teeth. Cannister hated to be called "Cann" by anyone he didn't like. He simply waved, got his balance, and sprinted off down the hall.

"Aren't you supposed to be teaching right now?" Ted called after him. Cannister continued to run down the hall, setting his jaw against Ted's cry. Ted knew he was supposed to be in class. If he didn't know, he would make a point of finding out. And then Ted would make another point of bringing it up at some afternoon coffee-house meeting between **himself** and Dr. Merritor. *Oh, my **shoulder** is still sore from the other day. It's really nothing. Young master Barnes – Oh, do you **know** him? – ran fill-tilt into me as I was walking along. It was around eleven-thirty **or** so that **Monday**. Silly detail, isn't it? You know how strange it is to **remember** certain things? Well, I **remember** because I'd only just looked at my watch and I **remember** thinking... **now** where could Cannister Barnes be running at this hour?*

Cannister ran **as fast as** he could, but by the time he reached his room, the students were gone. He stood for a **while**, panting and catching his breath, leaning with

one arm against the door. Sunlight patterned through the windows on the opposite side of the hallway and formed crosses in shadow by his hand. He knew he was being paranoid about Ted. He thought he knew. He smiled, shook **his** head, and moved off down the hall. He would make up for it by doing penance at the library, researching more secondary sources for his next paper.

His smile faded when he saw the Ice Queen standing by **his** office, waiting for him. She pushed the long length of dark hair away from her face in what Amelia called her “Cher-move,” and smiled widely at him. Cannister groaned. He came up to her and grunted, hoping she just happened to be in the neighborhood.

”Hi!” There was something wrong. The Ice Queen’s normally composed, cold behavior had been replaced by **an** odd friendliness that Cannister frankly found disturbing. ”How are you?”

”Fine,” he said. ”What’s going on, Vicky?”

”I need a ride.” Vicky Torbin smiled widely at him. ”I need a ride downtown.”

2

They rode in silence in Amelia’s car, Cannister nervously maneuvering through the rising tide of city traffic **as** they moved closer downtown. Amelia was strict about having him **only** drive to school and back. She was a stickler for **rules**. It was no use arguing with her about how he wouldn’t get caught.

”Maybe not,” she would say, nodding her head solemnly. Someone who didn’t know her better would **think** she was kidding. ”There’s always a chance.”

Occasionally Vicky would give him directions, telling him to stay in one lane, telling him to get **off** at this or that exit. He followed without questioning orders,

concerned more with the thoughts in **his** head, wondering what he should do. He didn't like Vicky Torbin, who he knew only vaguely. She was new in the department, and had been to only a few of the same functions **as** he had. Amelia called her the Ice Queen because she seemed (according to Ames) either incapable of clinically unable to make friends. Cannister didn't know about that, but he knew that it seemed strange for her to be suddenly friendly with **him**, asking **him** for rides. He worried that he should have said no, that he should have made an excuse. Amelia would have wanted **him** to. But Cannister had always been poor at those **sorts** of things.

The car weaved in and out of **Janes**, Cannister feeling only slightly queasier when driving in the speeding lane, or **as** Amelia called it, "the accident lane." Vicky pointed the way and he finally found himself in —for **all** he could tell in **his** limited experience—a small parking lot that was surrounded only by high buildings. They were certainly in a nice part of town. Through a short alleyway, he could see the dapper of Boston walking swiftly **this** way and that down clean sidewalks. It seemed an appropriate place for a woman like the Ice Queen. Vicky smiled at **him**, her eyes doing the once-over he'd come to think of **as** her form of a handshake. Up. Down.

"Well, thank you, Cannister Barnes." She didn't move. He took **his** hands **off** the steering wheel, but then they were resting in **his** lap, near **his** crotch. He put them back up on the steering wheel. Cannister's students would have described Vicky **as** being fine. She **was** tall, almost taller than he, with jet-black Snow White hair and light skin. She didn't look unhealthy, though. Her paleness somehow seemed exotic. Her eyes, a deep blue, were **still** looking at **him**.

"Um..." He felt foolishly uncomfortable. "Um, you're just going to get out here?"

"Is there something else I should do?" She shifted in her seat, her jacket opening a little to expose the rich peach colored blouse she was wearing. The neckline was round, but low on her chest.

"No! I mean, no."

Vicky nodded. She was back to her old ~~self~~, except for the fact that they were sharing the close quarters of Amelia's Honda. "Not really. I'm meeting someone down here. I'm just shopping until then."

Cannister glanced around the high buildings that towered over the dirty parking lot. They shadowed the normally sunny sky, not allowing any blue or sun or light down onto the dingy asphalt. **On** one end were parking spaces, with a low cement wall, about knee-high, to prevent cars from dropping over the slight ridge between the lot and the alleys beyond it. Trash was nestled up against the wall, abandoned and growing stale in the **limbo** created in that forgotten valley in the city. Cannister had **grown up** in Boston, but **still** didn't quite feel comfortable when out in the midst of the city.

"Well, all right. **So** long."

"**Thankyou**, Cannister **Barnes**." She smiled at him again. He looked at her and their eyes caught at the same time, and for a moment he saw the **two** of them in the back seat, flesh upon flesh, clothes pulled down or up to extremities. He saw it clearly, and then it was gone. **His** hands gripped the steering wheel. Vicky gave him the once over again and then, before he could say anything, she **was** out of the car. He watched her stride quickly through the parking lot and move **off** down one of the alleyways, not once glancing behind her. Cannister watched her go, not knowing what to do. He caught movement in the rearview mirror turned, seeing an old man with a pepper stubble shuffle by in the street behind him, slouched into an old army jacket that looked like something he'd made. Cannister reached for the automatic door lock. The sound of all four doors locking at once with a satisfying whunk made him feel a mite better.

He was **getting** ready to once again drive away when he looked down the same alley and saw Vicky, **smiling** and waving at someone. He waited, Amelia's car idling quietly around him, until Vicky's friend came and swept her up in **his arms**. There was some kissing, and though Cannister felt somewhat ashamed, he stared anyway.

The friend Vicky had come to meet was Amelia's brother, Todd Curtis. Arm in arm, not noticing the rest of the world, they walked **off** together, out of sight within moments. Cannister sat there, stunned. Amelia was fiercely protective of her brother, **telling** stories all the while about what a sweetheart he was. But Todd's girlfriend was not the Ice Queen. Cannister sat for a moment before turning the car around and making **his** way back to the highway. He drove nervously back to the University, thinking all the while about what could be going on there.

3

October 3, 1970

My superiors returned from their summit meeting only **this** weekend last. No one spoke to them at the time, because the general consensus around the lab was that they looked simply awful. I was a wreck around Sheila all during Saturday and Sunday. She would ask me what was wrong, repeatedly, but I wouldn't tell her. How could I? I have yet to confide in her about the work we're doing, and given the seemingly "random" ~~talks~~ we've had on the subject, I can't imagine she'll be awfully receptive, **will** she? However, before this afternoon, I didn't ~~see~~ it **as** being a problem. I struggled quite a bit **this** weekend, I can tell you,

with what I would do, what we would do, if HealthWorks were to close so soon after its beginning. But today's meeting ~~was~~ worse.

The Founders (~~as~~ my friend G. ~~likes~~ to call them) are all very severe, very strict looking blokes. There are ~~three~~ of them, all over the age of *sixty*, and not one of them has a spot of hair. I don't know why ~~this~~ should be, but to be honest it makes it a bit difficult to take them at ~~all~~ seriously. G. has even commented on it, claiming that we've been hired by a smug trio of space *aliens*. At any rate, these were the men who went ~~off~~ to meet with their lawyers over the weekend, to ~~see~~ if we were to go ahead or not. The tallest one, Doctor *Kess*, ~~is~~—~~as~~ far as I understand it—the one in charge. He explained that they were together for a long time, that there were many lengthy discussions, and that finally they had come to the conclusion that it was unfeasible. You should have heard the groans in the crowd, the moving of buttocks on seats of chairs. Doctor Kess held up on long-fingered hand and continued.

"Please. Please. Your silence." We all stopped counting our troubles and settled down. I was nervous. ~~Or~~ excited? I'm not sure if they're the same thing. I only wanted to work. I thought of how Sheila gave a squeal of delight when she saw our new flat. "Unfeasible is not really the right word. I mean to say unlawful." Doctor Kess looked at all of us. "Our team has gone over and over the Project and the accompanying charts you all have so graciously drawn up ahead of time. They feel that without question, we would have to go and register ~~our~~... well, ~~our~~ designs with the government. They were unclear ~~as~~ to where it would be best to begin. I'm assuming we'd need to first approach the

health board and then go to Parliament and **so** on. All of which is moot. Doctor Hynes (that's the second tallest doctor of the three) is passing out a copy of the legal mumbo-jumbo given to us. All of which is to say that we're fairly certain that **our** humble business here is aiming towards a strict violation of Chapter Nine of the Geneva Convention. **Our** lawyers tell us that certainly that **will** come up. Not to mention difficulties with the Catholic Church, with the National Health Authority, and any and all religious groups that might care to take a whack at us."

There was a pause. I was wearing my HealthWorks badge and I took it **off** my **shirt** pocket and turned it over in my hands. There was **an** inception date on the back, and I ran my finger over it. It seemed strange to be out of work **so** soon. And is that entirely fair to say? I think I must **also** be honest with you, journal, if I cannot at least be honest with dear Sheila. I believe that part of me was relieved. I really **do**. Relieved that we wouldn't have to go through with it. There was some more chatter **until our** third superior, Doctor Emile Chupp came forward.

"What we have to tell you is... difficult." He took a moment. I want to get this down word for word, though. I might need it later. "But for simplicity's sake, I'll just out with it, shall I?" He spread his hands before us, **as** though asking for absolution. Maybe he was. "We've decided to **go** ahead regardless."

Some murmuring and chatter here.

"Please. Please let me finish. The work is too important. There are already patent companies who have **begun** to delve into the field. Admittedly, we have got the financial resources to found a more competent team. We expect great **things** from this group. There's a team

of scientists working near Wales that expects a viable copy in twenty years. We believe we can make progress much sooner than that. With a minimum of error. Our goal is to have ten working Subjects by mid-decade which we can monitor in focus and sub-focus groups. At the same time, we'll be going through the paper work in the regular channels."

Hands were raised (I wasn't the only one fresh out of University), questions shouted.

"Please." Doctor Kess held up both hands again. Again, I'm struck by the eeriness of those long fingers. As though he's got an extra joint. "Please be quiet. Our concerns are shared by you. We understand that. But understand this. If you are uncomfortable with these ideas, you are **free** to drop out of the team. HealthWorks is a privately funded research venture and we **will** not prevent you from looking for work elsewhere. The contract you have all signed specifically prevents you from talking, so of course your silence is already legally taken care of. However, we understand the risk that you are all now exposed to. Please see that we're under a risk **as** well. We've trusted you with **this** information. We may have just **as** easily lied to you about it."

"You see, the issue here is time," Doctor Chupp said. "Even **allowing** the **slim** possibility that **our** work **takes** off, we need at least fifteen years to study the Subject. Whose to say the structure won't break **down** after a **fixed** period of time? You've seen that in your own work, I'm sure." He folded **his** hands, looked at the ground. "Pursuing the proper channels at **this** moment will take years. Possibly decades. The courts alone **will** tie up the matter longer than we have time for.

Who knows what other private companies are already taking the lead? If we take what we have now, we can privatize the research *steps* and sell the technology to Bio-Tech organizations once success **has** been assured. The ultimate payoff will make **us...**"

"Rich beyond our wildest dreams." It was G. who finished the sentence, and all eyes in the room went to him. I was not fond of this outburst, and a quick nudge to the ribs I think made my point **well known**. But I **also** noticed that there were nods of agreement from the **three** doctors at the front of the room. These are the men who founded HealthWorks, the men who set me up so stylishly in **this** lovely town.

"Look," Doctor Hynes said. He'd since taken a seat, and I had to strain to see him. "We know we can succeed at **this**. You all are quite young. You don't know what we do. We know that we've selected the brightest, the most advanced men in the field. We don't see **this** as a risk, really. Of course, **William** is right. There is risk involved. But that slight chance is negligible. We've already taken security measures more advanced than any other company in England. We won't be discovered. The silence clause in your contracts not only assures your legal rights as **hires**, but **also** assures an unquestionable legal burden on your part if you talk. Besides which, who would believe you? What I'm trying to say is, you shouldn't think of **this** as a crime against humanity. You wouldn't be here if you thought so in the first place. But also, don't think of it **as** a crime. It's only illegal if you get caught."

We talked and talked into the evening, and I arrived home very late. I didn't say much to Sheila, I'm afraid. What would she say? What could she say about it? And what will I do? I hear they've already got a

good test subject, a healthy five-year-old boy. I'm pretty sure I'm going to stay with the program. I don't see how I cannot. I must get some sleep. I'm so tired. I feel **as** though I've been writing for hours.

4

Cannister woke up to darkness. He was leaning back all the way in **his** office chair. There were no sounds outside the door, out in the English building. How long had he been reading? He grimaced. He remembered clearly getting back to the building early in the afternoon. He'd done work there for a few hours, but then he recalled collecting the **things** he'd been going to take home with **him** that night. He also remembered picking the red book delicately out of **his** satchel and just **opening** it for a moment, for just a quick peek before he went home.

The clock on the wall read that it was nine-forty-two at night. Had he been asleep for four hours? More? He couldn't precisely remember what time it'd been when he'd come back to the office, or when he'd put **his** work down for the day. At any rate, Amelia went to **bed** early, and by the time he made it home she'd be asleep.

Cursing, Cannister closed the book and gathered **his** things. He didn't want to be out late, not without an excuse. And what would he tell her? That he'd fallen **asleep** reading some book? That the Ice Queen had **asked** him for a ride, presumably because she was under the impression that he knew of her relationship with Todd? **By** the time he was locking **his** office door and striding down the empty hallway, he knew he wouldn't **tell** her. Whatever he thought he'd seen in the city, it might not be that at all. Though Todd and he would never be best **friends**, he didn't know enough about him to assume he was fooling around on **his** girl. And it wasn't really **his** business anyway. He

wouldn't say anything. He would get home **as** quick **as** he could and hopefully she'd be **up**.

5

It was late when he climbed the stairs up to the second-floor apartment he shared with Amelia. There were no lights on, he could tell by the cracks under the door. He ~~let~~ himself in, pressing down on the doorknob **as** he swung the front door open, trying to prevent the squeaking noise that always came with any new arrival. It was easy to find his way through the darkened apartment. He stepped lightly over the piles of **books** she'd left out, made **his** way into the kitchen. Starved, he threw a sandwich together and ate it by the window that looked down on the small courtyard they shared with their neighbors. A lamppost shone on the walls around them, its glow warm and **open**. It made the shrubberies cast shadows on the brick walls around them. He washed the sandwich down by drinking *milk* out of the carton.

He took a shower, allowing the water to jet over his shoulders, turning **his** head back and forth in the steam. He scrubbed mindlessly, soaping his body once, twice. He thought about Todd Curtis. He thought about the strange bond he shared with his sister.

When he crawled into bed, he could tell by her breathing that she wasn't asleep. He reached over to touch her shoulder and she rolled away from **him**. There was **a** lot of space between them on the **bed**. They'd sacrificed other furniture to buy a king-sized mattress. They both jerked around **in** their sleep and it was supposed to help their relationship to have a bigger bed.

"Where were you?" Her voice filled the room up. It was still warm enough to keep a window open. Amelia liked fresh air when she slept. A car shushed **by** outside.

"I stayed late to do some work at the office." It wasn't entirely a lie. But he still felt that familiar feeling of guilt twist and coil in **his** heart. He lay in the bed, staring up at the ceiling. That same lamppost shone through the four panes of the wide bedroom window and made a cross on the ceiling. "I guess I lost track of time."

Amelia took four slow breaths. He kept **quiet**.

"I guess so," she said.

He lay awake for a long while.

Chapter 8

Pictures of Todd

1

Cannister rubbed a hand over **his** eyes. Two days after he'd come home late to Amelia, **his** class sat before him taking a quiz. They felt, it seemed, that it was **unfair** for him to miss class and not be punished for it, so he gave them a test on the ambivalences of evil in Dickens' Bleak House, arguing to himself that **his** punishment would be sitting bored for fifty-five minutes while they scribbled away in silence. They had groaned for a while but now they sat penning their sub-brilliant thoughts. Cannister hated giving **tests**. They were unconscionably boring both for **him** and **his** students. He continued to rub **his** eyes. He and Amelia **still** weren't talking. She had lifted the cone of silence only to tell him that they were going to a dinner party at Todd's the next evening. Todd's current get-rich-quick scheme was laudable only in that it didn't involve Amelia spending half of her savings for its inception. This time, it was all Todd. He was going to be on Boston's very own, local game show, "**Bet** the House." The grand prize was a lovely mansion in the beautiful suburb **off** Cambridge, and a million dollar **lotto** jackpot to go with it. Todd's response?

"Cheap bastards. Only one million?" He'd been talking about the show ever since getting **his** slot **as** a possible contestant. He would complain about the "**small**" jackpot to them all, but with a smile on **his** face. It was meant to be a joke, but Cannister thought —knowing how Todd and Amelia were concerned with their security— that it probably wasn't so funny to them.

He looked out over **his** small classroom of students, a discussion section, trying their hardest to pass English 403. He wanted, suddenly—for no reason he could presently sense—to lift up his hands and tell them not to bother, that the world didn't care for their pitiful essays with their plaintive **hints** and allusions to troubled undergraduate lives hidden not-so-carefully inside. They would tell him the secrets of their lives and hope that he would take that into consideration when grading their exams. They would drop a little "PS" or a "by the way" in the margins, explaining carefully how their lives were so very complicated. He wanted to tell them that in the end, their "A" in Victorian Lit didn't matter, that they were all simply sitting there, alone.

He hunched down low over **his** grade book and penciled a note to himself in his own precise script: *stop by florist after school*. He would apologize to Amelia and work out **his** differences of opinion with Todd down the road. He would have to.

2

"You'll like him," Amelia had said. They were driving in her beat-up car, and she was wearing her hair in pigtails. He had told her he thought it was cute the first time she'd worn her hair that way, and now she wore them that way when she wanted things to be especially nice between them. They were dating and he still couldn't believe a woman like this was interested in someone like him. "He's quirky."

Cannister laughed. "Don't say that," he said. "I'll get the wrong impression."

"What's wrong with quirky?"

"It's just.. ." Cannister stopped. During this time, they'd been seeing each other for almost a month, a delirious time of laughter and mad love and experimenting. They'd tried things he hadn't thought possible, and still he was *amazed* at the mystery

within Amelia. She was new, she was completely new. He wasn't sure what would set her ~~off~~ and what wouldn't. "... Well, it's just that people say 'quirky' when they want to excuse someone who's an **ass**. That's **all**."

"You're saying my brother's an **ass**?" She turned to him, her pigtails swishing around shoulders, her dark eyes deep and accusing.

"What? No! No! I mean... I just meant that..."

But she was joking. Her smile broke free and it made her eyes somehow darker when she **grinned**, her teeth white. He felt some strong tightening in **his** chest, and he knew that it was that he'd never loved before and **this** was what that must feel like. He found himself staring at her. She was beautiful.

"What?" she asked him. A corner of her mouth wanted to turn upward. Maybe she had guessed the truth, maybe even back then.

He opened **his** mouth to tell her but closed it again. It was too early. He mustn't overstep any boundaries. How strange that love should be like that.

"Nothing. Nothing at all."

The drive in the rickety old car was bumpy but otherwise enjoyable. She told him funny jokes about the lecture series she was taking and they compared notes on the comparative lit seminar they shared. They laughed together a lot and he found himself stealing glances at her as though they hadn't been making love that morning, her hands all over **his** body. He thought about it until it made him **start** to **rise**, and then he distracted himself by watching the trees along the road. By the time they pulled into a small apartment complex he was soft again, thankfully. He was nervous. In the absence of a Mr. or Mrs. Curtis, **this** was the acid test. Meeting Todd was the final examination and he knew it.

"You'll love **him**," she insisted.

"OK." He agreed. It felt like it needed an agreement.

They walked together up the short path, down the walk, and over to a door that was like any other. Todd (he assumed) had posted a welcome mat that was slightly askew before the front door. **On** it, two pigs were laying in suggestive **postures**, both of them looking slightly satisfied. The caption on the bottom read, "EXCUSE OUR MESS." He looked up at Amelia and she shrugged while knocking on **his** front door.

The young man who answered, someone a few years younger than Cannister, was **tall** and thick-set, dressed in a tight knit tee shirt that seemed molded to his catalogue-model chest. Todd Curtis was handsome—Cannister could tell that about him right away. He had a strong, assertive face and kind, smiling eyes beneath thick, forest-like eyebrows. **His** jaw was pointed, like Amelia's, and he had Amelia's same dark hair, though **his** lacked the deep shades of red that he appreciated so much in hers. He wore blue jeans and loafers without **socks**. Todd smiled briefly at him before sweeping up **his** sister in **his** strong, muscular arms.

"Ames!" he said, loudly. Todd spoke in the voice of someone who'd just emerged from a firing range. "How are you?" It wasn't really a question so much as a **sort of** appropriate shout, barked out of those barrel-like lungs.

Amelia was laughing, beaming at her brother. She looked at Cannister — **still** being held high in the air by Todd — and for just a moment she turned that same wonderful smile on him. He knew, then, that there was something here—between these two people—that he might be a part of. Todd put down **his** sister and turned to him. **His** beaming white teeth were put away in favor of a suspicious, tight-lipped grin.

"And you must be the new guy," he said to Cannister, sticking out one hand. Cannister took it, and found that Todd was one of those **men** who liked to shake hands **as** though he were out to *set* a record. Cannister let go quickly, feeling the ridiculous, machismo sense of shame that such releases always provoked in him.

Amelia, though, had **still** trained her laugh on him, and it made it **all** go away. She reached out and took Cannister's hand herself. Her face was open and inviting **as** she did so, and it occurred to him that he'd never been taken in so readily by anyone. Not even by **his** foster family.

"This is Cannister, Todd." Amelia smiled at both her men, looking from one to the other. "I know you **two** will get along great."

3

December 14, 1970

There's been a lot of discussion around her about siblings, about identical **twins**, obviously, and so I've been getting to know my new colleagues quite well. The research and design has been on hold for a short while **as** the company looks for donors. I've been happily avoiding **talking** with S. about my job, spending more time at the company **as** we need to get things perfectly ready. The Superior Trio (as my close friend G. calls them) has dictated that we should be ready to **begin** experiments **AS SOON AS** we have a viable Alpha Subject. I have been staying up late, **figuring** out the **specifics** of the egg and cell fusion for the embryonic implant procedure. G. tells me that the Trio is really keeping **an** eye on my work (and not in a flattering tone, either, I fear). I remain convinced, pressure or no pressure, that there is a way to diminish the likelihood of both spontaneous abortion and failed-fusion abnormalities. Again, however, until we receive the means to work with the living subjects, we'll never be sure.

The laboratory is tense. It's one thing to talk around ideas about illegalities and cloak-and-dagger machinations, but quite another to know that such machinations are going on behind closed doors even while you drink your tea. G. has told me again and again that he'd give anything to know what was being said, what was being done behind those same locked doors. I spend much of my time in the lab, but there are plenty of relaxing rooms within the building that I find quiet and soothing. I've heard that the library is haunted, but aren't these old places always haunted? I continue to sense the presence of ghosts all around us. I wonder if they're really there?

The first two floors of HealthWorks are not functioning as a Fertility Clinic. Many of us are not allowed down there, for security reasons. We work upstairs, as though we belonged to another office. I was content with the cloak-and-dagger routine for a while, but the other day I was downstairs and helped a young woman find her way to the receptionist. I have never felt so low... and so dangerous... in my life.

S. is being quiet about the work, about my long hours, about how I won't speak much about what's going on in there. I received my first cheque in the mail yesterday and we had dinner out in the country in this adorable pub she discovered while bicycling last week. I asked her what she does all day and she looked at me said "I wait for you to get home." I didn't know what to say, or how to answer her. I saw another couple at the restaurant, laughing and dining on their pies, and I wished for a moment that we could be them, that we could have what they do. I know that she senses something's wrong, but is there any

answer for it? Of course not. Here, in these pages, I can answer to what I could never admit to her:

I want to ~~see~~ if we can do it. I want it **to** happen. There must be something to these new formulas I've worked out for the extraction and the prototype injections (see below, I've written them out here under strict violation of my contract, but why on earth would I ever want anyone to read in these personal pages what I've taken part in?). I want to see if it works out.

4

Amelia and Cannister had been dating a year the first time that he became aware of Todd's semi-foolish get-rich-quick schemes. Amelia had invited him to lunch, and when he arrived, Todd was sitting at the booth by ~~himself~~, paging through a magazine about men's health.

"Hey-hey Cannister Barnes!" His voice seemed to shout. Cannister feigned surprise. "What took you so long?" Todd was impeccable, **as** always. He wore a clean beige tee shirt under a dark sport jacket with pressed jeans. His shoes looked new enough that he might have put them on for the first time five minutes earlier.

Cannister shrugged. "Traffic?" He had walked. Todd knew that he had.

"Great! Great! Come on. I got us a booth!"

"Wonderful." The diner was down the street ~~from~~ the subway Station.

Cannister and Amelia, at that time, were living down in Milton. Amelia hated it, but Cannister liked the dour expressions that seemed to occupy everyone's face in town. She couldn't wait to move to Cambridge, where she could, **as** she put it: "live amongst people

who know how to read.” Todd, of course, lived in a brick townhouse with **his** current girlfriend, Harmony, a young pediatrician who paid the rent.

“Where’s Ames?” Cannister asked. He remembered her words exactly: the three of them were to have lunch. If she’d told **him** there was the possibility that he and Todd would be dining alone, he might not have come. They spent a lot of time with Ames’s brother, but usually Cannister felt like a third wheel. Todd and Amelia would spend hours just chatting with each other. After a **full** year, he **still** didn’t feel he knew the man **all** that well.

“Oh, she’s not coming.” Todd sat down, rubbing his hands like a movie-reel villain. Cannister kept his hands in **his** lap. Centered on the table directly between the paper placemats – decorated with the **silhouettes** of plates and silverware – was Todd’s Idea Book. It was a fat, spiral-bound black notebook in which he jotted down every single get-rich-quick scheme he ever dreamed up. The notebook was in tatters. Bits of paper, cocktail napkins (there were a lot of those), and shreds of paper bags were stuffed in between the pages. As Cannister watched, Todd opened it up **to** a page that was book-marked with a bright pink post-it note. Cannister swallowed, raising **his** eyes up to find Todd staring at **him** greedily.

”Now.” Todd reached into the inside pocket of his sport coat (a gift from Harmony) and delicately picked out a silver, expensive-looking pen. ”I want you...” He unscrewed the cap, lifted the **pen** to his lips, and stuck out the tip of his wet tongue, placing it firmly against the nib of the pen before lowering the instrument to his Idea Book. ”...to tell me everything you know about publishing.”

”About...?” Cannister blinked. Once. Twice. He looked around, wondering if **this** was a joke that Amelia had put **him** up to. ”About publishing?”

“Yeah. I’m going to become an agent.”

“A what?”

“An agent! A literary agent! Amelia told me **all** about them. They work on commission and take **all** these bigwigs out to lunch and sell **books** and crap. What do you think?”

Cannister opened **his** mouth, only to be interrupted by their waitress, a cute college student wearing the diner’s uniform of a white tee shirt with jeans. Todd snapped the notebook shut and **his** eyes slowly moved over her. She smiled at **him**. Cannister was always amazed at Todd’s ability to launch over such dating hurdles **as** friendliness and respect.

“Hey beautiful!” He reached out **his** hand. ”What the hell is your name?”

She leaned into one hip, her mouth drawing into a smirk. It was meant to be disarming and strong, but Cannister could already sense that she was charmed. Cannister looked at **his** hands.

“I’m Brandi,” she said. “And you?”

“I’m Todd Curtis.” It was a statement rather than an introduction. A reason for her to accept the proposal he had yet to offer. “How are you today?”

”Good. I’m good.” She was nodding now, enjoying the chatter. Her left hand stole into the apron she wore at her waist, emerged again. She was nervous. It was a fact of life, a deeper meaning to the existence everyone shared, that Todd should be stunningly attractive to women, against **all** reason. Cannister had yet to understand it.

”**Looks** busy in here,” Todd said. ”Do you want to sit down?” He moved over in one smooth motion to the other side of the booth.

Brandi was nodding, **smiling**, when Cannister looked up. “Hey, how’s your girlfriend? Is she coming to join **us**?”

Two faces fell around **him**. **An** emotive earthquake.

”She’s fine, Cann.” Todd rolled **his** eyes, and the waitress, though slightly off-put, smiled again. “Why don’t you give us a moment, sweetie?”

Brandi moved off, and Todd turned to Cannister. "What was that all about?"

"What?"

"That. That 'How's your girlfriend?' bullshit. What's up with that?"

"I was curious."

Todd barked laughter. He barked everything. "I'm just razzin' ya, Cann.

Really." He placed **his two** meaty hands back on the Idea Book and smiled widely into Cannister's eyes. "I mean, come on, right? I'm not dead, right?"

Cannister smiled and nodded. He had never understood, even in high school or college, why boys felt it necessary to share their virility with other boys. It made no sense to him. Todd was constantly checking out other women, even while Amelia and he were out with Harmony. Back then, they didn't know that Harmony wouldn't last, or that there would be a few other **girls** between her and April. But Todd's insistence on sharing such Fraternity-Brothergawkings with Cannister left him feeling uncomfortable.

"No, I guess not, Todd," he smiled and nodded. Later that day, the waitress would end up **giving** Todd her phone number. They laughed about it, Todd genuinely and Cannister just out of nervousness, but Cannister would remember that he never threw the number away.

5

Pictures of Todd. Always they were in black and white, because it was easier for Cannister to forget about things in those shades. It's easier to forget how sharp things were, then. Color pictures remind you too clearly of the day. With gray and deep shadow, it's like those things happened long ago, not only **two** or three years before.

Those pictures become ancient, something to be dug up in an attic somewhere, or behind some dusty **books** in a professor's house in which you're not supposed to be exploring. Photos of Todd.

Cannister, having now dated Amelia for almost three years, had been subjected to the Idea Book a few dozen times. He wanted to open a restaurant, a private brokerage firm, a bookstore, a literary agency (that was during Harmony's time), a massage parlor—that particular one had been terribly appealing to Todd—and once, a post office. He would start a new postal service. It had been a real genius-quality idea until Cannister had wondered aloud how many postal services the country could take.

Amelia had drawn him aside after that one. This took place about a year before Cannister would go to England. A dinner out in Little Italy had ended with Todd arguing with the girl of the moment (Cannister forgot which one—black and white, black and white) and Amelia following Cannister outside as he went to smoke a cigarette.

"What was *that*?" Spit flew from her mouth, reflecting the lamps outside the restaurant.

"What?"

"What you did in there? 'What about **UPS**? Didn't they already try this?' What the hell are you thinking about?" As she imitated **his** voice, her features turned down in a decidedly unflattering frown, her voice lowering and sounding noticeably stupid.

Amelia had morphed into a gorgon, and venom was coursing through her veins. "Do you have to be **so** fucking obvious?"

"**Jesus** Christ!" he hissed. "Take it easy, Ames."

"You're not so high-and-mighty," she said. The index finger of her right hand came up and pointed at him, rigid and straight like an arrow. "What gives you the right? Huh? What **gives** you the right to criticize him?"

Their favorite restaurant in Little Italy was sandwiched between attractive buildings and brick streets, narrow enough for only a few cars. It was a family-owned, small place with dim lighting and candles in wine **bottles**. Cannister liked it there because he liked to imagine that it was FAMILY-owned. The waiter who served them every time they went was a large man who looked like he might just **as** soon pour the water on their laps **as** take their money. **So** at that moment, standing by the building with Amelia glaring up angrily at him, he glanced around, hoping the family wasn't watching them fight. Maybe he was self-conscious, or maybe it was the sheer *vehemence* that Amelia was attacking him with. Perhaps it was little Italy, causing blood to **boil** with a flavor that was not theirs. Whatever the reason, the words were out of **his** mouth before he really knew what was happening.

“It’s a moronic idea, that’s what.”

Amelia’s struck him.

Open-handed, her fingers each adding a separate sting, her palm catching right at the jawbone. He stumbled backwards more from shock than force, but the bite of Amelia’s slap **rung** around him **as** though it were reverberating **off** the brick walls in audible waves. Maybe it was, at that. Moving like a boxer now, she didn’t wait for him to recover, but stepped in while he was still recoiling, her finger up again, shooting forward and stopping under **his** eyes. The sheer violence of her anger and attack caused him to fall backward, stopped only by the restaurant itself. A couple down the street was watching them. A few yards away, Todd and the **girl** were making out, oblivious to the fight now that their own was through. All of the figures stood out in shadow, silhouetted against the light from the **street**.

”You say that again and it’s over.”

And she stalked **off**, taking Todd’s arm when she got to him and walking him away, down the street. Cannister stood there, watching them **go**, Todd’s girl the only

one to look back at him, **as** amazed **as** he was that Cannister was being left behind. That night, he would take the "T" back home alone to Cambridge, and once there, he stopped at Flannery's for a quick shot of bourbon, and still believes he would not have gone home with the waitress there *if* she had not looked down at him, Amelia's handprint still burning on his cheek like a brand, and said,

6

"... hand them in?"

"What?" He looked out over his students, who were smirking at his lost expression. "What?"

"Do you want **us** to hand these **things** in? We're done."

Cannister **looked** up at the clock. Like a calendar, pictures of Todd go by quickly. He'd daydreamt most of the period away. **His** students stared at him, their pencils down and their eyebrows raised. There were still fifteen minutes left in their class. He held out his hand.

"Give them to me. You guys can go."

The students rolled into action, muttering under their breath. He knew what they were saying. They each came up and dropped **off** their composition exams, and then shouldered their way around each other to get to the door. One of his brighter students, a young man named Ben, waited a little longer than the others.

"Are we getting our homework back today?"

"Homework?"

Ben rolled **his** eyes. "**Geez**. Forget it. What's wrong with you today?" He hitched his satchel up higher and walked out. Cannister watched him go, **thinking** about

the waitress. Thinking about the Curtis siblings. Amelia and Todd. She had hated him at that moment, now almost ~~two~~ years past. Really and truly, she had hated him in that alleyway by that restaurant. If he'd keeled over dead, she would have spit on his lifeless face without a second thought. Cannister sat at his front desk, ~~his~~ students' papers in a small stack before him, thinking about how memories were like pictures. He thought about that for a while, before the students for the next class started drifting in like leaves.

7

~~December 31~~ January 1, 1971

I just got the news. One of the patients downstairs has absorbed the fetus and looks to be carrying. I sit here, on the cusp of a new year, thinking about their solution. It doesn't bother me so much. I have heard rumors... horrible rumors, about other women — many of them — who have rejected our little Project and whose wombs are said to be contaminated now, and useless. A side-effect we hadn't counted on. Our **figures** projected a 90% failure rate, but not a destruction of the carrier host. I don't know what to think about it. We've got the donor child set up in a nursery for comparative studies and **growth** chartings. I wonder how many children we'll raise for our **own** when **this** is through?

S. sighs and rolls over in our bed. I haven't touched her in months. Worried about the **figures**, I suppose. I've made more notes on the Injection/Extraction formula. I think it will work. We'll know soon

enough, I suppose. Happy New Year, S. Im going to be a father. I even had a drink for the first time to celebrate this glorious occasion.

Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha

Chapter 9

Games

1

Amelia always discussed Todd's girlfriends **as** though they were some newly discovered species of animal. Amelia referred to them **as** Todd's Women, always in capital letters, and they were a frequent topic of conversation, had been, in fact, even before Cannister left for England. April Miller was the newest young member to join the ranks of Todd's Women, and, in true Amelia fashion, was labeled with a nick-name almost **as** soon **as** the **two** of them had **started** to date. April had come to be referred to **as** April Showers. She had been dubbed thus because of her proclivity towards weeping at the slightest provocation: sad movies, phone commercials, slightly intimidating conversations or disagreements. Amelia thought it irritating. Cannister wondered if perhaps, dating a man whose sister obviously couldn't stand to be around her, April didn't have something to cry about and simply found other avenues to do so. Which of course he didn't say.

What struck him about Amelia's dislike for these women was not that it was because they were silly or unintelligent or unattractive. Todd's women tended to be **stunning**, smart, and –not surprisingly– well **off**. Amelia's problem, of course, seemed to be mainly that she had to share her brother at **all**. Cannister wasn't worried about a deep incestuous history hidden behind the famous Curtis camaraderie. He worried, mainly, that what did *not* bother Amelia about Todd's Women was that he was shamelessly, hurtfully, using them both for his own ends. He admitted to Cannister and Amelia often that he loved neither of them, that he was, in his own words, simply

attracted to the "sport of it." **When** he'd told them **this**, Amelia had nodded knowingly, her mouth set, somehow approving of something Cannister found more and more he couldn't stomach.

As far **as** she was concerned, the bottom line was that her younger brother was all right. Everything else simply fell into place behind that.

2

The flowers that Cannister had made note of in **his** book had worked. He'd surprised Amelia the day before with a large bouquet, and now they were speaking again. Amelia still seemed suspicious, which he thought was unfair. But that morning they'd gone out for breakfast, and Amelia had let **him** cut her toast, something he'd done for her the first morning that they'd spent together.

On the evening of their good-luck party for Todd, they were walking down the **street** and it wasn't until they passed the parking lot where Amelia parked her car that Cannister saw how she was planning on going. He didn't break **his** stride when he looked back over his shoulder at the black Honda sitting quietly, getting farther and farther away. She kept a few paces ahead to stay away from the smoke of **his** cigarette. Things had **been** hard for her since she'd quit the previous Spring and he had not. He called out to her up there, appreciating the way her new jeans fit her.

"We're not driving?"

"No, uh uh," she called back. "I thought we'd just take the T."

Cannister shrugged, slowing his pace. He looked down and saw that **his** hand was shaking. Amelia never asked **him** what he wanted to do. She was in charge, and that was always clear.

"SoOK, then. I guess that's all right with me, since you asked."

Amelia stopped, turning so that her arms seemed to whirl around her **as** if in a game. "What now?"

"Nothing." He stopped and blew his smoke towards her face. He tried to, but most of it was blown away by the autumn winds. He didn't look at her. They were across from an apartment building that had a courtyard in the middle of its C-shaped wings. There was a solitary tree, and all of its leaves were fallen early. From the air, Cannister thought, the trunk must look like it's got a halo. He took a drag of cigarette, knowing how this argument was supposed to go, waiting for his cue.

"Would you look at me?"

He did, sulkily. It was the challenge he knew she would not ignore.

"Oh **damn** it, Cann. Why now? What's wrong with getting somewhere on time for once?" She was more aggravated than **angry**. There was time, he saw, to rescue the situation from what could be an actual fight. He would only have to concede now. He was enough in tune with her emotions that at times it was silly for them to fight at all. He stuffed his shaking hand in **his** jeans pocket, feeling childish and a little sick to his stomach. The entrance to the T station was **down** the street just a ways, and already he felt uncomfortable. That discomfort was making him bad-tempered, and he knew all he might do was tell Amelia what was going on. Just tell her. Instead, feeling even **as** he proceeded to smile bitterly up at her, he opted for going for the fight.

"Why can't you ever ask me my opinion?"

Amelia half-snorted, half-shouted, throwing her hands up in the **air**. She was wearing her camel-hair coat and skin-tight black gloves, **and** a scarf. He thought in that moment that she looked like Autumn herself, that she must be a goddess of some **sort**, controlling the drop of the leaves around them. It even somehow matched her auburn hair.

“God, Cannister, what did I do? What did I do now?”

“Nothing. OK? Nothing. *Sorry* I ever asked you to consider my feelings...” He tried to walk past her.

She stopped him by grabbing his arm. “What? Did you just *say* that to me? That I don’t consider your feelings?”

“Look, let’s just go, I guess.” He turned from her, annoyed. There was another Cannister that watched them, that saw that he was being childish and crazy, but he made that Cannister turn around. He saw exactly how he was being, and chose not to deal with it.

He made it a few steps before she passed him again, not speaking to him or stopping to look at him. He followed her down the sidewalk, watching the patterns of fallen leaves on the squares of cement, how some of them covered the cracks there and some of them did not. They were almost at the corner, and he stopped and lit another cigarette. He was stewing himself into a really piss-poor mood, and he didn’t know how to stop it. It was like something he couldn’t control. Like a **train**.

He turned his back to the lawns, avoiding looking down to the **station**. From the corner of his eye, he could see her almost reach that darkness before she turned and saw him standing there **taking** a few quick drags on **his** cigarette to keep the fresh cherry lit in the briskness of the fall breeze. She strode back up to him, and he saw that now it was too late. Now he had really done it.

“You have to smoke *now*?”

He nodded and shrugged **his** shoulders. The other Cannister tried to **tell** him what a complete horse’s ass he was being. He didn’t listen. He hated that **this** was how it always was. Todd was her brother, never mind the fact that they both knew the night would be uncomfortable. April was hosting the dinner-party and dress rehearsal, of course. The Ice Queen, apparently, thought that Todd’s chances of **becoming** rich were

zero to none. A night playing a mock quiz show with April and Todd was the last thing either of them would like, **but** they were going anyway—all for Todd. He didn't like to think he was threatened **by** Amelia's control. He wasn't. He just wanted to say something **once** in a while that mattered.

Behind Amelia, he saw the T station, the awning and the **stairs** that led down into the darkness below the **street**. He struggled to get the cigarette to **his** mouth, the butt shimmying around before he nearly bit it with **his** teeth. He stared at the ground, instead.

“What the hell is wrong?”

“What?” He looked up at her, and suddenly the anger on her face changed. She looked at him, looked deeply into what was going on in **his** expression. He turned from her, not caring to be examined in that way, but touched by the sudden change in her mood. She didn't allow him to avoid her, though. She took a step so that she was facing him again. Taking **his** chin in two strong fingers, Amelia **Lifted his** face and looked at him, forced him to look at her.

”Why can't you tell me?”

He took a hard drag from his smoke. “I can't. I don't know.”

She took the cigarette out of **his** hand, put it to her lips, took a deep drag of it herself, and let it fall to the ground. She looked **off** over his left shoulder while she exhaled. “I wish you would, Cann. I really do.”

He looked at the ground. Tell her, he thought to himself. Tell her all about what happened, what happened with that man. What happened to you. Just go on and **tell** her the truth. What can it hurt?

“Ames...” He looked up at her, and her eyebrows raised in expectation. Her **full** lips were open, just slightly, **as** though she were waiting to catch his barest breath in her teeth. There was love in her eyes, then, but he saw forgiveness there, too, and saw in a

moment what it was she thought might be wrong. "Ames... I didn't cheat on you. I didn't." But of course he was lying about that, too. He lowered **his** eyes, thinking of the witch, wondering about his world, **his** life.

"Oh." She saw what he was hiding from her. She saw the secrecy written all over **his** face, and they both knew it. Those hidden things stood between them for a while, while they stood strong against the cold. He glanced around at the cars moving back and forth on the street, their drivers unconcerned with the pedestrian cares of **two** people such **as** them. He looked back to say her name again.

But she **was** already halfway back down the street. She stopped, a tiny Amelia wrapped up for Autumn, and beckoned him on, waving at him with one finely gloved hand. He took his time. She didn't wait for him but instead the car was running and waiting for him in the road, a quiet Amelia behind the wheel. She drove in silence and sadness, nearly the whole way there, and he felt it between them but didn't know quite what to do.

3

January 7, 1971

Can't **talk** for long. The company is driving us all to get **our** goal accomplished **as** soon **as** possible. I never thought there would be so many... ~~I never thought there would be~~ I haven't seen S. at all, nearly. I come home late every evening, and she's in bed. She knows I'm keeping secrets. She caught me bent over ~~this~~ journal the other evening, a glass of bourbon on the desk, and the look on her face was wretched. I ~~think~~ I've disappointed her. How could that be? I want her to hold me and I want

to tell her how G. was talking the other day, how he was having a drink at the lounge at the company and his hands were shaking and he was telling me about how we're.. .how the rejection numbers (figures, he called them figures like they weren't young women) were bigger than we'd suspected they'd be.

How many of them won't ever have children again?

God

God

We wanted so desperately to have more than just the one child. But so far there is still just the one case of the womb accepting the copy. But we keep trying. We keep running the tests and making the Implants. Those poor **girls**, they come into that clinic and they smile at all the friendly nurses and doctors and they never guess that it's the company that's.. .I can't

4

Cannister watched the trees along the side of the road, thinking of the book. Thinking of the man. It was genius, really, to **start** writing his novel in the form of a diary. Made perfect sense. **A** man who obviously had writer's block to the point that he was taking notes, jotting down quick chapters every day, he just started writing it all down there. He smiled at his **own** reflection, caught in the darkening day outside. Amelia drove in silence, sad for the thing he could not share with her, never guessing that all he could **think** about was getting alone again so he could go back to his secret book. The man had even written down formulas and sketches of stuff that looked

vaguely like what **his** character was **talking** about — diagrams of what Cannister could only guess were supposed to be experimental formulas, done in secret for some shadowy company. Fiddling with nature. The **thing** about it was: the **book** was good. It was really, really good. It felt like he was really reading a red account.

He thought about Amelia, sitting beside him. He wished she would talk to him. He wished he could talk to her. He thought about the other day, how he'd walked down the sidewalk. It had been sunny. There were patterns of shadows on the ground and he had been **thinking** how he was going to teach well that day, how he was going to make up for slacking **off** in that class. He was **thinking** those **things** and was almost upon the T station when he looked up and the beggar had been there, sitting in **his** old wheelchair, the people walking around him without seeing him, without knowing he was there.

The ghost had known he was there. The man in the chair was looking directly into **his** eyes. Something like a smile was playing around his lips. It was irony, or jest, or some deeper emotion that was dimmed in his appearing in this life at **all**. Cannister knew something escaped from **his** mouth like a scream, a yell. He closed his eyes, shut them so hard he felt them hurting, and when he looked up again...

The man was **still** there. **Still** watching him. **So** Cannister, not knowing what else to do but feeling hot tears rising in **his** eyes, turned and walked slowly back down from where he'd come. Amelia had already left for school and she wouldn't know he hadn't gone, even when she got home. Their teaching schedules were different enough that they rarely crossed paths in the department. Unless **Ted** told her, the kind of thing he would take great pleasure from.

He'd spent the day at home, wondering if he was losing **his mind**. Wondering what the hell was happening to him. All he had to do was tell her. **All** he had to do was explain to her why he'd **been** so afraid. She could help him. Amelia could help him through **this**.

Cannister crossed **his** arms, riding the rest of the way to April's house in silence.

5

April looked weary when she answered the door. She didn't have any marks on her, but she seemed sad to him. If he asked Amelia about it she would say only that she thought that April Showers looked fine. But Cannister thought she looked different. Her cheeks were a little fuller. She led them both into the living room, which was littered in note-cards. They were everywhere, covering the floor and the sofa and the coffee table and all of it. Amelia and Cannister looked at each other, and then to April. She was watching them, her bright eyes shining with secrets.

"This is nothing," she told them. "Wait 'till you see the 'Game Room.'" She put her fingers up **by** her face to indicate the quotation marks around "game room," a habit he knew Amelia would complain about later that evening.

April was dressed in an over-sized cranberry jumper and a dark green shirt with long sleeves. She wore socks with colorful patterns on them and **all** in all resembled a high school girl who was not terribly comfortable about her figure. April was stunningly pretty, with long blonde hair and light blue eyes that matched the sky on early mornings in May. She smiled at them now, half-apologizing for the mess in the room that wasn't really a mess at **all**. She had nice things in a cozy, two-bedroom apartment, and but for the note-cards, the room was **spotless**. Cannister wondered if Todd helped with the housework, or if that **sort of** thing was regulated to feminine duty.

Giggling, April led them through a doorway into a dark room and proclaimed "Ta-Dah!" while flicking on the light switch. The room had been made up to simulate the familiar stage of the Lottery game show Todd would soon be on. April had done an

amazing job. Everything, from Tony Mack's emcee podium to the player's **booths**, was almost exactly alike. She'd made everything out of cardboard, using strips of wood to support the models. The walls were draped in dark blue **curtains**. She'd somehow strung lights around the ceiling and the room glowed like an actual television studio. Amelia stood **still**, her mouth open. Even she was impressed.

April beamed. "I haven't let him **see** it yet," she whispered to them. "I want it to be a complete **surprise**. All he knows is that we're going to practice tonight. I thought you **guys** could be ~~like~~ the **two** other contestants."

Cannister smiled, astonished into forgetting his earlier worries. How much time had she put into the mock-up? How many hours?

"I haven't let him in here **all** week!" April laughed again, putting her hands up to her mouth. "We've been practicing in the living room, and I did this while he's been at work! He's been really grumpy about it but I ~~think~~ he'll be..."

She stopped suddenly. Her eyes grew wide, her mouth hanging open. She was looking at **something** behind Cannister and Amelia, and Cannister knew... he *knew* what had happened before even turning around. He and Amelia turned to find Todd standing in the doorway, looking things over for a moment before reaching out to hug his sister.

"Hey Amy!" he said. "Good to **see** you, man." He held her tight, winking at Cannister **as** a way to say hello. He was the same Todd from Cannister's earlier mental photographs. Cannister felt April behind him. He felt the wideness of her eyes, the stunned emptiness beyond her expression.

"Todd..." her voice was quiet. Todd had reprimanded her once for whining too much... he'd done so in front of Amelia and Cannister. "Todd... you were supposed to wait."

"I couldn't stand it any longer!" He leaned forward and pecked her on the cheek. "And I wanted to say hi to my sister, didn't I?"

“But...” April stood, her arms at her side. The four of them stood there, in the middle of the game show mock-up. Todd gave the room the once-over.

”Boy, that’s something else, Honey. Neat.”

April stared at **him**, disappointed. Amelia looked quickly at her shoes, but not before Cannister saw that there **was** a smile playing on her **lips**. She held a hand up to her mouth and Cannister felt a moment of black anger rise inside **him**.

“Hey!” Todd let go of his sister and clapped his hands together. ”I had a great idea! After dinner, let’s all play cards tonight, huh? I’m so tired of practicing for that stupid show that I **think** my brain is fucking fried, you know?”

“Um,” Cannister **rubbed** the back of his neck. **His** arms felt sweaty and tired. ”I **think** April had something **special** planned for **us...**”

”Come on, Cann.” Amelia patted her **brother** on the back. ”He can’t practice all the time, can he?”

“Ames...” He stared at her, but she avoided **his** gaze, choosing instead to reach out and hold Todd’s hand again. “Ames, I **think** we should...”

“No.” April rubbed her hands together, briskly, **as** though she were washing them under running water. ”No. They’re right, Cann. Let’s all eat Todd’s great spaghetti and afterwards we’ll all play some Euchre! I agree. Let’s go.” Cannister watched her beam at them **all**. Her voice didn’t crack. At least there was that.

Todd and Amelia walked out of the room, Amelia saying something to **him** that made **him** laugh. April, lowering her head so that her hair hung before her eyes, brushed past Cannister, her hands wringing, wringing, wringing. He watched her **go**, and for no reason he could **think of**, thought of the girl with the summerstorm eyes. He stood alone in the middle of the network’s ”Bet the House!” **set**. It really was something else. He stayed there, quiet, until they started calling for dinner.

Not surprisingly, Todd and Amelia partnered up for the card game, and Cannister and April sat across from each other. They'd all played Euchre together before, and Cannister knew what they were in for. Todd and Amelia played to win. Amelia's competitive spirit, which was normally tuned down low, was keyed up high that evening. When they'd win a hand, Todd would reach across the table and shout, "That's **RIGHT**, Baby!" and he and Amelia would give each other **high-fives** while Cannister tried not to look irritated or disappointed. Each hand that the Curtises won seemed to be a brilliant victory in some war only Amelia and Todd knew about, and Amelia would smile her smug smile around the table, allowing it to rest each time, firmly, on April's tired face.

Cannister sat there and watched, not sure what to think. He'd seen it all before, but the night's subtext was especially raw, especially challenging. He sat and drank gin and tonics, watching Amelia and Todd Curtis laugh and jeer and play off of one another's hand. They were the perfect family unit. If there was one truth that lay behind every right and left bauer that the **two** siblings played that night, it was simply that they needed no one else.

march 22, 1972

Sometimes, I confess, I wonder where it is that we're all going. My lovely wife, Sheila, is there in our bed and I'm writing this by moonlight.

We've already started the Project, and **still** I don't know what it is that we're all doing. I wish that there were some way that we all could be sure, but I know that there's not. I pray that there is. I wish that Sheila would understand, that I could tell her. I need to tell her everything but I cannot tell her **this**. I'm writing **this** by moonlight and while I know Sheila would complain, would really have my hide, I know that she would yet smile on me for not waking her. For not waking my precious. To **think** that I almost lost her. God to **think** I almost did. But what it all comes down to is honesty. There was that lovely afternoon when we were in London and got caught in a real pissar, and it flowed around us in rivers, remember? And S. pulled me under that willow in the park, and while we were kissing I stared across the pond and a painter was working there with **his** easel covered in tarpaulin. I wonder why I remember that? Curious. I wonder sometimes if S. knows, if she has known for a while and just not bothered to tell me. I wonder if she found M's kerchief that day, if she smelled the perfume upon it? She **has** never mentioned it to me. Not once, after all these years. To **think** of it, she never speaks of M. at **all**, which is curious because they worked together for a short while. I pray that she doesn't know, that I haven't hurt her. God, S., if you knew what we've found down in that wee, unassuming townhouse, if you knew what we've done. What have we done? What have we already done?

We've already run some **tests**. The patterns **look** identical. They're completely identical, except for the age.

Their mother died in childbirth.

Chapter 10

In the Autumn Leaves

1

path heading subject header

from: rafe@Eton.uk.edu

subj: how bout a visit?

to: cannes@harvard.edu

Tuesday, October 3, 1999

To my dearest bloke Cannister who never writes:

I **a m** making a surprise trip to the Colonies and would like to **see** you. Please prepare your lovely wife (**sorry**, girl) for my arrival and let her know I'm mad for your **affections**. Will arrive in short while, phoning you the night before **as** my plane reservations are up in the **air** (so to **speak**). Have some things to discuss with you of great importance.

All my love, Cann. It **will** be **good** to **see** you,

Rafe

2

The seats at the studio for "Bet the House!" were surprisingly uncomfortable. Cannister shifted in **his** quite often, and found that the format of the show itself made **him** just **as** uncomfortable. He was sandwiched between April and Amelia and wasn't allowed any

armrests. On one end, he didn't want to wrestle Amelia for hers because he knew they would wind up growling at each other. On the other, he **still** felt ashamed about what had happened at April's the week before. She stirred in her seat, occasionally brushing **his** leg with her foot and then **smiling** at him with her eyes blinking. He would say he was sorry anyway, though. They were **still** going through the instructions, coaching the three contestants on stage. Todd was nervous, and it gave Cannister a secret **thrill** to see him up there, looking so helpless.

Now, the lights were going down. The place for some reason was reminding him of a church. The audience settled into a hush, expecting something to happen. **Off-**stage, some of the workers were talking to each other, and their voices sounded strangely casual. They were unaware that someone Cannister knew was on **his** way to possibly becoming a millionaire. They were unconcerned that Cannister himself had somehow turned into a **liar**; that **his** life had changed to the point where he allowed a pretty, smart girl like April to be hurt and possibly cheated **on** by **this** person he knew. He was being melodramatic, but the situation called for it.

He put a hand to **his** eyes, rubbing them gently, and suddenly he prayed. Cannister prayed with all **his** might that Todd would lose.

3

In the darkness created by the show and **his** closed eyes, memory swirls. It clouds and crowds around him and he finds himself sitting in the hard pews at St. Bartholomew's. The windows around him are **tall** and colorful. He watches them every Sunday when his foster parents take **him** to mass. They stretch up over his head, and **as his** feet kick at the kneeling bench, he **thinks** about Mr. and Mrs. **Barnes**, his foster parents. They teach them

in the classes that if they pray for something, God will listen because God listens to Catholics and God listens extra hard to Catholic children. Corky Monsma had asked at the time if God listens *especially* extra hard to weird Catholic children, and Sister Gertie had laughed with them, laughed and laughed, not knowing that Corky was referring to Cannister himself. But Cannister knew that he was special. He knew he was special and if he prayed, if he prayed very hard, he would get what he wanted. **His** parents hardly told him anything at **all**, leastways anything he could use, but Sister Gertie was nice to him, seemed to like talking to him.

“You’re a New One,” she’d tell him, and giggle in that funny laugh of hers, “God pays attention to boys like you, Cannister.”

He’d look up at her and watch her, not saying anything. Cannister didn’t say much. He studied his **books** and his lessons at the school the Clarksons sent him to, and at night he prayed for a new family. He prayed and felt like he was sinning at the same time, because Mrs. Clarkson was always telling him how lucky he was that he’d been given the chance to live with them.

“You’re a lucky sunofabitch,” she’d tell him, her mouth **full** of dark teeth and bad smells. “What if we’d not come along for that government check, huh? What then?” And he’d settle in comfortably beside her and watch her stories with her. He didn’t dislike the Clarksons, but there was something about them... they didn’t really feel like **his** family. The foster home they provided him with was warm, and gave him comfort. But at times it seemed like no effort was made to provide him with some sense of it being where he belonged. They didn’t kiss him. They didn’t hug him. They were older, and at times they would talk about adult things around him, which he liked, but then they’d remember he was there and shoo him out of the room. Sometimes Mr. Clarkson, a **tall**, skinny man with spots on his hands and crazy, white hair, would smack him around, but only when he did something stupid like trip over a piece of furniture or drop a plate.

He was a lucky sunofabitch. He truly was. But he would pray regardless, hoping that someday the old people would pass on and he would be taken in by another set of parents who seemed genuinely glad to see him when he'd come home from school.

4

“Oh God, I'm nervous,” April was saying. She was sitting bolt upright but her hands were laced across her middle, as though she were patiently waiting for an appointment. She bounced lightly in her seat. The stage-manager, a slim man with a white tank top and beige pants that had a rope-belt across their middle, had come out and informed everyone that taping was in five. Amelia was gripping Cannister's hand on his left now, **squeezing it as** she smiled madly into the darkness. They made a nice trio: the **girls** were hoping he'd win, and he was sitting there wishing with all **his** might that Todd would make an ass out of **himself** on network television. The lights blinked twice, and the crowd's murmur diminished appropriately. There were only occasional whispers.

With a rushing blare of noise and strobing lights, the show's familiar theme music blasted into the theater, and the trio jumped. Amelia actually uttered a little scream, and April and Cannister laughed out loud together because they both noticed Todd jump in surprise at the sudden explosion of commercialism. There was Todd, acting smart before **all** of America, seemingly tiny in the middle of **the mighty** colors and plastic-looking set pieces of the game show. And a second later, the host was trotting out in his odd, half-jogging run, waving like a moron and **smiling as** though he might hurt **himself** doing so.

“Oh God, here we go,” said Amelia. He turned to look at her, she was squeezing his hand so tightly, and she was staring at Todd on the stage with frightening intensity. Cannister let go of her hand, afraid that some **sort** of energy would course through him and kill him dead.

5

Rain pounds the pavement in his memory now. This doesn't take place in Boston, but instead the Midwest, where Cannister received a scholarship to go to school at the University of Michigan. The Clarksons have long since passed on, so maybe prayers get answered. Cannister is working in town the summer before his junior year **as** an undergraduate. He is walking, not running, through the rain because he knows that there is something about being covered in a downpour that is romantic and he needs **all** the help he can get. It is not just raining... it is **pouring**, and the water sluices downward in great ripping currents that seem to douse particular sections of the sidewalk **as** though someone high above had not a watering can but a hose. Cannister sloshes along, **his** shoes and socks soaked through. **When** he wiggles **his** toes he finds that there is water between them. He moves on.

Down South University **Street** now, past **all** the stores long shut down for the night. The town is not a happening place, **as** it were, in the summer, but Cannister feels connected to it somehow. That summer he delivers bagels, working for the store on the corner of South U. and he **starts his** run at three in the morning. He is a night-worker now, and he loves the mystery of it, the romance of being up before anyone else in the whole town. He loves driving **himself** through those **streets**, past all the sleeping houses, out into the country to the next town over. He drives slowly through the student ghetto

sometimes, hoping to catch a glimpse of someone dressing through a lit window. He has driven past the house on 133 Church Street any number of times. To **his** credit, he feels ashamed about doing so. He cannot help **himself**, because he has fallen madly in love. Her name is Janice, and he is convinced that she is the woman he's been looking for **all** his life. He knows **this** with the passion that **all** lovers know, with the conviction that all lovers have. They are friends, drawn together by their similar pasts, and Janice has said a number of times that she's thankful to have **him as** a friend, but he knows that once he tells her how he feels, she'll see the truth of their relationship. He feels that **his** heart is **on** fire, that it's burning for her so fiercely that she must be able to see it through **his** chest. **Yes**, he **thinks**, coming up on her house, because our love is sacred.

He stands there now, apprehensively leaning on one foot, then another. He takes out his cigarettes, lighting one and imagining that it will calm **him** down in some way. The rain soaks the cigarette within moments, and he tosses it away into the rushing water of the nearby gutter. He is going to do it. He has known Janice for almost three years now and he's going to do it. He wipes **his** hands on **his** pants to dry them off, laughs at himself, and heads up to her front door. The house at 133 Church Street is a Victorian-style mansion. **Its** front door is massive, and when Cannister presses the doorbell he hears the dour chimes resound in the hall that lies beyond the door. There will be shuffling feet now, and slippers moving past nice paneling and sideboards. Janice, unlike Cannister, is wealthy. When she was orphaned, her godparents took care of her. Cannister **himself** was not **so** lucky. Once, a long time ago, they had spoken on a rainy night not unlike **this** one and **talked** of their parents, discussing them in quiet, revelatory tones, finding that they were not alone, that the feelings they had were feelings they shared. Cannister nearly wept on that night. Janice did **so** without shame.

“Cann?” The door swung open and Janice was there in her pajamas and slippers. Her hair was in curlers. Cannister felt a sharp **twisting** inside him and he knew that he loved her. “Cann, are you **all** right? God, what’s happened?”

”No, no. I mean, nothing. I...” He looks at her, knowing how he’s somehow crafted **this** moment, feeling **as** though for the first time in their relationship he’s being dishonest. “Can I come in?”

“Oh, God! **Of** course. Come on. I’m **sorry.**” She steps aside and he steps into the front hall. It is not such a spacious apartment **as** it looks, but it has actual rooms that put Cannister’s cheap efficiency to shame. Janice has hardwood floors and tall windows and a living room. He doesn’t want to **get** her floors wet so he stands there, pathetic and sopping on the front mat. He thinks in one brief, odd moment that “mat” was one of the first words he ever learned. He nearly remembers it completely, sitting in the orphanage’s donated desks, spelling it out with someone else’s crayon.

“Cann?”

Janice is looking at him, wondering what’s wrong.

“Janice.” He stands there, raises **his** hands from **his** sides and then lets them fall when he doesn’t know what to say. They splatter water from **his** pants, and the shower sprays outward and onto **his** friend, and they both laugh out loud, nervous. ”Janice, I had to come over here.”

“Why? Cann, what’s the matter?” But he sees the suspicion already there in her eyes. He **sees** what she doesn’t want to happen. ”Cann, what’s wrong.”

“Nothing’s wrong, Janice. In fact, I **think** that everything might be right.”

She stares into **his** eyes. Janice is almost **as** tall **as** he is, and she holds her height well, her shoulders always **back**, **as** though she were raised to model. Her hair is a rich, gold leaf blonde, and tonight she has it pulled back in a hasty ponytail. Her eyes, a light blue that goes somewhat gray when she wears that color, search **his** own. She’s got her

left hand folded under her right arm, her right hand holding the top of her pajamas at the neck. She might be any concerned mother, wondering at the noise in the yard at night.

"I think that I might love..." he says but her gentle hand leaves her mouth and covers **his**, so that **his** lips move against it—oh, **his** lips on her skin, she tastes like flowers—and still she presses her hand there, stopping **him**.

"Please don't." When she's certain that he's not talking any more, she takes her hand away. "Please."

He raises **his** eyebrows, and she looks away from **him**. "Why?"

"Cann... I just, I just don't. I can't."

"But... why not? I mean, why? We're so close and we're so... we're so *right* together..." But then he stops, seeing that he's no longer confessing a love but defending it, and soon he'll be begging so he has to stop. "I better go."

"Cann, don't."

"I need to go. I'm sorry. I shouldn't have come here. I'm sorry."

"Don't. Oh, don't be sorry, dear Cannister. Sweet Cannister..."

"Stop! Just... just stop it. I'm **sorry**, Jan. I'm sorry."

And then he's outdoors, **running** away in the rain, trying not to slip on any puddles, knowing that would kill him, knowing that if he were to slip and fall there on the cement, Janice would *see* him and laugh and that would be the end of him. He doesn't fall, but he looks back and it hurts just **as** much. Janice stands at the door and watches **him**, and in the rain and the darkness of night, he can't *see* her but only her silhouette and shape in the yellow light of the hall behind her. And then he walks away into the night, knowing that he's screwed up again, confused friendship and family for love again. **Their** friendship **will** become awkward and **begin** to suffer after that summer, and eventually they'll stop speaking. That **will** come later, but for now, there is only Cannister, walking away into the night's wet shadows.

He blends with the rain. He merges wetness with the rain.

6

Cannister grimaced while the game show progressed. There were no commercials, only ten minute breaks. When Mr. Hostly announced a commercial break, and talked with the contestants, they had to sit and watch them sweat it out up there, frozen in time in TV-Land for five minutes, wondering how they would do. Todd was 200 points behind the leader, and **his** forehead stood shiny and bright in the overhead lights. A makeup lady came out and dabbed at **his** sheen, applying a little extra so he wouldn't gleam so much. Amelia sat there, agonizing, and glancing every so often from her Todd —spotlit and somehow alive up there on the living TV —to Cannister, trying to smile over her knuckle. The winner in the lead was named simply "Chad," dimpled and **grinning**, thinking of the **millions** that would hound **him** forever **as** proof of **his** inane sense of useless trivia.

When the lights blinked twice, the audience once again simmered down, and Cannister found that he **was** now praying to Chad, praying that Chad would come through, would win. It didn't seem the right choice, but he couldn't stand the thought of what would happen. He saw himself waiting outside the doors, if the inevitable should occur, and having to reach out and shake Todd's hand and congratulate **him** on **his** accomplishment. What would that be like? He saw himself, instead, reaching out and punching Todd in the face, the shocked look of the **girls** staring after them both. What a joke that would be. Todd would beat the shit out of **him**, hands down, and Amelia would certainly leave **him** for good. There would be no apologies for it. He wondered idly if the Ice Queen was watching the show, her eyes wide, her hands gripping the sides

of her chair. Cannister wondered where she'd been. He'd thought about simply telling Amelia what he thought had happened, but something held him back. He found he was afraid that there again, she would condone her brother's actions, and where would that leave him?

He found that his hand, too, was raised to his mouth, and he stared forward, praying to the almighty Chad, while Amelia whispered beside him: "Come on, Todd. Go, Todd!" She whispered it over and over, like a mantra, and Cannister doubted she even knew what she was saying.

7

Amelia sat alone, sipping tea, when he approached her that first afternoon. She was in the small café in the library, and if anyone had told her then that the strange, awkward boy who was stumbling up to her was going to be her first major boyfriend, she wouldn't have believed it. Cannister Barnes in his first year of graduate school was a sapling, not yet grown into his branches. He was bulkier back then, and his clothes were all loose and wrinkled, hiding what he considered to be fat and what most people consider to be normal. Cannister was as concerned about his looks as he was about time, even then.

"Hey, can I borrow your eraser?" he asked her, and she turned to him and looked over her small frame spectacles and saw something in his eyes that triggered memory.

"Aren't you Cannister Barnes?"

He nodded.

"We share a seminar together. I think you have the strangest name."

That was how Amelia met Cannister.

8

He was still shaking when he stood outside, the memories gone, the game show over, but the suspense still very much upon him. Cannister had to try for a fill three minutes to make his fingers work their way to let loose a cigarette from a fresh pack. The other viewers were milling around the auditorium where the filming took place. He was jostled a couple times, only bothering to nod when apologies were given, to scowl when they were not. Cannister finally got the filter between his lips and sighed out loud when he found the matches were not in his pocket. He must have left them with Ames.

He took the cigarette out from between his lips and stood there to breathe. More and more people were coming out, talking excitedly. He wondered briefly at the barrage of backs that drifted away from him, a varying rainbow of shoulder blades, each one cloaked against the brisk breeze that was making the autumn leaves—collected in umber drifts along the cement pots that trees grew from—whisper and shush, as though they, too, were all aquiver with the events that had taken place that night on the game show of champions.

Todd won. Todd had won. His partner's brother was a multi-millionaire.

He thought carefully about what it meant, thinking about Todd appearing on morning shows (he had already been approached by someone from Today! while they were surrounding the winner to congratulate him), thinking about new apartments, gifts for Amelia, money to burn. And the women! How many more women would Todd lay his hands on, now that his money would attract them, like insects to a light? He shook

his head, trying to clear his thoughts. He was being melodramatic again. Now that Todd had money, things between Cannister and Amelia were bound to be...

Better? Worse? What would happen? Cannister looked up and for a moment the girl with the summerstorm eyes was moving past him, looking back once with that perfect, mischievous face to stare into his own, and then she was engulfed by the sea of people that moved and surrounded and took over around them. People were still chattering all around him, but for a moment those sounds were hushed, getting lost as though conch shells were against his ears, and he could hear the ocean. The Atlantic Ocean that swayed and gulfed between him and England, and all the mystery there. He was overwhelmed with recall for a second, smelling very distinctly the rich aroma of Rafael as though he were right next to him. He turned, searching the milling faces one by one, but none of them bore the dark, handsome looks of his friend. He moved off through the crowd, unconcerned with the possibility of losing himself from the others. They could find him on their own.

Cannister took a deep drag of his smoke, finding his way to a shady comer, away from the warm footlights that were placed in comers, dusty with fallen leaves, shining their lights on the auditorium's facade. Was he so good, so high and mighty, that he could feel ill will towards Todd Curtis for these imagined wrongs done to Vicky and April? He thought April was a sweet kid, but Vicky — he was still (to be perfectly honest) unsure what really had happened that day in the city. She had not spoken to him in the car, had not even thanked him for his help, for his being there when her boyfriend was not. She'd always treated him and Amelia with something close to disdain. But, considering the unbreakable Curtis connection, could he, in all seriousness, blame her for that?

The Bostonians were out and about now. It was warm for an October evening, and people were dressed in light sweaters and sport coats. Somewhere close by, a man

was smoking a pipe, and he was reminded once again of the orphanage. It had been Father Manley who'd smoked with a pipe, and Cannister, though he'd disliked the Father, always found the aroma to be rich and comforting. He looked down at **his** hands, which were still trembling. Todd had won, they said with each jitter and shake, Todd was a millionaire. And why did it bother him so? Why did **he** feel sick to his stomach, the ire and disappointment coiling and broiling within him so that he could almost feel a physical presence there?

He looked across the courtyard **as** the game-show goes slowly dwindled away. In one of the cemented courtyards, covered now with the slowly gathering brittle carpet of leaves, a dog was digging, **his** forepaws working the earth. Cannister watched it work its way through the leaves, into the **earth**, its snout nosing through the ground, **its** eyes intent and focused. It was searching for something with all its energies focused only on that, in hopes that it might find it before its master called.

He watched for a long while, **his** cigarette forgotten, **until** the dog finally either lost interest or gave up looking. The animal looked up, looked around, and then walked **off**, casually, through the autumn leaves. Cannister watched it go, the cigarette finally burning the **tips of his** fingers. He dropped it on the cement, stubbed it out with his shoe, and went to find the others.

9

August 3, 1972

I was walking **through** Records today, looking for J. to get the results from the Charts we've been running from the heart-monitor, when I ran into the father by accident. He was lost, looking for the office they'd

referred him to back at the clinic. I didn't want to ignore him. I didn't want to simply ignore him. I was cold. I was sweating, but he didn't notice. He only wanted someone to help him, to help him find the people he was looking for. I took him and brought him downstairs to the front office, where I waited. I felt... ~~I felt so~~ But I stood there, and they told him he'd have to come back another time, and the man started crying, started demanding to **speak** to someone, to **speak** to anyone. I wanted to run away, but I stayed there, watching. The man was weeping, **begging** with the secretary, and she regarded him so coldly. Where did they find such a woman? He kept saying over and over again, "They took my wife. They took my wife." I finally left him there, ashamed. I wondered how...

G. was down with the new one and the boy, and I told him the whole story. He regarded me coolly, and said only, "I wonder if they'll **get** rid of him? Seems like an awful risk." G. turned those cold, dark eyes back to the baby. I simply stood there, amazed.

The brothers are doing well. Gerard seems healthy, but after that initial scare, they monitor him more often than the Subject. Often I hear the others saying how lucky we are that we achieved success so early, so soon. G. feels we'll never know ~~until~~ the Subject has led a good portion of life. There has been some little discussion on the idea of Environmental and Social learning, which I am very against. I feel attached to these boys in a way I could never describe. G. ~~thinks~~ it's the **only** way to be sure, and he really **has** the ear of the Trio. I wish I had **his** political saavy. I wouldn't **be** surprised if he was running the joint some day.

Came home late from the pub last night and S. was up, waiting for me. She asked me what's happened to me, and I didn't know what to tell her.

I wouldn't know where to begin.

Chapter 11

The Visitor

1

It was dark in the bedroom. Cannister noticed the coming of the cold months in the way the mornings were growing dimmer. It was getting hard to wake up as early as he liked, as well. Usually he liked to rise at five-thirty, shower quickly, and go down to the small second bedroom on the first floor that Amelia and he used for an office. Just lately, that room had been lonely for him.

He ran his right hand over his neck, slowly back and forth. His hair was getting longer; he needed it cut. He sat hunched over, liking the way it felt to allow his body to droop, as if under a great weight. And what weight would that be? He just didn't seem to care for anything. He took a deep breath, let it out slowly. He had to go work that morning, and Amelia needed the car. She told him only that she had an appointment. The thing was, she was lying to him, and he knew it, but he couldn't seem to muster up the energy to care. Closing his eyes tight, Cannister sat up straight and put his fingers against his eyes.

What's happening to me? He pressed lightly against his eyelids, feeling the pressure, feeling relieved that he felt pressure at all. What's wrong with me? Why can't I get it together?

He got up from the bed, and Amelia groaned from her side. She'd taken the covers again, wrapping herself up like a taco as she always did. He looked down at her, admiring the way her figure looked, the folds of the bed-linens contoured in the shape of her body. She raised her head only slightly, her hair lying in strands over her face.

”Hmm mmumhummuh?”

Cannister smiled. He felt love for her at that moment. As he looked down at her, **his** hand on his bare stomach, he asked her, in his head, are you cheating on me? It would serve me right. Are you? What’s going on? What’s happening to the **two** of us? The first three sentences out of Amelia’s mouth upon waking were always in another language, learned perhaps from whatever dreamworld she visited at night. He knew her so well. He knew her so well and yet they’d become so distant.

“What, baby?”

“mmh hunnh um *haer-hnrh*?”

He almost had it. He thought he knew what she was asking him. “What time am I going to the airport?”

Amelia, her eyes squeezed shut, nodded.

”He’s supposed to get her around five or five-thirty, I think. His flight is scheduled for five-twenty. I bet it’s late.” He padded around the bedroom, aimlessly, looking for a tee shirt to put on, but not liking the ones he saw on the floor. He couldn’t seem to focus. He found the closet, finally, and after looking through **his** good shirts and the tie rack, he grew conscious enough to remember that his **tee** shirts were in the bureau. He shuffled over to the other side of the room. Amelia liked hardwood floors, but he’d insisted on carpet in the bedroom. He couldn’t stand waking up to cold floors. “I’m going to get there at five, just in case.” She was asleep already. He put on a shirt and sat on the edge of **the** bed, staring down at her face. She was wrapped up tighter than usual. For just **a** moment, Ted’s face flashed into his mind, and he shook his head. No. Impossible.

Cannister found his slippers after a short search and moved downstairs. He went slowly, listening for the mice that Amelia ~~insisted~~ lived with them. Cannister thought it silly, but **still** he descended slowly, in case he might surprise them into

revealing their existence. Doing what? Pictures came to **him**, unbidden, of rogue mice, sifting through their magazines, lounging on the couch, watching the TV and getting Dorito crumbs on the remote. He smiled, reached the landing, and took the sharp right into the other bedroom. Here was where they planned to stick Rafael while he was with them.

The second bedroom was quaint, but a perfect example of what Amelia called "Landlord Lingo." In Landlord Lingo, forty-five minutes from Harvard was "walking distance." A tub that used a garden hose instead of having shower pipes was "rustic," and Cannister and Amelia were lucky enough to be living in a "two-bedroom" apartment. Never mind that the one they slept in was about the size of Cannister's dorm room at Michigan, and that **this** room that they used together **as** a study looked to be no more than a glorified closet. Amelia had fixed it up, of course, and arranged the furniture, and so it looked better than it should.

There was a small, light wood desk against the wall by the window, and **two** floor-to-ceiling bookshelves on either side of it, with space between the desk and the shelves on the left for a printer-stand. The rest of the room was occupied by a twin-sized futon, and it was here that Rafael would spend **his three** nights. Cannister felt a twinge. He wondered if things would be **all** right. Entertaining always made him uncomfortable. He hated having people around for whom he felt responsible. This was a conversation he'd had with Amelia, and he'd seen what it said about him, but her only comment in that mode was, "**So** you don't want that many kids, I take it?"

It bothered her no more than anything else did.

He sat at the desk chair, staring for a while out the window. He thought, after a moment, that **his** mouth was open, that he was simply staring outside like a zombie, and that he must look comatose. Reaching down, he opened up a drawer of the desk, peering at what was inside. It was **his** half-finished manuscript, a novel he'd always wanted to

write about his experience growing up in a foster home. It looked up at him, its first page blank but for *three* quick lines:

The Rectory at St. Bart's

A novel by

Cannister **Barnes**

He looked down at it, the title and the slim pages having no life in the light of the dull morning. He picked up the manuscript, turning it over in his hands. He flipped through the pages. He still wanted it to be alive, he still felt there was something inside it that wanted to breathe, but he hadn't talked about that to anyone, not even Amelia.

He stared down at the title page. He'd had such high hopes for the novel. He read someone once who'd said that everyone's first novel is autobiographical, and in part, St. Bart's was that, but a lot of it, he felt, was also very good. He ran a finger over the smooth edge of the manuscript, the thing entire. Of course he knew how many pages: two hundred and forty-two. That was where it stopped. That was where he had stopped, just before February of that year, when he'd gotten behind on his research at the library for Merritor, and his schoolwork and other things had simply taken hold of his time and not let go. He and Amelia had a fight about it, of course.

"I just don't have time!" he'd yelled at her. And she had screamed back at him, "All you have is time. That's all you fucking care about! Let it go!"

A stupid fight. A childish argument that kept childish motivations behind it. She didn't want to fight with him at the time. She was only looking out for him, as always, only wanted for him what was best. She'd claimed that when not writing, he was rude and not very pleasant. That was what had started it. He'd even **known** she was right at the time. It was so difficult sometimes.

The manuscript. Cannister stared out the window, **thinking** of yesterday.

2

Ted poked **his** head around the corner of Cannister's office door, grinning like the village idiot. He gave a giant thumb's up sign to **him** before swinging around the corner and leaning against the doorjamb. "Good show about your once-removed new riches, eh?"

"What?"

"You know. Todd Curtis. I saw **him** on the telly last night." Ted often used English colloquialisms, claiming to not even be aware of it. "He won quite a bit of cash, didn't he?"

Cannister nodded, not looking up at **him**. Usually, ignoring Ted worked. Usually he went away. "He sure did."

"That's a good deal for you, isn't it?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, you can work on that little novel of yours, can't you?"

Cannister put down **his** red pen. He looked up at Ted, finally, really looked at **him**. He was just **as** tall and funny-looking **as** always. The smile on his face spoke of something that Cannister decided he didn't like. He sat back in **his** chair, leaning away from the pile of student papers on **his** desk. He was at least **three** weeks behind in getting back the discussion group's homework. But here was Ted. Here was Ted, who somehow knew about his novel.

"Which novel is that, Ted?"

Ted smiled. **All** teeth and no ability to hide the fact that Ted knew something... *something* that Cannister did not. In the movies that Cannister had **seen**, the villains were always incredibly intelligent, always one step ahead of the hero. Real life, though, was rarely so facile. Cannister found that Ted was impossibly moronic compared to how brilliant he thought he was. And there he stood, impatiently waiting for Cannister to ask him how it was he knew about St. Bart's and grinning like a schoolboy, hands in pockets, unable to dissemble at **all**.

"Oh. Oh, you know. The novel. The one you've been working on." Ted's belief in his own subtlety did him a disservice. He came across **as** an amateur actor who didn't quite understand the meaning or use of inflection. "The Rectum at St. Batlebv's, or something like that." Ted laughed at his own joke. The kick of it was that Ted *thought* he was being clever and insulting Cannister while pretending to *like* Cannister, and thus not **insulting** him at **all**. But the insipid tone of **his** voice belied **his** true feelings, and in Cannister's opinion, it made him **all** the more asinine.

"Huh. **Yes. I** guess **I'll** have some **time** after **all**." He pulled back up to **his** desk and picked up **his** red pen, turning his attention rudely away from Ted the Jackass. He knew that the other man stood there for almost a minute, saying nothing, feeling that something more ought to be said. Feeling, maybe, as though he'd left something out. Finally, when Cannister **offered** up nothing more, he turned and left the room.

As soon **as** he was gone, though, Cannister sat back in **his** chair again. Where had Ted found out about **his** novel? From Amelia? It surely was the only logical explanation, **unless** Amelia had told Krupple and she had told Ted. After **all**, Ted was in cahoots with Eleanor Krupple. Who knew what departmental stories reached **his** ears? But that too, seemed unlikely. It didn't seem reasonable to picture the Chair of the English department gossiping with one of her charges like someone in high school.

He turned in **his** office, staring out the window, wondering to himself. He knew that Ted and Amelia had been in a seminar together **this** summer while he'd been away. Was it at all possible that she...?

Cannister stared out the window. He drifted into his thoughts, the papers and the red pen behind him forgotten once more.

3

November 17, 1972

The Trio is asking if we feel we'll learn anything, behaviorally, if we keep the boys locked up here all their lives. I feel that the question is moot, but I'm afraid I stand in the **minority**. I noticed that they defer often to G., asking **his** thoughts on a number of issues. I also noticed, for the first time, how poorly Doctor **Kess** is looking... and how greedy G. watches him. He might **as** well simply rub **his** hands in an approximation of a mad scientist in a show. For myself, I presented my case for keeping the children enclosed, and safe, here, but I fear it did not **go** over well.

I play often with the New One. He **seems** perfectly happy and healthy, despite what the monitors say. We've **seen**, **also**, increased intelligence and adapting ability. Shows high advanced problem-solving techniques. Oddly, the Birth to 18-Month team is reporting a marked decline in motor skills just of late. I wonder what **this** could mean. They promise they'll know more soon. So far, though, alpha- and beta-

patterns appear to be spiking to a match to where we peaked Gerard at that age.

I confess, thoughts of rescuing little Gerard or the Other fill me at times. What ~~this~~ journal must look like to foreign eyes! But of course that ~~would~~**could** never happen. Never. To ~~think~~ of the formulas I've written down here, to think of even the diagrams I've drawn. I would be fired for certain... or worse.

Last night S. was gone. I came home to find her out. Couldn't sleep until she made it back. She let herself in, quietly, and when she crept into **bed**, I waited, pretending to be asleep. I listened for her breathing. She fell asleep and I waited, **thinking** she might utter a name, or say what was on her mind. We haven't been talking much. Or not nearly **as** much **as** we should. Not nearly **as** much at all. What can I do? Been drinking a lot. Is that it? Is she disappointed in me? Damn it, if she only knew what I did. If she **only** saw the *things* that I've seen.. . then she wouldn't judge me, would she?

I love you, S. I love you dearly, I do.

4

Cannister took a sip of **his** coffee, the lip of its plastic to-go lid rubbing unpleasantly against his cold lips. He'd **lied** to Amelia. It hadn't been the first time, but it felt worse than the other times. He was standing beside the wide bus kiosk that stood at the end of their **street**. There, he had a commanding view of their apartment. In his coat **pocket** was the information about Rafael's flight. He came in just after nine.

Cannister watched, the coffee hot in his hands. It was sunny that evening, the warm October light shining down through the colored leaves, illuminating patches of **grass** that was **still green**. He was thinking of the waitress, the woman he'd slept with that night after the fight he'd had with Amelia in Little Italy.

Cannister pulled his coat tighter around him. The memory of her was getting him hard. She had kissed him all over his body, taking **off** his clothes piece by piece, going down on him once his shirt was **off**, unbuttoning his pants with a ferocity that Amelia never exhibited in bed. He thought of the way she looked, how when she'd put him in her mouth the energy had run out of **his** legs and he'd sat down hard on the bed, and she'd laughed out loud when he popped out of her mouth.

A strange feeling, the memory of that night. The shame, **his** lack of willpower, was enough to cause the guilt he'd felt that time to come back, even over his arousal over the pictures he kept in **his** head. At the bar, after he'd propositioned her and was waiting for her shift to end, he told himself again and again to go out the door, to leave and not come back, to stand her up and go back home to Amelia. But she (he couldn't remember her name, not for the life of him) was sexy and electric, moving from table to table. He wanted her body. And, worse, he wanted to hurt Amelia for hurting him. Such anger. Such hatred. For a moment, he even considered the idea that part of him wanted to provoke that within her again. But whatever the reason, he waited. He sat there, feeling sick and horny and **guilty** and sick all over again, and waited until she took her apron off, sat beside him, did two shots in a row, and then took his hand. She led him out of Flannery's and down the **street** to her place.

He'd left in the morning without waking her. It was the sort of thing he pictured Todd as doing. And **two** weeks later, when things had cooled between Amelia and he, he'd told her everything.

Standing there, watching the driveway to **his** apartment building, the one he shared with Amelia, he felt, for a moment, as though he were close to finding something. It was not an epiphany. It didn't happen in a burst of sunlight, or amidst angelic choirs, but rather, it snuck up on him unbidden, and slow. Across the street from him, the same side of the street on which he lived, was the courtyard he'd passed the week before, the one with the **solitary** tree. There were only a few dull red leaves still **clinging** to its branches. The apartment building behind it was capturing sunlight on half of its bricks. The side that was directly facing Cannister was cut diagonally in half by shadow, one of its **two wings** that ran perpendicular to the street getting in the way of the sun. The triangle that was illuminated was lit in what looked like brilliant gold. The bricks stood out clearly to Cannister, who felt he was seeing something in a way he never had before. In front of it **all**, that **solitary** tree, almost bereft of leaves, caught in the same sunlight that now illuminated half of its home. The colors were all extraordinary. The green of the grass, interrupted by the reds and yellows and oranges that had yet to be raked, stood out and wept for Cannister, for **all his** suspicions, for what he felt he **was** lacking, for what he didn't know he was looking for. He stared at the scene across the street: the bright sunset gold of the sun, the green of the grass, the solitary elm, the beaming bricks behind, the brightest blue of the sky overhead. He stood and stared at it. He knew he must look the fool, but it was too beautiful, too **perfect**, to just let it go. He thought, suddenly of the painter in Eton, the one who had set up **his** easels across the street from the cafe where he'd first seen her. He thought of what it must be like to see colors like **this** and reproduce them.

He realized, standing there alone and holding **his** coffee, that he felt sad. He realized that he would never see that same convergence of color again, that he was witnessing something good and unique and without peer.

When he turned, seeing movement, and saw Amelia pulling into their lot, a figure sitting beside her in the car, he surprised himself by turning away. He didn't want to know. He didn't want to spoil the evening. Instead, he walked swiftly towards the corner, where he could reach a payphone in order to call a cab. He knew he could take the T, but was afraid of what ghosts might ride there with him. He tried, desperately tried, to make those colors stay in his head. When he looked back at the corner, Amelia and whomever she'd brought home with her were gone, already inside.

The world seemed to shift. Looking up, he saw the sun disappear behind a deeply gray cloud whose edges were rimmed with white silver. He looked back down his shadowed street, the moment over, and then turned away, digging in his pockets for change.

5

Four hours later, he stood anxiously at the edge of a small group of people who waited just beyond the gates at Customs. Then he saw Rafael's distinctive head moving easily among the crowd. When their eyes met, Rafe's lit up and he dodged between a family of three and an older couple, coming up to Cannister too swiftly but not slowing down. Instead, he swept Cannister up in both his arms and held him tight, lifting him until Cannister's feet left the ground.

"God, it's good to see you, Cann."

"It's good to see you, too."

He asked the usual questions while they stood there, uncertain what to do for a moment. Finally, after Rafe told him how his flight had been and of the characters he'd met on it, they stood there and looked at each other.

"You look good," Cannister said. It was true, of course. Rafe always looked good.

"You don't," Rafe said. He looked Cannister up and down, as though making sure of his original estimation. "No. You don't. What's happened to you?" He seemed concerned, his eyes narrowed. Was it normal for people to be sweating so much so soon after getting off their plane? At night? In autumn? Rafael looked him over again. "Is there something you want to tell me?"

"What? God, Rafe. Come on. I'm not dying or anything."

Rafael appeared honestly relieved. "Well, of course you are not. Foolish of me, really. And how daft, eh? Telling you something like that when I've only just arrived. I'm sorry. The jet-lag, you know."

"Of course. You must be exhausted. Let's get your bags."

Rafael grinned. He turned so that he could show the backpack on his right shoulder. "This is all I have with me. I'm a light traveler."

Cannister smiled. For no reason, he felt like crying. He found his mouth was dry, and he swallowed hard for a moment before speaking. "Let's get you home, OK?"

"Of course." Rafe re-shouldered his bag and looked into Cannister's eyes. His gaze had always made him uncomfortable at Eton. How strange to fall under its power here. "It's good to see you again, my friend."

Cannister simply nodded, and then turned quickly away. They didn't say much on the cab ride back to Cambridge, save for a few remarks from Rafael about how kind he and Amelia were to put him up, about how he liked the looks of Boston, about how strange it was to be in the States. The rest of the way, they rode in silence, each of them keeping their own thoughts.

Chapter 12

Rafael in the States

1

It was late morning when Cannister woke up, **smiling** as he rose at the thought of the Amir in **his** house. The worries of the month were so easily avoided, so easily pushed away at the arrival of something new. They had not seen Amelia the night before. When the cab dropped them **off** at the apartment, there was a note on the fridge: “CANN, WENT TO TODD’S, SEE YOU TOMORROW.” The note was by his bedside in the morning, though he didn’t remember placing it there. He sat up in bed, took the yellow paper in **his** hands, traced a finger around the identifiable loops of Amelia’s curvy handwriting. It was obvious: the man in the car had been Todd. Amelia didn’t want to be in the apartment with the strange Arab she didn’t know, so she’d taken Todd with her to collect her **things** and they would stay at his place.

Cannister shrugged. Why wouldn’t she? He’d seen pictures of the mansion that sat on the river, just a short drive outside of Boston. It was lavish, almost grotesquely expansive. He thought about the empty rooms that were there. Who would inhabit them all? Todd spent **his** first night there just the other day, sleeping on the floor all by **himself** in what Amelia told Cannister was a beautiful living room with ceiling-high veranda windows that looked out over the river. Cannister felt the same bite of jealousy, the same sick feeling of regret that Todd had won what he’d wanted.

There was a noise downstairs. He rose, not bothering with a shirt but finding **his** **socks so his** feet wouldn’t touch the cold floor, and shuffled down the stairs. He peeked

in the study, and the futon was **still** extended, the bedclothes Cannister had set out for him ruffled and piled on the floor. He padded away to the kitchen.

Rafael was dressed only in white boxer shorts, his dark skin made dramatic by the contrast. He was drinking out of the carton of orange juice when **his** eyes rolled around and saw him, and he guiltily took the carton away from **his** mouth, making Cannister laugh.

“Sorry, my friend.”

“That’s **all** right.” Cannister went to the counter, found a glass in the drying rack. “Pour me some?”

Rafe did so, looking around the kitchen **as** he took another swig before putting the juice back in the fridge. He was lean and defined, more muscular than Cannister could remember him being, though he couldn’t recall seeing Rafael so exposed in the gray days of their time together at Eton.

”Did you sleep well?”

”**Yes**. Where’s your girl?”

“Amelia?”

Rafe didn’t answer. He raised an eyebrow. Cannister looked down at the floor, found that he could **see** more of his stomach than he’d like, and crossed his **arms** over **his** chest and stood up straighter. He spoke to the ground.

”She’s at her brother’s. I **think** we might go over there later, if that’s **all** right with you. He just got **this** huge mansion. **By** a game show.”

”**His** mansion is right by a game show?”

”No. I mean, he won **this** game show and the grand prize was **this** big house outside of town. You should **see** the place. Amazing. Really amazing.”

Rafael was watching him and nodding, thinking to himself. “So we may go over there later, you **think**?”

"Yes. Possibly. I... whatever you want to do?"

Rafe smiled at him, lowering his head and raising his eyebrows. He looked like a wolf. "Whatever I'd like, you say?"

Cannister groaned and shook his head and shuffled back out of the kitchen. "I'm going to take a shower, Rafe. We didn't know what you'd have with you, so all of that stuff in the bathroom down there is yours!" He started shouting as he reached the top of the stairs. "OK? You all right?"

"Brilliant!" Rafe shouted back up at him. "I'm fine. Go clean yourself!"

Cannister smiled, a genuine smile, and noticed how strange it felt on his face. He moved off towards the bedroom and bath, still wearing it.

2

February 3, 1973

There is a young woman on the floor beneath mine, who keeps an office right by the lounge where I often go with G. She is a lovely woman who wears her dark hair close to her head, as I suppose is the fashion of the time. Often I see her there and we smile at each other. G. sometimes speaks of her in impolite ways, and seems to feel it would be appropriate for us to discuss her breasts while she is sitting across the hall. I tell him to hush, to simply be quiet, and most of the time he is.

She is quite lovely. I spoke to her this afternoon. I'd gone to the coffee room to get away from the others. There's been a lot of worried talk about the company, mostly involving the high mortality rate in our test subjects. Doctor Kess says we mustn't worry, but often I see my

fellow scientists mingling about the halls, discussing things in low tones, and it makes me doubt—yes, it makes me doubt the stability of what we're doing. We had a meeting the other day (all we seem to do is have meetings, while those **two** darling boys play in the nursery, unaware), and **Kess** assured us we were not to be alarmed. The Project shall continue, he says!

I worry, though. The meeting was strained, with arguments on the benefits of societal contact getting heated. I stood up and challenged G.'s idea that we auction off the Subject to an adoptive family that is ignorant of his... of **his** being special. Placing **him** in a family like that, we'd have every chance of losing touch, of not being able to **run** the tests we need to **run**. I have begun to discover certain patterns in the Subject's brain functions that make me think... **no**, I won't even write it down. Not yet.

I have started calling **him** Adam, much to the dismay of G. He **insists** that he is a test, an experiment, that he is not even a real human being. We had quite a heated discussion about that, nearly shouting at each other outside in the hall, which is when I came down to the coffee room.

Which is when I started talking to Helen.

She, like many of the **staff** of HealthWorks that doesn't work (and live!) on floor 3, knows nothing about the Project. We talked pleasantly, discussing the weather, how it's always so rainy **this time** of years, how she loved the snow we had a few weeks past. I think she could tell I've been **upset**. I asked her... ~~I asked her to drink and she~~

~~said yes but then I declined, claiming I remembered some work I had to finish.~~

The other night I went out to dinner with S. and we sat there, eating our meals, not speaking to one another. I can't remember the last time that I kissed her goodnight, the last time we took a walk together. The last time we expressed our love. I sat there and it was a stranger before me, and the worst part is that I wasn't sure if it simply wasn't for the best.

It's midnight, and there's a ~~glass~~ of Glenfiddich by my notebook. I've entered here the latest results of those Alpha tests (see Index A2) and some notes I took on the behavioral patterns I've been noticing in our Gerard. I continue to grow in my belief that he's acting out in response to the extra attention he sees Adam receive. I wonder if I can speak to the Nursery team about it. I wonder a lot of things. I keep a bottle in my desk. I've been placing a hair over the drawer, one of my ~~own~~, each night ~~so~~ that I'll ~~know~~ if S. is going through my ~~things~~. Helen was wearing a white blouse today and the form of her brassiere, which I could just make out beneath the material of her shirt, entranced me.

I ~~a m~~ living in an atmosphere of guilt, which surrounds and suffocates me ~~so~~ that I cannot breathe. I am living there.

4

Cannister sang in the shower, ~~his~~ tuneless voice echoing in the marvelous acoustics. He found ~~as~~ he rinsed ~~himself off~~, the steam rising around him and making

him breathe deeply, that he expected Rafe to show up, to talk to him while he was in the shower, but it didn't happen. He turned off the water, toweling himself off inside the wide stall with its glass door, still murmuring the tune. As always, as soon as the water wasn't running, he grew self-conscious about his voice. It had always been that way.

Running the towel over his hair, he padded softly with his wet feet from the bathroom down the short hallway, turning the corner into his bedroom, and found Rafe already there. He was sitting on the edge of their bed, still in his boxer shorts. Rafe's hair was cut short, and the sunlight had drawn a sharp line from the nape of his neck down his muscular shoulders. Cannister covered himself with the towel, and was about to say something raunchy, when another step brought him to a different angle, and he saw that Rafe was absorbed in reading the little red book. He coughed, and Rafael, who he'd never once unruffled in all their time together (not even the time that Rafe had asked him, as though asking for his luncheon apple, if he would like to go out on a date), jumped, the book dropping from his dark, shaking hands.

"What are you doing?" he asked calmly.

Rafe stared at him, his eyes wide. The October sun filled the gaps between them in the room. Rafe's mouth agape, attempted to form words, didn't, and then closed again. He shrugged. "I...I found this?"

"At the bottom of my backpack? Under all those things?"

"I was looking for something to read?"

"So you read my private journal?"

"This is yours?"

"Yes!" Cannister made his voice indignant, but it rang false, and both he and Rafe heard it. "Yes, of course it is." He took two decided steps forward and snatched the book neatly from the floor at Rafe's feet. "Of course it is."

They remained that way for a few minutes. Rafe simply sat on the bed and looked up at him, somewhat penitent in **his** regard, but mostly curious. It was in the shocking bright color of his eyes. Cannister stood in **his** towel, running a hand (he made sure it was dry) over the cover of the book, turning it over in **his** hands, lifting it to his face and smelling the still-lingering scent of the strong alcohol.

“Of course it is,” he said once more. He wanted **his** voice to be strong, but even he, at the center of its echo, heard how quiet he sounded. How tired.

5

They went to lunch at a popular Deli in downtown Boston. They took a taxi, cleanly avoiding discussion of the T. Cannister only shook **his** head. Once they’d arrived, ordered their food, and settled in, he told Rafe the whole story. Not just what had happened with the beggar, how the man had died in the park, how he’d left him there, alone. He told him how miserable he’d been, how **things** were between Amelia and him. He told him about the *secret* trip downtown with the Ice Queen, how Ames suspected the worst, but how he couldn’t **tell** her otherwise. About the game show. About the reasons why Amelia once again didn’t trust him. About the possibility that she was acting out against the break-up he felt surely was coming. He didn’t weep again – not really – but he was surprised when he told Rafe about what happened the year before, about the fierce anger Amelia struck him with, about **his** subsequent indiscretion with the waitress.

These were feelings – some of them, anyway – that he’d kept to himself for a long time. And Rafael, unblinking, listened to him. He sat and ate **his** food, even while Cannister’s hot sandwich grew cold, and munched quietly, peering intently into

Cannister's eyes while he told his story. He nodded, occasionally would offer a grunt, and even once, while Cannister spoke of the beggar, seemed to cry. The deli was crowded and no one paid attention to the **two** men, sitting hunched over their table, telling tales and stories and secrets. The waitress ignored them, stopping by only occasionally to fill their glasses of water. Cannister told it **all**. He felt, near the end, that he was lighter, that something had changed within **him**. He ought to have been careful, to have considered using caution at spilling so much to someone he'd really only **known** for a short time. But in the end, **as** early afternoon began to seep into evening, Cannister told **his** story, and Rafael listened to it all.

7

They stood outside for a cigarette. Rafael was quiet. He was thinking about something, or **was** unnerved that Cannister had talked so much. Cannister smoked a few steps away, occasionally pacing back and forth for the cold. He felt uncomfortable. He felt vulnerable.

"What do you think?" Rafe said, finally. He looked carefully at Cannister.

"About what?"

"Do you think that little book's real?"

Cannister looked at the ground, ran **his** feet along a crack in the sidewalk. What did he tell **him**? Of course it couldn't be. For the past three weeks he'd been reading the book in secret, he told himself that. But when he looked up again, Rafael was studying **him** intently. There was something in Rafe's features, some hidden expression that seemed to be just beneath the man's skin, that gave **him** a shock of déjà vu. He recoiled, smelled the sweet, strong aroma of pot, and then shook his head. It was gone. But he

remembered Rafe from Eton, telling him about the private company in Bath. He remembered thinking that Rafe was hiding something from him. He thought so again.

"I don't know, Rafe."

"How far have you read?"

"A little past halfway. **Of** course it's not real." He shook his head. He ran his foot along the crack in the sidewalk. "Of course not. It can't be real."

Rafe nodded, watching him. They didn't speak any more about it.

8

After lunch, Cannister took him around the city, showing him the sights. He stopped to call Amelia once, but she wasn't home. He let it **ring**, heard his own voice on the answering machine, hung up. He considered a moment, and then called the number written down on a new piece of paper in his billfold. It rang twice before a familiar voice answered.

"Hello?"

"Todd?"

"Hey! Cannister!" Todd's voice sounded forced, too loud. "Where are you, buddy?"

"I'm downtown."

"Yeah?" Silence. Rafe stood nearby, taking pictures of the **nearby** buildings. He smiled at Cannister, gave him a thumb's up sign.

"Is Amelia there?"

“Sure. Hold on.” More silence. The city grew in noise around him. The traffic in the street sounded in **his** ear over the handset. He switched ears. Amelia insisted that cell phones were dangerous. Cannister simply didn’t like them.

“Cann?”

”Ames! Where have you been?”

”Here.” Her voice was flat, straightforward. ”I’ve been here, at Todd’s.”

”Yeah? Everything all right?”

”Sure. It’s great. You should bring your friend.” From the other end of the line, he heard Todd call out, **as though** from a distance, “Yeah! Bring the towel-head!” Amelia offered no apology. There was silence again on the line. Cannister stamped **his** feet, the autumn cold coming on with the evening. “What are you doing, Cann?”

“Well, I wanted you to meet Rafael!” He felt he should shout over the traffic.

“I’m at Todd’s right now.”

”I know that.”

Amelia’s voice was cold. Rafe was chatting up some strangers nearby, asking directions to a restaurant Cannister had mentioned. He **turned** away, spoke low into the mouthpiece. ”What’s going on, Ames?”

“What do **you** mean?”

“What’s going on with **us**?”

“You want to discuss that now?”

”I want to know where I stand.”

For a **minute**, he thought she wouldn’t answer. Then, ”Where were you, the other night?”

Of course. Of course she would ask. And what did he tell her? How did he tell her? ”I told you, I had errands to run.”

“No. No, you didn’t say that. You told me you stayed at school to get work done.”

”Did I?”

“Yes.”

A gust of wind made him cold. He glanced behind him. Rafe was happily standing, craning his neck upwards to watch an airplane coming in low over the city towards Logan. “Amelia, I’m sorry. I promised I wouldn’t talk about it.”

”Promised *whom?*” Her voice grew high in its frustration. ”Cann, what am I supposed to think? What do you think I should do?”

“I don’t know. Trust me?” It came out harsher than he meant it to, and he could feel Amelia recoil on the other end of the line. “Listen, I gotta go.”

“I know.”

“Maybe you could join us for dinner?”

”I’m cooking for Todd over here. We went out for some furniture today.”

“Is April there?”

“Who?”

”April? Todd’s girlfriend? Is she there?”

Silence on the line. Silence could mean anything. “I don’t know. No. I think he broke up with that one.” She wouldn’t say her name. But something in her voice. . . Cannister began to wonder if the night of the game show was the last evening of April and Todd’s relationship. Would he cut her loose so soon? For Vicky?

“He did, huh?”

“I think so. I don’t know. Well, don’t keep your friend waiting.”

“Amelia...”

”I’ve got food on the stove, Cann. I’ll talk to you later.”

“wait..”

The phone went dead in his hands. He hung up the receiver, frustrated and angry. She could be so cold... it ~~was~~ something he didn't understand. When she was with Todd, though, there was no room for other feelings, for other emotions. He turned and Rafe was there. **His** hands were in **his** pockets, and he raised **his** eyebrows.

“They aren't coming for dinner, I gather?”

Cannister shook **his** head. He felt ashamed.

”Then you and I, my friend —Rafael came and put a strong arm around Cannister's shoulders —“are going to have a night to ourselves.” He started to lead Cannister **off** through the city. He laughed out loud, letting himself be taken. “We are going to own **this** American city of yours, ~~this~~. . this... Boston. We will spend my father's well-earned money **as** though I were nothing more than a spoiled young prince, and if you're very, very, lucky, I **will** take you to **this** gay club I just heard about. I **will** take you there and seduce you by stirring **your** drinks with hundred-dollar **bills.**”

Cannister laughed. Rafe's arm was strong around his shoulders. Boston opened before them.

9

There was a red clock by his bed. It read 4:03 am. The numbers would not keep still. Cannister leaned over his mattress and vomited. He thought he heard voices. He drifted away.

He dreamt clearly. He dreamt that Rafael woke him up by running his fingers lightly over Cannister's forehead, brushing **his** hair away from **his** face. He'd still not **gotten** it cut. There was something deeply sad about **his** friends expression.

"I'm sorry," Rafe said in the dream.

"For what?"

"For what they did. For what I did."

Things seemed to **run** like watercolors. Rafael bent down and closed **his eyes** for him, and kissed him lightly on the cheek.

When he slept again, he dreamt no more.

Chapter 13

Ties

1

"Let me see that for a minute." Rafael held out his hand, reaching for the satchel Cannister had brought with him. For a moment he resisted —overcome with the strange feeling that Rafe would take the red book from him somehow and ~~steal~~ it —then handed it over. They'd had ~~an~~ early breakfast, begun by Rafe ~~insisting~~ that Cannister bring along the book so he could look at it some more.

Now they stood near the large, imposing security gates that Rafael would pass through to make ~~his~~ flight. Soon, a large plane would take Rafe back over the sea. He was returning to England. He said he didn't want to go back to the desert. Not yet. Flight attendants' voices spoke mechanically in the air around them, muffled by the ~~small~~ gatherings of people around them in other hurries. It didn't look like too many others were taking Rafe's flight. It looked lonely in the airport. Cannister had never thought of ~~airports as~~ being lonely before.

Rafe turned the book over in ~~his~~ hands once or twice. He was biting down on his lower lip, thinking hard about something. Cannister thought he might tell him to keep it, but knew he couldn't do that. He was too much into the story by now. Taking a deep breath, Rafe looked up at ~~him~~, said, "Um..." Stopped, looked down at the book again, and then handed it back to Cannister.

"You haven't read on ahead? Not once?"

Cannister shook ~~his~~ head. "I want it to be a surprise."

Rafe, surprisingly, barked out laughter: a single explosion, like a surprised “OH!” and then he looked around, uncharacteristically embarrassed of **his** outburst. “Oh, I **bet** it will be a surprise.”

Cannister stared at Rafe. He looked at him for a long time. “You never told me what you had to talk about; what was so important.”

Rafe looked at **him**. He seemed serious, **his** face drawn in Severe lines. “Another time, yes?”

”I was selfish. You came to talk to me about something. I took up all the conversation with my.. .”

But Rafe reached out and took Cannister’s chin in the first **two** fingers of his right hand. He held it so that Cannister stopped **talking**, looking into **his** eyes with **his own** piercing blue **gaze**. It reminded him **so** clearly of how Amelia had held **him** the night they’d gone over to April’s apartment. Rafael shook **his** head. Cannister tried to object again but Rafe held **his** jaw tightly.

“No. This isn’t about that. It’s not about you dumping on me or vice versa, Cann. It never was. I’ll tell you what I have to tell you, really. Just some other time, you know? Some other time, Cannister Barnes.”

”**You** promise?”

Rafe smiled. **His** eyes were bright and he suddenly looked through **his** single shoulder bag. He pulled out a pen and opened up the little red book. Before Cannister had a chance to object, Rafe scribbled a few **lines**, back a ways from where Cannister had marked **his** place. He closed the book shut with a snap, and then handed it back to Cannister, who looked down at it **as** though it might not be the same story at all anymore. He looked up at Rafe, whose eyes were still overbright.

“I promise, Cann.”

“What would I do without you, Rafe?”

Rafaellaughed again, that same, strange, bitter chord striking somewhere deep within **his** voice. He shook **his** head.

“I don’t know. I truly don’t, my friend.”

They hugged then, Rafe holding onto him so tightly that he could feel the muscles in **his** back bunch together. He put **his** strength into **his** own hug, feeling **his** own arms working against the clothes on Rafe’s back. They stood that way for a while before letting go. Rafe turned immediately and headed down the ramp. Cannister watched him go until he turned the corner and was **out** of sight. He moved slowly around the reception desk, around the angled rows of chairs, finding **his** way to the seats that sat directly before the window. He sat and watched the men run around the bottom of the plane, attaching and removing hoses from the fuselage, loading last-minute additions to the cargo bay, pulling the wide, yellow blocks out from in front of those massive wheels. It was like looking at a picture. The windows were clean, and the morning sun was shining on the tarmac outside, giving everything a golden veneer. The men and the plane looked close-up and therefore miniature. It wasn’t really happening, he thought. I’m just watching a movie.

But the plane began to move, and he watched it roll silently backwards, the air around the big engines of the 767 boiling and warped by the tremendous energy of that power that would take **his** friend far away from him again.

Once the plane taxied away from the gate, it turned the corner and he could no longer see it. He sat in the same seat for a while longer, watching the airplanes seem to float lazily across the sky, each of them tilted upwards, their noses heading for the sun itself.

May 16, 1973

I haven't written here in a long while... too long, I fear. But so much has happened. I hardly know where to begin. I hardly know anything, any more. I suppose the easiest thing to do, surely the simplest thing, would be to write it out here, to tell you **all** of it. Every bit.

I came home a few months ago and found S. was gone. There was no note or letter. I searched the entire flat and it was **as** though she vanished without a trace. Was it because of the woman? I won't know. I didn't write of it here, so even if she found ~~this~~ book, she wouldn't know of it before now. I wrote of her, but surely only in such flattering tones so **as** not to be placed in suspicion? I didn't mention our evening together, nor the *events* that followed it. I see that time now only in shades of gray, **as** though looking through some stranger's picture-album. I promised myself a long time ago that I would never again be ~~unfaithful~~ to my dear Sheila, and there I was, with that lovely girl. It was worth nothing. Nothing at all. For just recently, she won't speak with me any longer. I have tried to stop by her office but I haven't seen her. The whole business is heartbreaking, but I **am** quite sure that S. could not have discovered my indiscretion. There would be no one she could hear it **from**, least of all me.

I'm forced to believe she left me for my continued absence in ~~this~~ home. I have tried to make things right... lord knows I have tried to make things right, but to no avail, perhaps. **You** see, it was last March, when Kess's health was failing ~~him~~ and there were womes that the Project would not hold (see notes under Appendix 3F, within: I've

marked the declining brain patterns in both subjects), when I left for the night, fully intending to stop by the pub on my way home, I had a thought. I know that S. could not have gone **far**. She's not the savings for a clean break. But I resolved to go in search for her anyway. Even then, my resolve did not last long. I must have made it home that evening, though I remember little of my escapades.

The next morning I hardly remember how I managed to rise and make it into work. It seemed I was carrying the weight of the world on my shoulders, that there was simply no way I would escape from the world in which I'd wrapped myself. What did I expect to find? Certainly not the police that were standing uncomfortably around the front, security-enclosed foyer of our small headquarters. Not G., waiting for me by the elevator, sweating and running **his** hands together. He alternately grinned like a skull and looked **as** though he might weep at any moment.

G.'s voice was hushed, but rose and **fall** like waves. "There's been... an accident." He was breathing heavily, **as** if he'd come from a brisk run.

"**An...?**" I wasn't sure how to interpret that. How honestly surprised I must have looked, a moment later, when he told me that **Kess** was dead. He'd taken a turn down a flight of steps, and the **security** cameras showed none other than G. entering the stairwell with him. It looked, in short, quite bad. The cameras showed it taking place at around ten-forty, the time I was leaving the building for my nightly pubbing.

"I have something to talk to you about," G. said to me. He got **his** breathing under control long enough to look me in the eyes. I followed him up to the office, and he closed the door. I sat down, wanting more than anything to quickly stop at my office next door for a nip. I felt nervous, I was shaking. Was it possible to hurt oneself from guilt? I felt splendidly dangerous, as though I were a secret agent of some sort. G. sat down before me.

"How much do you remember?"

"Of what?" I asked, nervous.

"Things I might have said," he was mad. **His** hands shaking worse than mine. "Things about money. About what I'd do if I had control of the company."

"What have **you** done?" I asked. Nothing would surprise me at **this** point. I'd known G. for three years. We'd been close since starting work together. I knew **his** ambitions, surely. Even then, I saw that plans were being formed, that half-realized ideas were rising from wherever our subconscious hides them from us in the light of day.

"I've..." G. ran a hand over **his** face. It came away gleaming in the office's overhead lamp. "I've.. .I've done something..."

I sat back in my chair, not imagining then... no, not then, the worst. But G. didn't confess to me that morning. There was nothing to confess. No evidence turned up to show that there was foul play. No video caught G. in the act, **as** it were. Still, even so, G.'s actions that morning preyed on my mind. I've had, **till** just **this** recent week, my wits just barely about me.

I'm too tired now to go on. I must rest. Tomorrow, I may take a drive out to the country. I can't live with this any longer. I can't go on knowing what I know. There will be something, some answer. If only S. were here. She must be in town. She must be close by.

Love you, S. Love you.

3

Cannister moved through the campus, the late evening shadows of a setting October sun playing with the ideas of trees in the commons. He stopped for a cigarette, wondering at this fictional world he'd immersed himself in, wondering at the goodness of his friend, Rafael, who seemed somehow so different, only one continent away, but so richly different than he himself. He lit another cigarette off his first, not wanting to go indoors. The coolness of autumn was settling in to cold, and the setting sun was playing orange in the glimpses of western sky he could see between the old, brick buildings. The carpet of leaves hid the grass already; the rich smell of their colored skins so recognizable, like the visible smoke of his breath. Two students stood talking near a tree, the woman leaning against it, the man with his hands deep in corduroy pockets. Even from his vantage, Cannister could tell that the boy loved her, but didn't know what on earth to do about it. And did she love him too? Cannister would stand there all evening to find out, he decided, until another thought came to him, as clear as the darkening blue of the sky.

These are real things, he thought to himself. These are real life things and they exist in your reality. Amelia is real. Those two students are real. The grass and the trees and the setting sun are real. You've got to save yourself, Cann, from all this dithering

about in some rummy's **journal**, some fiction you rescued out of time, saved merely by being in the wrong place at an important moment that didn't involve you. Throw out the book. Let the book go and hold onto the reality you can. **You** can't escape into its pages forever. You'll have to reconcile with Amelia eventually.

He turned and moved into the English building, **thinking** these thoughts. Why shouldn't he simply check his office for papers and then take a cab, **as quick as** he could, to Todd's new mansion and rescue the princess within? **His** love would rescue them. He'd throw out the book on the way, would leave it behind, and all the inanities he'd been allowing to interrupt **his** life.

He was passing the English office when a familiar voice called his name.

"Mr. Barnes?"

Eleanor Krupple stood in her office doorway. Warm light issued from inside. She was there later than usual. He smiled at her **until** he noticed the look on her face.

"Mrs. Krupple?"

"Would you step in here for a moment?"

4

Cannister, faced with Mrs. Krupple's glaring gaze, did all that he could do: he lied. "Just been very busy with those things. **It'll get** better. Amelia and me, we've been having troubles." He thought for sure that would get her. She loved Amelia. She would reconsider Cannister's position for her.

"But you must accept my concerns are valid. I mean..." Krupple looked through something on her desk. "The performance reports I've been **getting**." She shook her

head. "And Amelia's work hasn't faltered. Not one bit. It's not much of an excuse, Cannister."

He was in the principal's office again. He was in the confessional. He didn't want his face to go red. He wouldn't go through that humiliation again. Not here, before old Mrs. Krupple, who accepted the fawning attentions of that faker, **Ted**.

"I don't think we can keep you here next semester."

"I can shape up! The school year's only just begun!"

Krupple shook her head. "It isn't that. Merritor's very disappointed in you, in your research. What do you expect, Cannister? It's a very competitive department! You've paid hardly any attention at all to your classes! To your research! Even Amelia says that you..." But Krupple broke off, and Cannister half-rose from **his** seat.

"What?"

"Cannister..."

"Amelia **said** what? Has she **been** talking to you against me? Are you serious?"

"It isn't like that. You're not helping your case, any. I must say..."

There's no dignity in situations such as **these**. Cannister proved **this**. He turned and walked out of the office, stood in the **hall**, not quite believing he'd walked out on the woman. He stood there, and for a moment, he smiled with complete lack of control, **his** lips drawing back involuntarily. It was a mad moment, and he tapped **his** teeth with his finger, amazed at **his** brilliant smile he couldn't control. But then, **as** he moved away from the office, towards the doors **as** the end of the hall, he remembered that he left his bag. He had to simply go, make **his** exit, it was the only way to save face. But the journal! No. He was planning on leaving it behind...

But he'd only been considering giving up the **journal's** world for Amelia's sake. And what did he owe her now?

He returned, coming around the corner, not looking at Krupple, reaching down and picking up **his** satchel. He glanced up at her, and she stopped smirking at him. Her face, in the shadows of the green-shaded desk lamp before her, was severe, peculiarly drawn in the evening.

"I urge you to **finish** the term, Cannister. **You** may wish to reapply. Don't.."

He left her again, swallowing. There were no tears, which surprised him. His stomach felt **aloft**, and he couldn't stop his hands from shaking, but there were no tears at all. He made it all the way downstairs and outside before he felt he might vomit, but even that was simply the nerves. He stood on the front steps of the English building, breathing the cold evening **air** again. He was... he was free. It felt nothing like he expected it to. What would he do first? He took out a cigarette, stared at his left hand until his lighter stopped shaking enough, and smoked for a few minutes. What would he do first?

Chapter 14

Past Lives

1

The room, that last week in October, was cold. Cannister sat on the bed. The red **book** was open, lying beside him. He hadn't spoken with Amelia about the English department. She must know, but she didn't ask him about it. When she'd gotten home that evening, late, she'd gone to the bathroom, taken a shower. He stayed in the office, reading, until there were no more sounds upstairs. He'd gone to bed in darkness. Now, he was awake, and the book, **still**, quiet and open beside him. Amelia's side of the bed empty. He looked over there, ran **his** hand along the space where she slept. The light shone in. **His** mind ran over the entry he'd gotten to the night before. The **book** was still open to it. And at the end of the entry, Raphael's quick scrawl.

Outside, the sky was flat white. Clouds covered the sun.

True, true. My secret **book** is true.

2

May 28,1973

As I feared, G. has taken over HealthWorks, and not without some scandal within the company. There have **been** numerous objections brought against **his** promotion — I've heard that it was arranged by **Kess**

before **his** untimely demise—especially where it concerns his feelings towards the Project, which I'm afraid he's already made perfectly clear.

I have to admit that I've not been to work **as** much **as** I ought, of late, but even **so**, I've heard the weekly rumor **mill**. G. feels that the long-term costs of the Project are too much for our accounts. G. feels the risk is too great. G. feels we should wait until the market is ready for what we have to offer in terms of organ research and cellular modification studies. All these things speak ill of the Project's continued success. I remain neutral for the moment, knowing my relationship with G. is well **known** in the company and will be brought up regardless of what I say. Lord knows I've pleaded with G. on a number of occasions to view our precious copy **as** a human being, to look on what we've done **as** a true miracle, and he continues to be obstinate by insisting it is only a man-made creation, a step away from a chemical by-product of our own human ingenuity. He simply won't see the larger picture, and I fear that's what **will** do **our** young men in.

I was down in the nursery just the other day (a wee bit tipsy at the time, I fear) and heard some of the caretakers discussing the options they'd heard of through the grapevine. Apparently there's rumors that they might ditch the Project and send **our** experiment overseas, while keeping **tabs** on young Gerard—setting him up somewhere close by, using the Clinic **as** a front to orchestrate his adoption. I will confront G. about **this**, if it comes to pass that such obscenities are true, and plead my case. I cannot believe that we've come so far, that we've done... so much, only to throw all research and study out the window.

I've already **begun** to tender words of resignation, if such a things should happen. But I **will** wait and **speak** to G. about it before deciding on anything hasty. My mood, these days, is dark. I have become the **sort** who hangs around empty lanes, hoping for the glimpse of a dream while being gawked at by every bloke who happens by. I **was** convinced the other day that I saw her down by the Cathedral, and so I stayed around the Bath House **all** day, sitting by the fountain in the middle of the square, watching for her and ignoring the **looks of** the traveling students, smoking their cigarettes in the middle of history. I stopped my vigil for a few pints (it is so hot these days, out in the square there's no shade to be had) and when I emerged back into the sun, I was tempted to tell the students what **sort** of history was really emerging around them, just up the road. What sort of remarkable Science was being conducted under their very **nooses, and** at the s m d price **of just** a few nasty deaths. What would **they** say, I wonder.

I miss her terribly. What I wouldn't give for just a glimpse, to make sure she's **all** right. What I wouldn't take back, to have my life back again to how it was.

3

The night that Amelia and Cannister slept together for the first time was sometime in February, and there had **been** an early thaw that year. Earlier that day Cannister had been out **walking,** and the evaporating snow hung in the air. The mist over everything was magical, and extraordinary, and Cannister had wondered at the

time how there could ever have not been love in his life. He wanted every part of her, so that she would be **all** around him like the mist. Then, he was **still two** years away from **his** summer trip to England. Cannister was not thinking of England that day, or research. He was not yet Professor Merritor's assistant. Amelia was the only **thing** on **his** mind.

His walk took him by the University Art **Museum**, and he carefully walked along the **tiny** ecological system of lakes and rivers left by the melting snow. He looked up at the **tall** steel doors and took the steps carefully, his **boots** squelching through the gritty sand deposits left by the Don't-Sue-Us crew from the last snowfall.

It was there, in that museum, that Cannister became lost, feeling somehow as though he were not in the world he'd just been, but rather was a different Cannister **Barnes**, secreted away into the world of pretty **things**. He took **his** time pacing through the different rooms and **halls**. It **was** the first time he'd ever been there. **His** stocking hat was clutched in both hands, nervously **wrung**, as though he understood the need for reverence but not the **best** way to go about it. Each **small**, separate chamber was a fresh arrangement of paintings and small sculptures on pedestals. He felt he should write a poem about the experience, but didn't know the words to use to access what he was feeling. Cannister was awash in inspiration. When he left the museum, he went home and wrote a short story that spoke of lust and **art** and spoke of them quite badly—such the fate of the **half-inspired**.

He was **still writing** that evening, the sun already **half-set**, when Amelia came to collect him. This was well before they would go to meet her brother Todd later that year, when the **summer** months would layer texture **as well as** experience on **the** lovers. Even then, however—especially that evening—Cannister somehow felt on that day that he was stretching out somehow along parallel lines: forward and backward into the future and past. When he answered the door he was not seeing Amelia, dressed in a smart brown

sweater-shirt and matching skirt with hose, but rather the Amelia who maybe somewhere down the line would agree to marry him, to hold him on autumn Sundays when they would go to the park and read together. All these **things** were with him, and he scooped her up in **his** arms and kissed her with passion. She responded in kind, perhaps **tasting** the Romantic flavor of **his** day somewhere behind the movement of **his** lips.

They ate dinner in a **small** restaurant in town, one to which they'd never **been**, and it was there that they laughed together, and the **strange** lingering wonder he'd felt that afternoon seemed to hover over them **still**. He didn't **speak** of **his** childhood **as** a foster child, which he was wont to do on early dates with women. **Quite** early on in his undergraduate years, he'd discovered — admittedly to his own shame — that the story of **his** lonely childhood in Boston was quite effective in garnering sympathy from susceptible **girls**. It had grown into a habit, spurred on **by** too many successes in cramped dorm rooms, until one night he'd found **that** he felt somehow **as** though he were a parasite, a minor demon one might find in a long **Dickens** novel. He'd given it up shortly after **his** dramatic episode with Janice, on the rainy night that marked the end of that friendship.

But that was in the past. He needed no tricks or **effects** to win over Amelia, who seemed genuinely mature and interested in what he had to say. They **talked** about literature, for **God's** sake, and when the subject of past relationships came up, they were smart enough to steer the conversation aside to more practical matters, such **as** things they'd once thought of doing for a living. They spoke in the cultured, experienced tones **of** the world-weary graduate student, tired and **worn** from the many roads of life.

"I don't know." She grinned at him, her mouth smiling over the circle of a **glass** of wine. "You know what? I used to want to be a fireman."

Cannister laughed, enjoying the unique experience of knowing it was all right to interpret her story as comic, sensing even then that her thick skin would not allow her to take it personally. "Really?"

"Oh yeah. I wanted the helmet, the big jacket. All that **stuff**."

"How very cross-gendering of you."

Amelia nodded graciously to an unseen audience. "I know, I know. I was ahead of my time. I really was."

"I never wanted that. I never wanted to be that."

"Really? I thought all little boys wanted to be a fireman?"

"I don't know. Maybe I was never that boy."

Amelia was looking at him thoughtfully. Her dark eyes were **soft**, and there were tiny **hints** of gold **flecks** where the **dim** lights from the restaurant found their way into her and reflected back out again. "Maybe you were never that little." It wasn't a question.

Cannister didn't laugh that time. "Yeah. Maybe not." He took a long drink of water, and when he put the glass down, Amelia was still watching, her eyes looking into **his** own. He wanted to change the subject. "What did your parents think of all **this**?"

Amelia sat back in her chair. She didn't look away from him, but she went someplace else in her mind. He could **see by** her expression that he'd said or done something wrong. He'd asked **some** question that he wasn't supposed to ask. He thought for a moment—with the frantic desperation that early dates can lead to—that he had to do something quickly, that he had to somehow save **his** tremulous foothold. But before he said something more, he saw that he'd not made a faux pas, but rather had occasioned a consideration in her mind that she'd not been expecting to make. She took her hands away from the table and placed them, almost primly, in her lap. They were thus hidden from him, and he wondered what clues they might give that they were thus

removed from the equation. She looked at him, and even before she spoke, he recognized the fear in her eyes. The expression on her face was completely familiar—it had taken him **off** guard only because he wasn't **used** to seeing it, only using it. He knew exactly what she was going to tell him, but kept silent, allowing the disclosure to be her choice. He was glad when she finally spoke.

"I don't.. ." She took a moment, looked down at the secret hands, looked back up to him. "My brother and I grew up with an Aunt and Uncle."

And **his** heart swelled for her. Where he usually **used** the information **as** a device, here she was **being** honest with him, **allowing** him to make **his own** judgments. He knew few other orphans in life, many of them ended up in bad emotional places, **making** poor choices. Here was another who had "made" it. Here was a person who, like him, knew the **peculiar**, hateful feeling of being ashamed that **as** a child, she'd suffered a pain that would forever change how others saw her, spoke with her, interacted with her. It never became easier, that essential truth of their being. This truth could never be erased, not even when hidden behind the shield of caution and dissembling that Cannister had learned to use instead.

Meanwhile, Amelia seemed not to care, squinting her eyes at something she presumably would identify on her plate. They'd never spoken of these things. Not yet. **When** she **looked** up at him, her **eyes** were searching **his own**, though he could tell she tried to keep her guard up. He reached across the table and **opened his** hand. But Amelia sat still, choosing to keep hers safe from view, or vulnerability.

"I understand what you mean."

"Oh?" She sounded doubtful. She had every right to be.

And he told her. He told her about the Clarksons, told her about **growing** up in that old-smelling, antiseptic place, Boston all around him but not caring about him. He told her about **his** childhood, for the first time not covering the truth of it with false sighs

and regrets, not using **his** own past **as** a ploy. Amelia listened, nodding at the parts — at the feelings—she recognized. She told him her stories. She told him how she and Todd (how strange, at that moment, **to** see her brother **as** being **as** kind and giving **as** he thought was she) had managed in a small steel town in Pennsylvania. They were originally from Pittsburgh, but when their parents had died, a poor Aunt and Uncle had taken them in out of duty — the only relatives they really knew — and had resented the cost of their presence in their home. She explained patiently to Cannister that she and Todd had learned to live only for each other, that their bond had grown unbreakable, their **two** hands being their only connection to the world.

“**So** .. when Aunt Clara found I wanted to be a fireman, **she** threw up her hands and nearly passed out. Their home wasn’t really a place for **two** children, **let** alone a sister who wanted to be a brother.” She smiled, and he was looking only for the beauty, and **missed** the other life behind that expression; **missed** the bitterness behind the **lessons** she must have **learned** in that small town. “**So I started** reading, instead. I spent my days in the library instead of that house. With the **books**. Until I got the college scholarship. You must have been funded **by** the same department.”

“Fahrenheit 451 must have struck a chord, huh?”

Amelia didn’t laugh that time. “Funny. My brother was encouraged to be macho. It wasn’t **as** if we grew up in the **fifties** or early sixties. But **still**, I was given the pink **frillies** and Todd got the war toys and fire engines and **all that junk**. And it *was* **junk**, you know? All of it used. But it **still** mattered.. .” Her voice was thoughtful, and Cannister let her wander in the past, only slightly uncomfortable. This was **the** part of any relationship that he cherished but seemed to so **often** be denied. He **enjoyed** the first glimpses of the other person, because later, in the false-comfort of being used to someone, those exciting initial meetings with another person’s past were behind you.

”...I could have.” She was talking, and he was **still** lost in the prism reflections of her eyes.

”What?”

Amelia sat back in her **chair**. “I’m boring you.”

“No. No you’re not. Tell me again?”

”I was just saying I could have done it. I could have been a fireman. If I wanted.”

“Of course you could have.” He meant it, too. He saw it in her.

“Do you want to go somewhere else for a drink?”

Cannister nodded, sitting up and looking around for the waiter.

4

They were lying close to one another, so that he fit up against her back with his own. After the sex, they’d talked together for a long while, and when Cannister gently lifted his head to glance backwards at the clock on Amelia’s side of the bed, it showed him that it was four-thirteen in the morning already. He was filled with adrenaline and hormones, restless and **still** horny. He wanted her more but wanted her to sleep. Best to not let her think he was that needy in bed.

From his position, he could see into the living room of Amelia’s small apartment, and through the window snow was lightly falling again, and Cannister grimaced, thinking of how icy things would be in the morning after the melting earlier that day. He could feel, rather than hear’ Amelia breathing next to him. He thought about her story, thought about how she’d sounded under **him**, how her hands had gripped him. He remembered, with a writer’s clarity, the tactile sense of her merging with him. His

thoughts were arousing him again, and he removed himself from that memory-bed and moved silently into the living room.

There, outside, was the falling snow, the bare trees. He stood before the window, looking out at the **starkness** of the winter night, the melted snow becoming ice and snow again. Elements once lost transformed again, moving from one state to another. Cannister thought of how **his own** parents had allowed Sister Gertie and the Catholic Church to raise him. He thought about other women he'd used to ply with **his own** story. He thought of the evening when he'd gotten the mail and found that **his** scholarship money had been approved, that he was going to college. The Clarksons had not been there, nor would they have cared if they had, and so Cannister had snuck downstairs and broken into the pantry, stealing a stale piece of coffee cake, celebrating with only himself. He'd sat alone in the kitchen, dreaming of what college would be like, while at the same time wondering how on earth he'd survive outside those same walls.

From the bedroom, in the present, he heard Amelia moan in her sleep. The sound was not lonely to **his** ears. Even in her dreams, she sounded confident. He wondered how he'd not detected her childhood in her expression before. She was so collected. It was **as** though somehow, in some way, Amelia had **grown** up without the intense desire to *find* something, without the burning emptiness that told you that there was **still** more out there, that there was **still** something else you had to **look** for. Amelia didn't act like a tragic child because she wasn't searching for anything. Not the way Cannister was. He looked out at the falling snow and looked back at the bedroom, the dark doorway behind him.

June 11, 1973

The atmosphere at the company is changed. The atmosphere everywhere is changed. The decision's been handed down from Dr. Passer. The subject **will** be sent away, with **all** necessary arrangements made to make **his** adoption and citizenry in the States taken care of by some old money we've got across the sea. I have railed and yelled and even sworn, but my opinion is thought very little of, I'm afraid. I would **like** to think that it was G. who's been spreading stories of my drunken escapades, but I won't slip into paranoia. I know myself well enough to know I haven't been clever enough **to** hide the late mornings, the stinking breath, the long lunches from which I **stumblingly** return. It's a wonder I've continued to write in **this** journal.

Received a letter from S. the other day. She has arranged for a divorce, and will take me to court if I don't agree to a speedy (and clean) separation. What choice do I have? A jury would see me **as I am**, would ~~sense~~ the demon that I've become, and would instantly side with **poor** Sheila. Hell, I would side with her, and I'm certain that she knows **this**, that even now she's done **this** so that I will suffer no more than I have to. I wonder if there is **still** love there, **as** I harbor love for her?

There is no comfort in Godfrey Passer (why hide names any longer?) being in charge. I believe he **sees** me **as** a threat; that he thinks I may have some grudge to bear against him, besides the obvious one of **his** terminating the most important biological creation since the dawn of time. I can't help but **think** of that morning after **Kess** passed away and he **asked** me repeatedly what I knew, what I could remember. Our

world might be crumbling around **us**, but I can see Passer **as** a murderer no more than I can see us having any chance of keeping **tabs** on **our** Subject once he makes the trip to America. Godfrey **assures** me that we'll **get** funding somehow to keep an eye on **him**, that we'll **get** medical records and information once he's old enough, that we'll do our research second-hand. We do, he reminds me often, **still** have the original here with **us**.

All of which **makes** me ill. There's no excuse for abandoning this creature. He is just **as** human **as** us. Certainly he's just **as** human **as** Gerard. There's no reason at all that we should assume that these efforts of ours won't profit someone. At least consider the future **teams** of scientists that could avoid making the same tragic **mistakes** that we did.

G. **says** we'll **also** be closing the Clinic downstairs. There's **no** need, he tells me, for keeping up pretenses that we no longer require. I must see the logic in this.

I have drafted **a** letter **of** resignation. It lies here, at my side. I can only drink and **look** at it. **It's** late but I don't feel like sleeping. I **sometimes go** to my window and look out over **this** beautiful town, its roofs lit **by** the moonlight outside, and **think of that** first, wonderful afternoon when S. and I **first** arrived here and made love **on** the floor of **this** marvelous flat. I wish I could **start** over. I wish I could remake myself in that image, and tell her everything. She would take me by the hand and we'd leave **this** town... and HealthWorks, forever. But we'd be together. We'd be together, and I would not have the faces of those women, those innocent, charming women, that haunt me every night,

that **turn** the moon's light into a beacon that singles out me alone, me alone in this room, guilty.

6

June 25, 1973

Well, it's all over with now.

I made a scene **this** morning, I'm afraid. Tears and remonstrations and insults: I felt victim to them **all**, lashing out against Godfrey **as** best I could in my state, which was not very well. I've been drinking all day and night. I found a job working **as** a pharmacist's assistant in London, and I intend to lose myself there, in the city, where no one will be able to find me ever again. Not even S. I don't want to face her. I really don't.

There was no party, or going-away bash, in my honor. G. asked for my security pass back and I threw it on the floor and stamped on it, feeling the fool **all the** while, knowing I was acting like a spoiled child. What other recourse did I have? He was sure to warn me that if I were to speak to anyone about what happened here, I could be sentenced **to** jail, no matter what became of HealthWorks. I find it hard to believe that I could be found guilty of betraying the greatest monsters of **our century**, but where would I end up? G. certainly is not **so** foolish **as** to forget that even if I were to blow the whistle, I would be certainly **as** culpable **as** the rest. And what would I blow that whistle on now? A young, seven-year-old boy living in the southwest of England, quite near here? A

nondescript child growing up in foster care, somewhere in Boston?

What would anyone find wrong with that? Even all those young women, whose bodies we altered, and changed, even the young men we left **as** widowers... they all signed release forms through the Clinic. The only proof would be this sorry little **journal**, which of course **will** be seen **as** the drunken ravings of a madman, made lunatic **by** the departure of **his** beloved wife.

I'm going to drink now, and put this **book** away, and think no more about the lives we've hurt; the courses of people's lives we've changed forever. I leave for London tomorrow, and will do my best to put **all** this behind me. To put **behind** me **all** the **mistakes** we made and the people we hurt.

Because of me.

What name will our **Project** wind up with, I wonder?

7

Cannister continued to sit **still**. He continued to stare down at **his** hands. Below that last entry, in Rafael's hurried writing, were these words, and **an** arrow pointing to the author's last written sentence:

The name he'll wind up with is Cannister Clarkson.

The morning turned **by** without Cannister moving. For once, he was truly unaware of the passing of time.

Chapter 15

Leavings

1

On a cold **street**, with trash strewn **all** around, Carrister stood, wearing new clothes for the first time in **his** life. He even had on new sneakers, and he cautiously shifted **his** weight from one foot to the other. He was seventeen. **His** new sneakers were blue, and they didn't fit. **His** toes felt curled and cramped. **His** shoes didn't fit because he'd gone to the store by himself, and had been embarrassed about having **his** feet measured, or rather, had been too embarrassed to *ask* to have **his** feet measured. **So** now he was waiting for the cab that would take him to the **bus** station and his brand new shoes didn't **quite** fit. He thought there might be a point to it **all**, but was too nervous to think about it. He was alone. The Clarksons had expressed no interest in seeing him **off**. He stood before their empty brownstone, the dingy street around him the **only** witness to **his** departure.

They'd not said a word when he'd announced the other day that he was having **his** name legally changed. Mr. and Mrs. Clarkson didn't say much. They greeted him around the house **as** though he were an acquaintance that they expected would some day leave them alone. He'd been prepared for an argument, for some **sort** of hurt feelings at **his**, **his** first attempt at establishing who he really was. But there was nothing at **all**. He'd brought it up at dinner and Mr. Clarkson had looked up at him, **his** old, red-rimmed eyes blinking without any **inkling** of a reaction. Mrs. Clarkson had simply continued to eat her **peas**, munching them disconsolately, **smacking** the green mush with loud sounds.

The cab **turned** the corner at the end of the street, and he felt sick to his stomach. The driver did not seem overly friendly. He stared straight **ahead**, and Cannister climbed into the taxi, **his** duffel seeming oddly small. He was **settled** into the back seat before he knew what was happening. He thought there should be some emotion, some realization. He'd **grown** up in that non-descript house, and he was leaving it empty, a new name tacked **onto** his old, one that didn't quite seem to fit him yet.

"You ready?" **asked** the cab driver. The meter was already **running**, though Cannister had yet to give a destination or direction. The world was moving around **him** already, he thought. He'd stepped outside the Clarkson's gray front door and **was** now being absorbed into real life.

"**Yes.**" He stared behind him **as** the cab pulled away, straining to see into the windows of the house. They were too dirty, though, for **him** to see any faces that might be watching him drive away.

2

In the living room of the apartment, Cannister sat **still**, in the dark, moving the ashtray around in **his** hands. It was clean but for the remains of one cigarette's demise, **and as** he tilted the ashtray back and forth, the ashes swept **this** way and that. They were a gray, a deep gray—not the color of a thick rainstorm in **July**, but rather the color of **ashes**, or perhaps a **back** door, never seen again. **Cannister Barnes smiled, thinking** these thoughts, thinking of how ridiculous he'd become. **His** memories of his childhood were surprisingly dull... he'd put a lot of distance between that Cannister and the one of the present day. **Still**, he remembered that before he left for college, one morning he'd watched old Mr. Clarkson pattering around the kitchen, **sometimes** knocking the

occasional glass over, and **talk** himself through making **his** own breakfast. Cannister remembered staring at him, unabashedly, **as** he monologued pouring the orange juice, buttering the toast, making sure he didn't pour the **milk** too early, lest the cereal **get** soggy.

And there, in the evening light, Cannister wondered at **this** clear memory, **this** moment perfectly preserved, of **all** the moments that could be. He saw **himself**, sitting there, turning an ashtray back and forth. He saw how he must look. He was wearing sweats and a *dirty* tee shirt. This was surely not the outfit of the unbelievably unique. **These** were not the clothes of Cannister **Barnes**, **the** boy author. This was not the costume for a man who had tried to save a suicidal bum in the Underground. These were not the clothes of someone who kept secrets from **his** friends, though he had never once mentioned to Rafael that he had once borne a different **last** name.

Ashes, **tilting** and leaving tiny patterns along the clean, half-glimmering metal of the ashtray. Ashes. They were mesmerizing. They were shockingly peaceful. When he looked up again, the beggar was sitting across the table, watching him and shaking **his** head. Cannister stared, his hands suddenly still, feeling **as** though **his** heart might be actually stopped. **His** breathing was **uncommonly** loud in **his own** ears. Cannister watched the man, watched him because usually **ghosts** were supposed to give some indication of why **they** were haunting you. But the image just simply faded and Cannister was left alone again, the outline of the beggar softly, suggestively glowing in the darkness, like the after effect of a flashbulb in a dark room. Cannister watched **as** even that trace of him ebbed away, until all that was **left** was darkness again.

At some point, he'd dropped the ashtray, and the **ashes** were now lying around the table. He thought they might form a rude question mark.

"How did I **get** here?" he asked the empty apartment. He sounded desperate for answers, even to **his own** ears.

The drive from Cambridge to Todd's new house was pleasing. The roads turned and wound from village to village, slowly leaving behind the urban crowding of the city, of the college towns. Route 2, once leaving Cambridge, curved along gradual hills and wooded drives, and Cannister leaned back in his seat, allowing the remaining fall leaves to catch his eye, catching and filtering the sun through their clinging colors. Those leaves that had left their homes early lay along the side of the road, collecting in small drifts that seemed to speak of the snow that would come later. Once past West Concord, and approaching Boxborough, the houses on either side of the road began to recede from the road's edge, and their sizes began to grow. It was here that Todd's house was placed, and as the taxi pulled into the freshly paved circle drive, even Cannister had to admit that the place was beautiful. It stood four stories, including the charming half-windows up near the roof that must belong to a spacious attic. It was brick, and looked sturdy despite its age, and the front porch was guarded by four white columns.

The taxi pulled in and around the drive until it stood opposite the front door. Cannister climbed out, thinking of other taxis, of other journeys. All he had with him was his satchel and his pea coat, which he pulled around him against the cold. He craned his neck back and stared up at the awe-inspiring Curtis Place, and finally turned, paid the cabbie, and watched as the yellow car sped off.

He turned back to the house. He'd come this far, made his decisions only up to this point. Indian Running, that was what Amelia called it when she felt overwhelmed by schoolwork. She told him that in those times, she liked simply to make it through the next thing, ignoring all else for the moment.

Cannister took a deep breath. How long had they been together? And in the end, he could see **this** particular moment in time so clearly, even from that first meal when he'd discovered what they shared. He'd thought, then, that they had **so** much in common, choosing not to see the differences that now were **so** plain, so clear. He looked back towards the road. In the space between the drive, tall, straight trees obscured the highway. There was a low stone wall that ran along Todd's new property. **Or** should he say Todd and Amelia's new property? The sun was getting low already. Soon, the days would change, become darker. He stood there, appreciating the way the sun struggled through the trees, making patterns on the covering of leaves below.

Tears came suddenly, occasioned **by** fear, by uncertainty. The blinding knowledge that a chapter was **being** closed, that things had forever changed for him, beyond any small **hope** he might have kept that **his** old life, the one he used to lead, was at all salvageable. He wiped an arm across **his** face, **his** old habit, and thought again of his foster parents. Had they known? No. He wouldn't allow himself to think so. They were cold people, taking him in for the extra money from **the** government. That much had **been** clear to him from the **start**. But had they kept the truth of his birth from him? That he was some kind of experiment? It seemed **too** much, even for them.

When he **turned** around, Amelia was standing on the wide, cement steps that led up to the grand porch. He stood and faced her, holding a hand up to **his** face, feeling shame at **his** own tears. She looked well, in good color. **Todd** had apparently bought her a new wardrobe. She descended the steps, crossed the driveway **until** her feet crunched on the bedding of leaves he'd walked upon to stand among the trees.

"Why are you crying?" she asked him, and he found he couldn't respond. He stood there, arms straight at his sides, **his** fear and confusion only interrupted by the uncomfortable suspicion that Todd might be watching from one of the upstairs windows. But he couldn't move or talk. He felt **his** face working, and though embarrassed, he

didn't hide himself from her. She came to him and held him. They remained that way, the tall trees surrounding them, Amelia holding him against the cold. They stayed there for a long while before she took him by the hand and led him inside.

4

There was hardly any furniture in the house. The rooms were wide open and hollow. Two of the many upstairs rooms contained very large, king-sized beds with posters that rose upwards towards the high ceilings. Amelia gave him a quick tour, excusing Todd for not being home at the moment. He was meeting with investors that evening, finding sources for the rest of their money to accrue. Cannister allowed himself to be led from room to room, the ceilings seeming even higher with the empty spaces. The tour ended in the living room, where ceiling-high veranda windows towered above them, opening out towards a view of the river. The house sat on a hillside, so that at a distance, all they could see through the giant panes of glass were more trees. He wondered how they would ever fill the house. He'd noticed, but not commented on, the fact that the presence of some of Amelia's books spoke more than anything else to her intention of moving in permanently.

They stood a few paces apart, both of them looking out the windows as the evening made the shadows in the room seem lonely.

"Do you want something to drink?" she asked him, He nodded.

They sat, forty minutes later, **two** china **cups** before them, in the kitchen. The room was wide and high, and echoes of their voices chased each other **through** the mansion. Amelia sat and stared into her cup. They'd had tea, and there were dregs at the bottom of Cannister's remains. He wondered if they meant anything. He felt oddly at peace, **as** though the story he'd just told her meant nothing at all. He waited for her to say something.

"You believe all **this**?" Even **her** voice seemed diminished in the giant room.

"Yes. No." He took a deep breath. "I really don't know."

She nodded. She was not upset with him, which spoke to her knowledge that **this** had been coming for a long time. Something clicked somewhere close by, the sound intrusive in the middle of all that **quiet**.

"What will you do **now**?"

Cannister looked out the **high** windows **set** above the kitchen sink. The light was fading from the **sky**, and suddenly he was frightened. More than anything, he wasn't sure what he should do about **the** world, about **his** place in it. The **high** **limbs** of the trees outside created patterns beyond the window, and the strange light of the coming winter glowed behind them.

"I don't know, Ames. I don't know what to **do**."

He wanted her then, wanted her to hold him, but felt it would be wrong to ask that, now that they'd **drifted** so easily apart. It **occurred** to him to say **as** much, and she lowered her head **as** he spoke the words aloud, letting her face cover her **eyes**.

"We have drifted, Cann. I know it." She looked up at **him**, finally meeting **his** gaze. "But **this**..." her hand waved at nothing at **all**. "This really is something else. Why didn't you **tell** me any of **this** shit before?"

It took him a moment to see where she was going. "What?"

“Well, I mean, what is **this** all about? You get scared that we’re drifting apart, so you make up **this** story about... about...” Cannister, shocked, watched a tear, lit by the light above, fall from her right eye. She took a hand and wiped at it vehemently, catching it in her fingers and flinging it away. “Are **you** fucking out of your head? You think I’ll just believe that there’s something wrong with you, that you’re a... that you’re...” She stopped **talking**, biting her lower lip. **The** expression **was** uncharacteristically childish for her, who had always seemed so grown-up to Cannister.

“**You** think I’m crazy,” he said. It was easier if he said it for her.

“Well, what **am** I supposed to think?” Amelia’s eyebrows were raised, her voice **shrill**. Cannister had not known what to expect, but it hadn’t been **this sort** of emotional outburst. Not from Amelia Curtis. “What the fuck do you think? You tell me you’re a... you’re some kind of robot, or something?”

“A clone.”

“Oh, right!” Amelia stood up, her hands flat on the table for support. “**Of** course, how foolish of me! A clone. Right. A little ahead of your time, aren’t you there, Dolly?”

“Amelia, please...”

“Shut up, Cannister.” She was quiet again, standing over him. Her tears **seemed** to be under control, but still he saw she **was** far more upset than he’d thought. He **stared** down at **his** teacup. Night was **full** on, and the overhead light bathed them in warmth. Darkness stretched around them, broken **only** by the gleaming of reflections on new appliances. Somewhere close by, a clock was ticking. Cannister looked up and met Amelia’s eyes, and something in him slowly descended. He found there might be peace in the **truth after** all.

“Amelia, I have to **go**.”

“Why? Why wouldn’t you stay here and get help?”

“I have to know if it’s true. It’s too coincidental not to be. I’ll show you the book..”

“No, Cann.” She came to him, held **his arm**, knelt down beside him. She looked up at him helplessly. “I don’t want to ~~see~~ the book. I don’t want to ~~see~~ **this** thing you’ve written, to show me.”

“No. I didn’t write it. I told you, **this man**..”

”I know, Cannister. This mysterious old man gave it to you on the subway, and you found that all your old fantasies about being special and about mysteries and strangers in England all magically came true. Right?”

”Amelia..” he looked down at **his** hands.

“Cannister.” She squeezed **his arm**, and he **looked** down at her face. The light overhead illuminated her eyes, her cheeks. The beauty in her was encompassed in more than all of that, though. What he found he could **still** love was that she **still** cared for him. That she seemed more concerned for **his** health ~~than~~ freaked out, that she didn’t want him to hurt **himself**. She thought him insane, yes, but even ~~that~~.. even that was a little something that let him into the strange, shut-off world she’d built for her brother and her. ~~“Cannister~~, you need help. You need to let me help you. This isn’t the way to deal with what’s happened to **us**. This isn’t how you arrange to break-up with someone. This ~~isn’t~~ normal. I mean, it was bad enough when you stopped teaching your class, but...”

“I didn’t stop teaching it. I missed a few days. You had no right to go to Krupple and tell her... whatever you told her.”

“Cannister. You’ve fallen away from me. From all of **us**. What did you ~~think~~ I’d do? What did you ~~think~~ I would say?” She looked up at him, her face earnest. “You need help. You **need** my help. We can make **this** work out, if you want it to.”

He looked down at her. That was really the question, wasn't it? He had come to the Curtis mansion looking for absolution, but that didn't have to be the **only** answer. There wasn't only one solution to anything. If he wanted to work things out here, then certainly he could; it was **still** within **his** power. But if he wanted to **run** away to England, chasing some fantasy or another, then that was **within** his power **as** well. The question was what did he want? What did he want to do?

"I have to know, Amelia. I have to go over there and find out."

She stood up. The shadows around them were complete, now. The **sun** had **set**.
"Is that what you have to do? Is it?"

He nodded.

Her hands were **still**. "Will you come back to me, then? Will you at least come back and tell me what you found out? What you've discovered?"

Cannister found it was easier to look down at the shadows that the teacups made on the table. The overhead light caused those shadows to be particularly stark. He felt Amelia **by his** side, staring down at **him**. He opened his mouth, not quite sure what he wanted to say. "Did you sleep with **Ted**?"

"**Ted**?" Amelia's voice was quiet, cautious.

"**Ted** from school. Did you sleep with him? While I was **gone**?"

She was quiet. After a long moment she turned and walked back to her side of the table. She let her legs bend and she fell into her chair. **Her** face looked drawn, **as** though she were very tired. "**Yes.**"

"Were you with him the other night, when I went to pick up Rafe at the **airport**?"

"**Yes.**"

Cannister sat at the new table, **still** looking down at **his** lap. He felt he might either cry or laugh, but something in him was too wounded to react. There was no energy left in him. He glanced up at her, and she was **staring off** into the big shadows of

the house. The house itself, empty, quiet, ticked and clacked around them, **settling** into its new owners the way they would some day settle into it. When next she spoke, Amelia's voice was almost a hush.

"What did we do wrong, Cann?"

"I know the answer to that," he said. He was honestly surprised that he did.

"You didn't need me. You never did. You and Todd found what you needed, and when I met you, I thought I belonged, too. But I never did, I never really belonged."

Amelia smiled at him. It was a genuine smile. "You did, a little, I think."

He smiled back at her for a while, in the shadows. They were still sitting like that when Todd came home a half hour later. He came into the kitchen, looked down at the **two** of them and his smile was somewhere between kind and not.

"Well, what's **going** on here?" he asked. He seemed to already know.

6

Todd's new sports car was expensive and quiet, like Todd **himself**. It idled quietly in the dropping-off lane, the hustle of the **airport** outside completely cut **off** from the quiet hush of the Jaguar's leather **seats**. They sat that way for a minute before Todd turned to him. He'd **taken off** his **sport** jacket, and now he reached back and hefted Cannister's satchel, placing it in **his** lap for him. Then he dug around in the jacket back there, finally pulling out a rectangular leather case. He reached up and pulled a shining pen from **behind the** visor. He **opened** up the leather case and looked up at Cannister. Still **his** eyes were flat.

"How much?" He couldn't resist smiling a little at Cannister. He was smug. He was smug, **knowing** who was **begging** from whom.

Cannister swallowed. **His eyes** were drawn to the checkbook, to the **pen** wavering over ~~the~~ longest blank line.

”How much?” Todd repeated. He raised an eyebrow. It was a distinct Curtis gesture. . . Cannister never noticed before that they’d **shared** even that. “What do you think? **A** few thousand?”

”**The** tickets... they’re not that much...”

“Yeah, but you’ve got to stay somewhere, right? **You** can’t just show up at your friends house and freeload, right? How much? Ten thousand? Twenty?”

Cannister met **his** eyes. Todd smiled at **him**.

“I guess I made it, huh? I **guess I’m** not **as** dumb **as** you thought, huh?”

Cannister stared at him in the dim light of the dash. “I never thought you were stupid, Todd.”

Todd, not answering, scribbled suddenly on ~~the~~ check, writing furiously. He signed **his** name and stabbed the pen downward to dot the “T” in Curtis. He ripped the check **off** and Cannister instinctively reached for it before Todd pulled it out of reach. Cannister felt **his** face flush **as** he forced **himself** to smile. He pretended to be laughing with Todd, and realized that he’d never in **his** life felt **as** much an outcast **as** he did right then.

“Listen,” Todd said. The Jaguar hummed around them. People who walked **by**, hauling their luggage, stared at the tinted windows, appraising the Jaguar with envious glances. “You’ve got to do something for **m e** now.”

“Anything,” he said. He bit **his** lip. **His** cheeks had to be bright red. He thought of Vicky, stumbling down the alley, alone. “Anything.”

”Don’t come back. You understand?” Todd **smiled** at him, **his** superiority slick like the gel in Todd’s hair. “Don’t ever come back to me and my sister. Not for anything. She doesn’t **need** you. We don’t **need** you.”

"I know," Cannister said. He looked down, saw that **his own** hand was **still** outstretched, still begging. Twenty thousand **was** enough to get him to England, to set him up in a flat in Bath, or even Windsor, at least for a short while. Long enough. Long enough to find one man on a farm. **Or two.**

"It's nothing personal, man." Todd handed the check over, and Cannister, **thinking** he might pull it away again, snatched it from Todd's grasp. He ended up looking greedy, and he sat there for **a** moment, **still** feeling ashamed. "Don't feel bad or nothing, right? You're a good guy, Cannister."

"Thanks."

"Now get out of my car," Todd said, **grinning**. **As** usual, Cannister couldn't tell how he meant it. **He climbed** out of the car, took **his** bag with him, and closed the door. Todd pulled away from the **curb** without another word.

Cannister stood there, the noise of the airport swelling around **him as** the Jaguar roared **off**, Todd gunning the engine **as** he sped away. He stood that way for a long time, **his** satchel swung over **his** shoulder. He **finally** turned, looking once more at the check, not **quite** able to believe it, and went inside the airport to find a cash machine. He **might** even have enough money left over when he came back to the States, enough to settle someplace else.

He moved **off** among the churning Americans, losing **himself** in their crowds, allowing them to shove him **this** way and that, like a piece of paper caught on the waters of the ocean. A few hours later, he paid for the ticket he'd booked the day before, moved through the international terminal, sat in **his own** chair, lost in **his own** world, staring at the strangers all around him. In time, they called the number of **his** row, and he rose from **his** chair, walked easily up to the gate, gave them **his** ticket, and walked down **the** ramp towards the waiting plane. He didn't look back, didn't say any mental good-byes.

He simply moved off down the small corridor, feeling the chill all around him until he found his seat on the plane and strapped himself in.

Cannister closed his eyes when the plane lifted off the ground, carrying him up towards the sky.

PART III

Evolution

*My madness all thy life has been thy
doom, thy **curse**, and darken'd all thy
day; and **now** the night has come. I
scarce can see thee **now**.*

Alfred Lord Tennyson
"Balin and Balan"
IDYLLS OF THE KING

Chapter 16

Modes of Transportation

1

Dear Amelia

2

Cannister sat upright on the plane, looking out the window at Boston **as** the lights grew steadily farther and farther away. Somewhere below him was the sea, although he could just barely catch a glimpsed line of blue **as** the plane banked away from the land and out towards the water. After only a few minutes, the familiar invisible hand stopped pushing on **his** insides, and the plane began to level **off**. The water appeared to be tilting towards them, **as** though the world itself were tipping its wings in greeting. Cannister sat back in **his** seat. It was an empty flight and he had an entire row to himself. He stretched his right foot out into the space beside **his** tiny **dotted** room, and folded his hands over **his** waist.

He felt tired. Not so much so that he thought he might sleep (he was never able to sleep on planes), but in that his whole self seemed worn out beyond **a** physical understanding of the word. He'd reached an era, he knew, but from which side of the line was he looking out? Had he just crossed a finish line? **was** he one inch over the starting point, looking back on runners who would never again catch up with **him**?

“How can I race?” he said aloud. He **smiled**, barely, and turned his head lightly to look out the portal. They were escaping the **sun**, and it shone golden in a line **still** on the waters below. It would be very early morning by the time they arrived in London, and Cannister promised he’d stay awake long enough to watch the lights of the Empire’s Crown come over the horizon, weather permitting. **His** head pressed against the back of the seat, he stared down at the sea. “How can I **run**?” he asked again, to no one.

Over it all was the sense—no, the knowledge—that he’d started anew. That his life would no longer be the same. And, over **all** of that, that Amelia, for better or worse, was gone. If he were forced to return some day, she would never take him back. Not now. For **all** he knew, she was dead to him.

Cannister **stared** out the window, and a tear came from his left eye, crossing his lid slowly, but then racing down his cheek, perhaps to join the larger body of salt water below. Cannister looked out over the sea, wondering.

3

Dearest Amelia

4

Cannister slept through most of the flight, but he did awake in time to look out over the overwhelming darkness that had arisen **all** around them. He was sore and restless, having remained fairly immobile for most of the six-hour flight. He rubbed a

hand over his neck, trying to get some of the cricks out. The pilot announced that they were half an hour from Heathrow, and gave the weather report from London.

For the first time, Cannister began to think further ahead than the next few hours. What would he do in London? Loathe **as** he was to admit it—still confused and saddened from leaving Amelia—Todd was right. He couldn't just arrive at Rafael's doorstep and start asking questions. **Or** could he? What would happen if he got off the plane and there were men **in** dark suits, standing around, waiting for him?

Panic, like the darkness that rose from the eastern sea at dusk, rose up and seemed to **engulf** him. He'd acted rashly, unconcerned about anything but some vague notion of having a sense of origin. And now here he was, his entire life over, with nothing going for him but a satchel **full** of traveler's checks and a few changes of clothes. What the hell was he thinking?

Cannister rose, catching on his seat belt and folding back into his seat, collapsed. **Sobs** threatened, great ones that would erupt from his lungs given the chance. There had been few tears when he left Boston, nothing like what he felt now. He was exhausted, he was emotionally drained, and over it all was the suspicion that Amelia was right, that he'd thrown everyone he loved to the wolves for his own, possibly mad, reasons. And now...?

Cannister's throat was tightening and an image sprang up, unbidden. It came to him so quickly and clearly that he forget the terror rising in his belly. **His** jerking gasps steadied **as** he saw into his **mind's** eye, shocked for the moment at how at some point, some writer had gotten it right: it really did strike you **as** a flash, this sort of memory. It was the first time it happened to him.

He was **six** and standing alone in some kind of store. He turned his head and towering above him, red and yellow lines of words he couldn't read, cylinders of Hunt's Tomato Paste. To his left were jars and jars of salsa. He was at the grocery store and

he'd wandered ~~off~~ from Mrs. Clarkson. He was alone and completely at a loss for what he needed to do. Where he needed to go. The six-year-old Cannister Clarkson began to cry, to wail, turning in a circle (it was the only thing he could think to do, and he looked like some ~~sort~~ of young ballerina) again and again, his arms held out an inch from his waist, ~~as~~ if from centrifugal force. He turned in that slow circle, ~~his~~ wailing growing in volume and duration, until Mrs. Clarkson had shown up, embarrassed and scowling at him for having the nerve to get lost while she wasn't paying attention. She'd given him a spanking for causing a scene.

And with a blink, Cannister was back in the plane again. He was sitting straight in his cushioned seat, though it was reclined. ~~His~~ back was even with the window, and though he could feel the cool wetness of a few tears on his cheeks, he was no longer panicking. He forced himself to breathe deeply, rhythmically. In and out. And when he peeked to his left, there were tiny lights, seeming to grow from some hidden curve, out of the darkness somewhere ahead of the plane.

"Do ~~you~~ need something, sir?" asked a woman. The flight attendant was pretty and quite young, younger ~~than~~ he, and her English accent was endearing.

"No, I'm OK," he said. He smiled at her to make sure she believed him. "I'm ~~all~~ right."

5

Dear Amelia,

I know what you're thinking right now, and I don't blame you. I've been writing ~~this~~ letter again and again in my head since my original travels in England. That must sound awfully duplicitous to you, but I

can't put it any other way. Of course I can't be mad at you for fooling around on me, though I urge you to consider another candidate besides Ted. We've gone over **this** ground again and again, and I can do nothing more than apologize for those crimes I may have already committed. It doesn't change anything now, of course. It doesn't change the fact that either way, Amelia, when you read **this**, I'll have long since left you and come here, to England.

6

At Heathrow Airport, Cannister moved easily through the various **lines**. When he'd come here over the summer, the **lines** at Customs had been quite long, but the relatively few passengers on **his** flight and the ungodly hour of the morning made **things** easier for him. He was dressed in faded blue jeans and nice shoes, wearing **his** dark coat again, and while he moved through the airport, **his** satchel slung over **his** shoulder like last time, he began to fantasize again about the girl with the Summerstormeyes. That Summerstorm had seen **him** that afternoon in Eton. That she worked at the airport. That, like a bad romance novel, she had seen the bike accident, remembered **his** handsome face, and saw **him** again, working at her magazine counter at Heathrow when he left that morning, what seemed an eternity ago to him now. She didn't say anything, being too shy, but now she saw **him** again, a mirage during her late shift, and was even now rubbing her eyes **as** if waking from some long, extended sleep. It was fate. Surely there was no other answer. There was the same young man, walking towards her magazine stand, surely it was him? She could not ignore the pulling of true love twice in a season. She called out to him:

But there was nothing, of course. Cannister stood still in the middle of the airport, wondering what to do next. He moved towards the bank of pay phones, his eye straying warily to the large clock suspended from the ceiling. It was, luckily, **three** forty-two in the morning.

Not thinking about it, not caring to, he dialed Rafael's number. He would worry about being polite later on. He would worry about his questions later on. At the moment, all he cared about was that Rafe might be getting in from some party. He was tired and he wanted like mad to *see* a familiar face on this, the first morning of the rest of his life.

7

Is it fair? Is anything? Often, I look back over these events and I wonder if I'm not being pulled by some memory. Not something in my past, really, but some "thing" in my past that I cannot yet identify. Imagine that I've composed this letter **so** often in my head and that's the best I can do! But Amelia, if I am running from something, it isn't you. **If I a m** running toward something, it isn't some strange science-fiction adventure I only half believe in, and you not at all. I'm acting like some character in a poor fiction, aren't I? Chasing a dream so far into incredulity that one cannot believe **I** reach my destination. But I **think** that's not it at all. And if you can't forgive my trespasses, Ames, perhaps you can forgive me the knowledge that all my life I've ignored my own

existence. I've always pretended that I was like other children, that I was a normal boy.

But I'm not. And you know what that feeling is like, that feeling of abandonment, that somehow I'll never quite fit in, **I'll** never quite belong, again. You know that feeling, and so you'll understand that if I had to leave you, it wasn't because I didn't love you as you must have loved me. It certainly wasn't because you fooled around with that moron Ted.

It's because I need to know. I need to know where I come from, and to whom I belong, and how that stranger knew where I was born, and just why he had me confused with the character in **his** little **book**. I know that it's crazy. But you think **so** only because **you** found **all** those answers long ago, when you and Todd were being raised by a family who didn't want you. You found those answers in each other, and I have yet to do so.

8

Cannister wasn't sure what to do next. Rafael had not been home, and he'd only left a message on **his** friend's machine. It was four-twenty in the morning. Cannister could pay a cabbie to take **him** to Windsor directly from the airport, but then what would he do once he got there? He couldn't possibly show up at Rafael's door, bags in hand, and expect the young Prince to take **him** in. But what would he do in London? Lost in the big city, he would be helpless, and if he had to take the train to Windsor from there, he would end up having traveled in a big, useless loop.

Cannister stood beneath the **tall**, colorful posters in the terminal, wondering at how he felt completely, utterly lost. He didn't know what to do, where to go. He was alone in a foreign country, with **no** one to help him or put him up. Rafael **was**, as a prospect, shady at **this** point, given **his** **seeming** knowledge of things that were beyond **his** ken. For a moment he worried that **calling** Rafe might have alerted the wrong people, but when he stopped to **think** about how that sounded, he began to wonder if maybe he wasn't really crazy after all.

Finally, not sure what else to do, he wandered outside, looking at the lines of waiting taxis and **buses**, and lit a cigarette. How long had it taken him before, to take the bus to Windsor? He found he couldn't quite remember. He stood for a while, breathing the air of a strange country, utterly lost and afraid.

9

I know you, Amelia. I know you fight against that all that you can, but I DO know you. I know that right now you're reading **this** letter and saying that I'm full of **bullshit**, that I'm either making the story up entire, or I'm taking a few ridiculous things and blowing them up into something out of control. Aren't you? There's **nothing** I can do to convince you of how I know that it's all true. There's nothing I can say right now that **will** show you I'm right to leave. Because in the end, you'll only ask me how it is I can know for sure.

And I don't. I don't, Ame. But I know that sometime you take chances when you're not sure of things **as** well. Sometimes we're like

strangers, I think. Sometimes it's like we're so much alike, and yet we **talk** at each other and nothing ever gets said.

Do you wonder at life, Amelia? Do you wonder that **two** vibrant people like you and I can spend three years in a tunnel, unaware of anything but the passing of the stations, and occasionally ourselves? Can you name for me any specific day we've spent together that wasn't special, or a holiday?

I can't either. That's the darkness of the **tunnel** we're in. **And I** saw, when these **things** were happening around me (and they're connected... something is going on here and I can't **see** what it is but it's there... it's been there for a while, I **think**), that I'm tired of living in that darkness. I'm tired of living half-asleep. Aren't you? And if I have to go crazy, if I have to throw those other **things** aside and chase after some idea that's not more than a crazed mental blip in order to catch sight of day again, then I **think that's** what I have to do. I want you to understand that. I want you to, Ames. I want you to **see** the tunnel.

10

At Heathrow, Cannister moved around **as** if in a daze. He moved from the closed stores to the open ones, at one point stopping to spend a few pounds on a coffee and a stale-tasting scone. He was paralyzed — so shocked by **his** ability to go anywhere, to do whatever he wanted, that he found he could barely bring himself to go outside.

He browsed a few stands that displayed postcards of common English tourist-attractions: the Tower of London, Stonehenge, the cliffs of Dover. They were cleaning the

carpets around the closed gift stores **as** a few early birds drifted in to get ready to set up shop. The smell of the cleaning machines seemed incredibly strong. He sat for a while, staring at nothing but **his** thoughts, **his** satchel by **his** side. He bought another small cup of coffee, drank half of it, and threw the rest away. While sitting there, he set **his** watch for the new time zone, **his** eyes glancing up at the big monitor that kept track of incoming and outgoing flights.

He paused, looking down at the American time. It was just after ten-thirty. What was she doing? She must be with Todd, weeping, sharing misery, sharing stories. Would he sympathize with her? Would he support or berate him? He felt a sudden twist of anger, that he should not know this man who was so important to Amelia, that she should exclude him **from** their circle so drastically. **His** fingers hesitated on the buttons, tapping them lightly, not wanting to press down and **affect his** place in the zones. Really, in the end, he had no one to blame but himself. Perhaps Todd was right: maybe he had always seen himself **as** being better than Todd Curtis.

Finally, he set **his** watch. There was nothing more than a *tug*, a brief pulling on something unprotected just inside **his** heart. But then the time was **set**, and it was five a.m. Cannister was waiting in England, and not even Time Itself could tie him back to **his** country.

11

Im not looking for absolution. Is that what you think? Im not asking you to forgive me, because I see that would be more cowardly than I've already been. I don't want that. I only want you to travel through time.

Sound crazy? No. Just save this letter. Save this letter if you can. Put it aside, don't even look at it occasionally. Don't show it to new boyfriends or ~~flings~~ or one-night-stands to show them what you once had to go through. Hide it if you have to. For ~~two~~ years. ~~Or~~ three, or four.

Then look at it again. And see if you understand. I wasn't joking, way back in the summer, when I said I was going back to my homeland. I wasn't joking when I said I felt I could lose myself here, in ~~this~~ England that seems so magical and ~~so~~ much more real at the same time. If it is now five years later — or ~~six~~, or seven — and you've moved on, you've forgotten me and gone through your anger and revenge, or whatever, read this next line not hating me but maybe trying to see what I see:

I've never been fully me. I'm only half a person, really. I never knew my foster parents, and I see now that I never knew you. I need to evolve, Amelia. That's what ~~this~~ is about. And if you've waited, if you don't destroy ~~this~~ letter, but instead it's now 2004 or 2005, then maybe you've evolved too, and you'll see that ~~this~~ is a need. I'm no leaving because I want to know if I really am something... something unique. I'm leaving because I want to know why it is I've always felt the ~~truth~~ of it. That's what I need you to understand. ~~That's~~ what I want you to know.

The taxi moved smoothly along the highways, the driver instinctually weaving past **tall** buses and small, European economy cars. Dawn came and illuminated the passing country in great, golden and slanting **lines**. Cannister, sitting alone in **his** car, stared out the window at the rising light of day behind the green hills. Through the **trees**, he caught glimpses of industrial towns that moved by in mellow clusters of buildings. With the coming light, the world began to more clearly show around them, and it wasn't long until Cannister saw clearly the **grass**, and the **trees**, and the carefully laid plots of the cottages that sat back from the road.

Cannister, looking out at the growing fields, the cottages with their gardens, the sleepy roads just beginning **to** be crossed by these people, these English, allowed himself to smile. It was tentative at first. He was growing more and more nervous **as** they grew closer to Windsor. **But** in the growing day, he felt that somehow he might survive. **So** must ~~think~~ all creatures that shed their skin, that walk away from their oceans on new legs, and head towards the land.

Good-bye, Ames. I loved you. I hope that helps you, whether you're forgiving me or hating me, I hope that helps. I did love you and I **do** apologize. Not for leaving you, that's the only good thing I've done in the past three years for you. **But** I apologize that I couldn't talk **this** over with you in person. It's safe in the tunnel, and I guess in the end, I was afraid I'd be pulled back into our **train**, afraid of what's above the

ground. You were always good at pointing out danger, Amelia. I can't have you do that ~~this~~ time.

Good-bye. I love you still. I wish you well, and happiness. I'd ask you to wish me luck, if I felt I deserved that wish from your lips.

Good-bye.

Cannister.

14

On wavering legs, Cannister got out of the cab's back seat. He breathed in for a moment, attempting in ~~his~~ small way to keep things in perspective. He ~~was~~ full. Kept completely full by the emotions, by the journey, by the fears and hopes of what he was doing. He'd specifically asked the driver to take ~~him~~ to the train station, which is where he'd asked Rafe to meet ~~him~~. He didn't know why. Maybe because it had been there that he'd met with Rafe that one afternoon, when Rafe had convinced ~~him~~ to go to the rave in the Park. He paid the driver and unsteadily made ~~his~~ way along the cobblestones, looking wistfully at the clean stores and high-end shops that lined the lane leading to the ticket booth.

Windsor train station was on the edge of the town, and right beyond the tracks were smaller homes, all connected of course, with their individual gardens separated by descending brick walls. In one, quite close to the station, a woman was standing, looking out over her empty beds, drinking what might be coffee or tea. Cannister lit a cigarette, the first one since leaving the ~~airport~~, and breathed in deep. He exhaled and watched the smoke drift ~~until~~ it drifted into nothing on the morning breeze.

He moved along the tiny lane slowly, so slowly. A **train** was just arriving, pulling in slowly to the large red gate that separated the world of iron from the world of more polite things. It was almost **six**, and men and women dressed for the City were passing him, getting on board, some of them giving him curious **looks**. Most had cups of something hot in their hands. It was morning here, and Cannister was ready for bed. He had already taken his first steps into Windsor, into **his** new life... *if* such a life existed. But he couldn't progress. He was frozen.

The crowd moved around him. They swished by in their **suits** and their dresses, more and more of them, **as** the **train** began to steam and hiss. Even these people thinned, and finally the first trainload of Londoners was **full** and ready to go. Still, Cannister stood, unmoving, smoking **his** cigarette. He kept **his** eyes mostly to the ground. **His** mind, **echoing** his soul, was completely full.

What do I do? What if he doesn't come? Where will I go? How will I work? How will I live? Im alone. Im entirely alone.

The **train** began to move. He turned to watch it slide away slowly, and then pick up **speed**. The last car at the station moved away, revealing the cement platform beyond it, **as** Cannister stubbed out **his** cigarette with one heavy shoe. He took a deep breath and looked up to see Rafael standing there, **smiling** at **him**.

He moved to **his** old friend, nearly **running**. He thought he might weep, but he was **too tired**. He was too new. "You got my message," he said, all in one breath **as** he hugged the young man, **still** smelling of spices and soap. Clean, even at **this** hour of the morning.

"Well, of course I did," Rafe said. He clutched Cannister deeply to him. "Where would I be that I wouldn't hear your call?"

Cannister stood back from him for a moment. "How did you know? How is it that you...?"

But Rafe pulled him back, holding him with **his** dark, strong arms. "Shh," said the man. "I promise that we'll talk of **this**. But not now. You've taken a big step, and you need to rest, I think."

The **two** friends clutched each other, even **as** a new herd of curious bankers and lawyers and citizens **all** made their way to wait for the next train, the crowd parting around the **two** men who clung to each other lest they **get** lost in the morning rush.

Chapter 17

Rafael

1

For the rest of that damp month of November, Rafael kept Cannister near, but refused to answer any questions. He allowed Cannister to sleep, undisturbed, in the large, dark-wood futon he'd purchased —for Cannister—to place in the guest room. For the eleven days before December, Cannister moved ghostly through Rafael's large, three bedroom flat that sat just south of the Great Park. From the windows of the second story kitchen, Cannister could sip coffee and look out and think about the young woman he'd met there, in the middle of the **fires** in the night, and what she'd said to him. So much had happened, but **still** her words, her throaty, tired voice, spoke **as** if coming from those ancient, gnarled **trees** he could see even then.

*I see a **dark** man, he **follows** you. And a woman. A woman you desire who eludes you.*

In the mornings, late **as** they were for him, Cannister **Barnes** would sit in **his** chair and stare out at those misty, horrible **trees**, rotten with age. He would sip **his** coffee and wonder... was she right about all of it?

2

They blissfully ignored holidays together, although Rafe turned up on Thanksgiving with an amazing cook name named Terri (from Southhampton), an eighteen-pound turkey, and some truly **amazing** weed. They ate and drank luscious

wine, with Rafe touching his new cook-friend at every opportunity, and after the dinner and some fine smoking, Cannister retired to his rooms. The bedroom suites were on the third floor of Rafe's flat, and Cannister's had a balcony with which to look over the Park. Cannister had a cigarette on it, staring out at the wonder of the peace that settled out in the night, at how the old ~~trees~~ sat hulking shadows in the dusk. He was heavier with tryptophan than pot. Possibly heavier still with memories.

Rafael came out with him, his shirt ~~off~~, dressed only in a pair of loose khakis that accentuated his golden-dark skin perfectly. He lit a cigarette ~~as~~ well.

"You see any ~~fires~~, my friend?"

Cannister shook his head.

"That's not what you're looking for, though, is it now?"

It was the first time Rafe had spoken to Cannister about his ~~return~~, and even then a week after he'd taken him in, no questions asked. He looked at his friend, who smoked and peered out into the eve with precious eyes, his royal features set and thoughtful.

"~~You~~ know that's not why."

Rafe nodded. "I know." He turned and winked at him. "I don't suppose you'd like a nice, Thanksgiving Three-Way? I love the sound of it, really. I can think of ~~two~~ people in ~~this~~ flat who'd very much like to see you with your pants down."

Cannister blushed, shook his head. "No thank ~~you~~."

Rafael sighed, nodded to ~~himself~~, and flicked his cigarette down into the garden plot that sat squarely below them, separated from the greater green of the Park only by a charming brick wall. "I thought ~~as~~ much. Very well." He clapped Cannister on ~~his~~ shoulder. "Terri will be disappointed. Should I send her over?"

Cannister laughed. "No. No thank you, Rafe."

He spent the rest of the night on the balcony, unable to sleep, the music of his friend's love-making gasping and sighing and grunting away **as** he cuddled in sweaters and jackets, peering into the dark, dank cold.

3

On New Year's Eve, Rafael begs and cajoles and wheedles **until** Cannister consents to go out with him and his friends. They are treated to extravagance, no doubt at Rafe's expense, beyond what Cannister might imagine, and he drinks glass after glass of champagne. The party they attend after their meal allows him to not feel quite so ridiculous in the tuxedo Rafael has made him put on. They arrive at a gorgeous country mansion that is extraordinarily lit from within, every light blazing. The ball includes more champagne, a full-sized orchestra, more ~~than~~ a little talk about whether 1999 is the last or second to last year before the "true **millennium**," whatever that means, and more drugs being passed around than he's ever seen. And, it being the New Year, Cannister takes a little Ecstasy.

When the ball begins to drop, Cannister stands outside, biting his lip against the unusually cool breeze and thinking about the gypsy. She'd said something about his sign, but he could no longer remember. He remembered her full body, moving over him, and he remembered her seeming sad. But her words, what she said about **his lines**, were lost to the New Year. People are cheering and chanting and Cannister is well on his way to being wasted. He makes a resolution to no longer take any drugs whatsoever, and he relishes the promise with a long sip of champagne. Will he keep it? He's too blotto to care.

At just under **two** minutes, Rafael comes out and **joins** him. **Part** of the fun for the evening is trying to determine just who is Rafe's date for the evening. He's seen him dancing with a tall, Austrian chap who couldn't be older than 21, and a charming, dark woman, who Cannister imagines is French, though he hasn't **gotten** close enough to hear her speak.

"Nineteen Ninety-Nine," says **his** friend.

"**Yes,**" Cannister replies. **His** head is **so** heavy with various **things** that he can barely concentrate on one excruciatingly pleasurable moment to the next. "**Yes** it certainly is."

They stand in silence for a while. There is no snow on the ground that week, and Cannister's shining black shoes crunch listlessly on the gravel in the wide driveway that curves before the mansion of the revels. People have begun to chant. There is only one minute between the **two** friends and the last year (or second to last?) of the old world.

"A thousand years of longing," says Rafe.

Cannister looks at him, feeling clear-headed for the moment, a wave of some insight washing over him. "What?"

"Longing," Rafe says, and **as** the chanting whirls around them, **as** the cool wind bites into Cannister's tuxedo and pricks at **his** nipples, the chanting rises and steadies, like a crowd of the converted, finding themselves on the same mantric page. And the men and women are **singing**, yelling, exploding:

"TEN, NINE, EIGHT..."

"Will you start looking? For what you came here for?" Rafe places **his** hands on Cannister's shoulders and **stares** into **his** eyes. "Will you?"

"SEVEN, **SIX**, FIVE..."

"**Yes,**" Cannister says. He is lost in the determination, in the magic strength he's always **known** his dark friend to possess.

"FOUR.."

"Promise me," Rafe says.

"THREE.."

"I promise," Cannister says, over the "TWO!" and then

"ONE"

Rafael took Cannister's face gently, his cinnamon hands warm on Cannister's cold cheeks, and kissed him. Cannister closed his eyes, again **tasting** that warm spice, that exotic flavor Rafe possessed, bringing him back to the night of the **fires**. In that moment, the affection between them warming the air around their bodies, he heard the gypsy, heard her plainly:

You have a brother.

No. I'm an only child.

A brother.

He kissed his friend back. It was New Year's Eve, even here in **this** different time, and he was completely alone in the world, but for **this** one miraculous, amazing man who had taken him in when he needed him most. A man who probably loved him, but lived with the knowledge of his love's disdain. People were **still** cheering when Cannister drew his lips away, looking into Rafael's eyes.

"Do I hurt you? Do I hurt you when I reject your advances?" It was difficult to say those words, and not **only** because the Ecstasy was causing **his** lips to feel a bright, voltage-blue so that the **lines** of Rafe's passion spread out around his cheeks in delicious, sparking creases of energy. It was difficult because he heard echoes of another love in the response that he feared.

Rafe, though, was unfazed. **"Yes. Of** course. I love you. Haven't I always?"

Cannister flushed. The drugs. The night. The scene. He stammered and turned **his** foot on the cold gravel of the half-moon drive. "Then... then why...?"

But Rafe held up a finger, placed it lightly against Cannister's lips, which did respond a little. "Shh. Mon ami. I know that you aren't for me. I've known since before I met you, Cann."

"But... then...?"

And Rafael reached out again, grabbed him, pulled him in close. "I said shut up, my friend. Didn't I? Love exists without returns. Don't you know that by now? I accepted your rejection last summer. I accepted it. But **still** it exists in me, you know? Still it **lasts**, it burns. It circles inside me like that foolish snake that likes *its* tail—Oroboros is its name—and **still** I don't cry myself to sleep. Don't pity me for suffering. I don't pine away for you, Cannister. I never have. But that doesn't cancel out anything I might feel."

They stood for a while. Silent. The party swung behind them, but of course with less gusto. New Year's Eve **parties** always end at midnight. People **try** to make them last, but everyone knows that at the number **zero**, the confetti is settling on a bunch of ghosts, the relics of an age gone by, the husks of people who are one year older. We don't shed our skin until morning, when the rising sun comforts our subconscious and lets us breathe easier. We surround ourselves with Science but **still** we remain nervous until the day begins, until the light and warmth show us that yes, the world traipses on and there is no everlasting darkness.

"**You** have a good evening," said Rafael. Cannister nodded. "Are you **all** right?"

"Yes," Cannister said, believing it for the first time since he'd arrived back in England.

Rafael watched him for another minute, **his** dark mystic's eyes staring into Cannister's eyes, and finding some form of either assurance or dismissal there, shook **his**

coattails and with a somewhat cheery "Happy New Year, Cann," disappeared back up the front steps of the mansion, the party swilling around him **as** he opened the doors.

"Happy new year, Rafe," Cannister said, to the drifting mist of Rafe's last words.

4

On the first lovely spring day in April, Cannister went out in the morning on a long walk through Windsor. Since January, he'd gone out every day. The walking helped to invigorate him after **his** writing session each morning. He was starting his novel over again, in **this**, the first year of **his** new life.

It hadn't happened in any burst of recognition, any epiphany, but Cannister was certainly different, more adjusted since the New Year. It took a lot of patience on Rafael's part, putting up with hemming and hawing, but slowly Cannister emerged from **his** shell, accepted the sunlight, and moved on with his life. Rafe, having the connections he did, had pulled some strings with **his** family, and Cannister's official job title was United Kingdom Assistant to Export Document Tracking. It was right there on the work visa the **oil** company gave him. He received a paycheck every **two** weeks in the mail, and the first time he opened the **thin** envelope with the digital type showing how many pounds had been direct-deposited into **his** London bank, he had **run** to Rafael, half-laughing and half-weeping. Both extremities had made him cling to **his** friend for a long time, and Rafael only smiled and suggested perhaps Cannister take him out to a fancy dinner, which he did. **They** took the train to London and spent most of that first paycheck on one meal, which Cannister delightedly paid for. They laughed quite a lot at the fact that Cannister was still unable to pronounce correctly the name of the company he worked for, which seemed to contain an unreasonable ratio of consonants to vowels.

Cannister struggled for a while with the ethics of allowing Rafael to essentially buy him **off**. There was some little shame in it, considering that every morning, Cannister awoke with the nagging sensation that he was letting something very important slip drastically away from him. And each morning, he would promise himself to bring it up with Rafael that evening. But he never did. The red book remained closed, and Cannister, whether right or wrong, remained afraid. He found himself staring at Rafe at night, wishing that **his** friend would simply bring it up on **his** own, **thus** breaking the **seal**. But Rafe was silent, too.

And so Cannister lived with Rafe in their flat and built up **his** bank account. Cannister didn't allow **his** friend to do any work in the spacious place, preferring instead to clean and **fix** meals himself. One morning when Rafe was gone somewhere from the night's meanderings, Cannister picked up a notebook and began to write, finding that he **still** enjoyed the task, and when Rafael came home, he was **still** working, **still** bent over the notebook feverishly, recalling all that he'd once wanted to say about the rectory at St. Bart's. Rafe had simply glowed to know that Cannister was writing again.

Less complimented but **still** acknowledged in secret were the daily walks Cannister took through the winding **streets** of Windsor. Rafael never asked to accompany him, and though he didn't know for certain, he expected that all such roaming took Cannister across the bridge to Eton, and into the winding **streets**. Even after five months, Cannister had not yet explored each winding, cobbled and narrow road. Each lane, each small arched pathway that seemed to stretch through some fabric of which Cannister was only vaguely aware. On some days, Cannister left at about nine, having already written **his** daily hour and a half, and didn't return **until** after three, shambling and slightly worn. **still**, even when he became irrevocably, unerringly lost, Cannister continued to explore. Rafael's offer of getting an architect's map of the roads

was ignored. Cannister, believing there was magic somewhere close by, preferred to do it the hard way.

On that truly warm day in spring, though, when Cannister returned from **his** walk, he had been considering Rafe's suggestion. Surely, through town records, there would be some inkling, some idea of what he had missed in almost a half a year's wanderings. There must be something to it. He ~~let~~ himself into the flat, only just registering that something was different in the narrow stairway that led up to their second story quarters. On the top step was a sealed note Rafe had left for **him**, which he snatched up **as** he bounded up the stairs. He was anxious to take a shower and eat some lunch. The sandwich he'd bought at Mark's and Spencer's looked quite good, and he was hungry enough.

He stopped only at the kitchen, which was abnormally clean. Rafe was used to **his** housekeeping by now, and often the next **two** hours Cannister would spend at home after **his** daily search was in cleaning up after **his** friend. But the kitchen – every countertop, every **chair** leg, every pot and pan – was **spotless**. Wondering, not a little worried, Cannister turned, gazing around **him**. Even then, the letter, twiddling between **his** first and second finger, seemed to jitter, to suggest something other than the usual “see you at 7” or “will pick up more cream on the way home” that Rafe usually left for **him**. A quick run-through of the living quarters and the third-floor suites proved what Cannister somehow knew.

All of Rafe's things were missing. **His** friend, the Amir or Prince or whatever royalty it was that Rafael always refused to discuss, was gone. Cannister moved like a spirit around the chambers upstairs, looking at each neatly made bed, at each folded towel in the lavatory. He felt he might cry, he might weep, but was somehow steadier than he gave himself credit for. Sitting heavily on the bed in Rafe's lifeless room, he opened the note.

Dear Cannister **Barnes**,

Please don't be angry. I have always been simply terrible at good-byes, and this is my passive-aggressive way of getting in the last word, right? In the top right-hand drawer of your new study is the deed to the flat, which—congratulations!—is now yours. I have no limbs with which to shake down silver and gold, but I can grant you this much, right? The gift of the study, I'm afraid, is not really a gift. I took the liberty of discussing next month's pay with my father and we've arranged those items in there to be paid for by the company. I know you have enough pounds in your London account that you won't starve if you don't receive pay next month. Again, I hope this is proper.

If all this seems a bit much, don't panic. Though it seems so to me, **this** is not good-bye. I will see you again, some day. Times right now are complicated, especially for one such **as** you, and I somehow have divined that you will need some time, and soon, to work things out for yourself. I don't mean to trap you in any way. If you wish to not remain in Windsor, where you admittedly seem **so** happy, then the Company (mine, not yours) will take care of things. Juste-mail them and let them know.

Cannister smiled, a trifle uncomfortable. The subject that he and Rafe had not discussed, not once in **all** those months they'd *been* living together, was what role Rafael had played in knowing about Cannister's real last name. Sitting there, reading Rafael's words, he became aware that he'd not *wanted* to discuss it, that it had simply grown too easy for him to live the fairy-tale life, to accept Rafael's *gifts*, and to not worry about anything but

his walks. He'd been putting **off his** real questions in lieu of others, and now Rafael was going to call him on it.

If you must have a reason for generosity, here's one that's not so good: consider it atonement for any wrongs I may have done you, either slight or great, real or imagined. I suspect you'll have angry questions when next we meet, and perhaps this will soften the blow.

If you need a better reason, for what good better reasons will do, know that I still – even now – love you. You may take that to heart, no matter what happens. Please don't look for me. Look for your answers, not the ones I would so happily provide for you, if I could continue to allow myself to play the coward.

Cannister paused for a moment, looking out the window. The evening was coming on, and the shadows in the room were growing dim. He felt cold, but it was not the evening.

Remember, Cann, that there are other mysteries you once would chase in this country of **ours**. Remember what she looked like, that you believed so strongly that she existed. I hope to *see* you with her when next we meet. Sometimes ghosts are real enough to touch. I know this to be true. Hope you're well and stop crying, will you?

Love, really, Love,

R.

For a long **time**, Cannister could do nothing but mourn for **his** friend. He sat on the bed, wondering at the confusing **things** Rafael had **said**, unwilling to really believe

the luck bestowed on him for having **this** friend. He looked bleakly around, even at the empty drawers in Rafe's bureau, before moving, a trifle unsteady, to the third room upstairs.

The study was beautiful, with a modest oak desk placed under the French doors that looked out over the park. **An** adjoining door let a warm, delicious spring breeze in from Cannister's room. There was a brand new computer on the desk, the screen on, the cursor blinking. On the screen was another message for Cannister, and he read it through blinding tears. It said, simply:

There is no image you cannot paint tangible.

There is no lover you cannot dream real.

Make real what you would, Cann.

5

Later, when Cannister had finished both laughing and crying at the lavishness of Rafe's exit, he returned again to the computer. It already hooked up, of course, Rafe being in love with not just him but with gadgets **as** well. He used the Company server to check for e-mail, knowing it was against Rafe's way but hoping to see a last, good-bye message from his friend. As the modem dialed, Cannister wondered if he was a kept man. It was not the first time he'd had such thoughts, but when he'd brought it up once to Rafe he'd been mocked into silence.

There were **two** messages from **the** Rafael's company. The first one from an address he didn't recognize. He opened **this** one first, curious. The signature made him freeze, his breath stayed in his throat.

You've made my son **quite** happy in your friendship.

This is valued by me more than all else.

You will accept these *gifts* from a grateful father

I know you protect my boy

He'd never heard from Rafe's father before, and even with the seeming threat, Cannister again was absurdly touched. But when he opened the next message, which bore Rafe's return address, and read its contents, he sat back in **his** chair, stunned, unable to think.

He sat that way for a long time, watching the spring-to-summer **sun** play across the **trees** and grass out in the park. He sat for a long time, finally rose, smoked a cigarette out **on** the veranda outside **his** bedroom. He smoked and stared out at the park, wondering, wondering. He was **still** thoughtful **as** the sun went slowly down behind **his** building, making the shadows long.

6

path heading subject header

from: rafe@QasrAlHayrr

subj: how did you get here

to: cbarnes@QasrAlHayrr

Tuesday 21 April 1999

Cannister, we have yet to speak of this, but I have to **tell** you now, the truth. I **will** allow you to make of it what you like. **You** have my contact information, and my e-mail address, but **as** I suppose you **will** not be thinking clearly any time soon, I wish you would not be hurt to learn that for a while I'll be out of the **country**. I know we'll meet again some day. Let that day be one of peace.

Did you think it was strange that I gave you information to drive out to Bath, that the company there, so wealthy and well-established, should have a library that looked so new, though it smelled of old **books**? Did you think it odd that when you got there, there were no such notebooks that you could find? They never existed, Cannister. In point of fact, I never really existed, either.

My father owns a large share in the Whitchoate Company, Cannister, which I'm sure you might have guessed (but ignored, for now?), **used** to be run under the label HealthWorks. My father believes that the advancements they make there in Genetics **will** allow him and the royal family to live for quite a long time. I have often discussed this business with him, especially of late. There are not moral questions in **his** mind about the process, and no compunctions about doing **things** to... well, let's call them experiments, all right, my friend? He humors me, I think, and what I'm sure he considers my "cute" moral outrage. I want to **tell** you something else, Cannister. He doesn't know that I'm gay. I have yet to tell him, so I guess that **makes** me a double-coward, but for **this** late fortune to meet you in my life.

The red **book** is not a fictional account, or a science-fiction story. I was sent, actually, to America to get it from you. I hope you will, someday, take into account that I did not take it from you, that I left it in your hands.

You are the young man they sent to Boston, all those years ago. You know ~~this~~, I suspect, or you wouldn't have come all the way back here. You wouldn't have left behind all the **things** you knew back in the United States. When you first came to England, they were overjoyed, but didn't want to scare you off. Kidnapping, although discussed, was not an option. **As** you might wonder, they can't run the risk of being found out. They've kept your existence secret all these years. Any foul play now, they feel, **will** put them all at risk. **So** they needed someone to keep tabs on you, and my father, whose money has been in large part keeping Whitchoate afloat all these years, volunteered my services.

Yes, I've deceived you. I understand your rage, your confusion. Your probably sense of overwhelming loss. I must have seemed like your only friend, eh? And look at what I've done. Look at how I really am. These **gifts** you've received, my help in getting you established here in Windsor... I can't pretend that these **will** in any way atone for my being dishonest to you. I can only hope that you'll some day ~~see~~ that in the end, I saw what they cannot: that you are truly a gift of a **soul**.

I have to go away for a while, **as** I've told you before. I can only leave you **this** final gift, ~~this final~~ possible atonement, and that's the answer you've really been looking for. That answer lives at 22D Darwin Lane. It's a small, country road about a half-mile from Bath. What you're searching for is there. And I hope you do go after it, Cannister. I waited with you **as long as** I could, these last few months, but I can stay with you no longer. I can only tell you that answers, especially the kind you're after, never are easier the longer you wait to get them. Never.

I won't see you for a long while. Be strong, my friend. I don't think they'll come after you. I really don't think they will. But be strong.

Please forgive me my dishonesty. I truly wish to remain,

Your friend,

Rafe

Chapter 18

Meetings

1

On an early afternoon in late summer, Cannister arrived by train at Bath, finding himself once again in that world even more magical than Windsor itself. As the train moved slowly through the country valleys, the august mountains were slowly hidden by hovering clouds and mist, and by the time he made **his** way out onto a cobbled road, he found himself thinking of Brigadoon, or some such tale **like** it. Certainly he was no longer within the confines of what he considered his typical English lifestyle. There was something different about **this** new, unexplored area of his new country (at least for another **six** months when **his** work visa expired), and Cannister began to **see** that he might be missing valuable traveling time, given the relatively relaxed schedule he'd been following of late.

The summer had passed quickly, and though he received no other e-mails from Rafe, he'd written **him** back often. That day in spring he'd replied right away, writing **off** a message desperate and pleading in its subject. Cannister urged him to come and **see** him in England, to at least **talk** to him, but he heard nothing in reply. He waited to see if Rafael would follow with something else, even more mysterious, but there was nothing. Rafe had been right. Cannister was outraged, afraid. He spent whole days sitting alone in the flat, not daring to go out. What exactly had they done to **him**? Having suspicions about the red book's importance had **been** one thing. Finding out the truth had been another entirely. He was often struck that once again, he was immobile with the

possibilities around him: paralyzed just **as** he'd been at the airport, half a year past, when he'd left the **States**.

Finally, near the end of July, Cannister began to make arrangements. He had few to make. Frightened at the prospect of being employed by Rafe's father, who seemed to hold designs on him he couldn't fathom, Cannister had stopped e-mailing on the company account or using the computer altogether. But the checks kept coming. They must know where he was, but still nothing happened, no one came for him. **So** in the end, he'd merely bought tickets and **set** out. He could wait no longer to discover the truth of his birth, though the idea that he already knew what that truth was clawed at him and haunted his dreams.

His mind, on the afternoon's voyage, ran rampant. Sitting in his same dark thick jacket, Cannister considered the possibilities. He was mystified. Settling in for the night, the **swift** silver car speeding through green-frosted evening, Cannister read over and over the address he'd copied onto a three-by-five index card. He took only **his** satchel with a change of clothes and extra underwear. His life was a fantasy he'd never dreamed of living out. He had money and a place to live in a foreign country and no way to spend **his** savings. **His** journey west was made richer by **his** refusal to research the town, the area, or to take any maps along with him. He would explore, finding the address on his own, in his own time.

And underneath it all, **as** he was rocked gently by unseen hands, listening to the very faint clackety chuck clackety chuck clackety chuck of the train, was the added feeling that somehow, in some way, this was how he'd **known** this meeting would happen. He had never quite dared to *think* he might find **his** real family. But somehow he'd **also** never stopped believing it was possible.

Upon arriving in Bath again, Cannister was struck by how much the city had changed, after reading the journal's narrative. The city didn't look **as** timeless **as** it once

had, didn't seem **as** romantic. Instead, he saw the close streets and lanes **as** being haunted. He saw the old, weather buildings **as** being claustrophobic. It was nearly a relief once he'd rented an old bicycle and **set off** down the winding roads, away from the town itself.

Now, stepping out onto a cobbled road, Cannister looked both ways before crossing the street, sensing rather than knowing that already he was being drawn in a particular direction. The few cottages around him were spaced out along a wide, sloping **hill**. Not far in the distance, he saw the gathered buildings of Bath clustered in the valley below. He thought of the journal, thought of the beggar, moving guiltily through those streets. He thought of all the women, used like receptacles for the purpose of the mysterious Project. He thought of what it **all** meant for him, of the **final** truth he still didn't want to believe was real.

He stood uncertainly at a small intersection that seemed to **go** nowhere. Up and down the narrow street he'd just come, the small cottages formed a canyon under the decidedly gray sky. For a moment, looking down over the rooftops of the town just below, he thought he saw the peak of some clouded mountain ghost. For a moment there was some shadowy majestic something behind those mists, and then it was gone. He moved through the small streets, finding a smaller town around a tree-lined corner. Here were small shops, seemingly deserted, a few old farmers, walking with rosy cheeks along the lanes, **pipes** in their mouths and charming old caps on their heads. He came to the intersection of the town, maybe its main street, and the cross street passed under a dark, long archway to **his** left and right. Across the street, at the archway to one such alley, a group of three young boys were smoking cigarettes. They were all wearing identical **suits** with patches on the breast **pockets**, and **all** three kept identical, straight blonde locks that hung in a line over their dark, suspicious narrowed eyes. Perhaps they thought him a spy.

Tracing the line of their slowly drifting smoke, which seemed to add to the mist all around them **as** it drifted upward, he saw a burnt, smudged sign just barely discernable in the cement of the wall above their Stepford frieze. It read “Da w n L ne,” and passing the boys with not a little trepidation, Cannister turned down the alley, striding with what he hoped looked like confidence towards the twenties.

2

Cannister stood outside 22D Darwin Lane, looking at the **innocuous**, charming red door of the small country cottage. Darwin Lane was narrow but crowded, with identically adorable English villas **lining** the way. He thought he saw movement in one of the upper-floor windows of the cottage next door, but still he stood in the middle of the street. Cannister **Barnes** was afraid. He felt heavier, **as** though an invisible hand were pressing down on **his** chest, preventing **his** breathing. Somewhere close by, a bird was crying, the same **shrill** note over and over again. It was the **only** sound he could hear. He felt—it was paranoid but undeniable—that he was being watched.

It was **as** though he’d been led there, which was the primary source of his feeling uncomfortable. Since spring, Cannister had once more in **his** life been alone and solitary. He’d given himself **goals**, yes, but mostly he spent his days and nights in Windsor by himself. Avoiding the pubs, he’d stayed away from urges that might lead him to find solace in the arms of a one-night-stand.

But standing there, facing that red door with the gold numbers and letter, Cannister felt different. He began to feel the truth behind Rafe’s last message: that he’d been putting **off** finding some greater truth. He was terrified of what stood behind that door, of what strange answers he might find, of what it all might mean.

Go on, he told himself. Go on up there and knock on the door. It won't be a monster. Just go on and do it.

Cannister became self-aware, wondering what the occupants across the **street** might **think**, seeing **this** American facing their buildings, **shifting** from one foot to the next, staring at their block. He wasn't entirely sure that anyone was home. The **street** continued to be **still** and quiet. The stillness and relative abandoned feel of the area was unnerving. The flat wasn't **going** anywhere. Cannister would come back tomorrow.

So **thinking**, he stalked **off** again, feeling strangely relieved. His shoes clopped off over the stones. He didn't look back.

3

Cannister was holding **his** breath **as** he knocked on the door. He rapped smartly just below the numbers and went back down one step, breathing **as** he waited in small, short gasps. His chest moved rapidly up and down. He was nervous, **as** though he might be going on a first date. He looked around thinking he heard something, but the **street** was **empty**. He waited **two** minutes and then knocked again.

There was no answer. Whatever answers might be behind 22D's red door, they would remain there, at least for the time being. Cannister, smiling at the great relief he felt, moved down the steps, almost whistling, when he heard the door open behind him.

"I'm sorry. I'm here. Wait."

The voice was familiar. Cannister turned around and froze, staring up at the figure that answered the door. There, leaning on one leg, wearing exercise shorts and a dirty tee shirt, was **himself**.

Was Cannister Barnes.

Cannister sat in the corner, his arms slung over the sides of his companion's **chair**. He stared out the window, wondering at the things Gerard had told him. And his twin (but not his twin, what did you call the original copy of yourself?) sat anxiously nearby, his hands folded, twisting each individual finger back and forth, restless. Gerard **Barnes** was really Cannister. **Or** rather, Cannister was really Gerard. The man sitting across from him was —physically at least—five years **his** senior, but it was unmistakably him. He found that when he looked at his double, he felt dizzy and nauseated, so that all he could do was note the figure in the corner of **his** eye, waiting for him to say something. **His** world was over, and Gerard wanted him to say something.

"**So**," Cannister said.

"Yes?" Gerard said. He leaned closer **still**, if that were possible. Cannister noted the movement but looked out at the barren street below. Nothing moved down there, and he thought **this** would be the perfect place to hide the greatest secret in the world, away from everything but those children, smoking at the entrance to the west lane.

"So I'm not even me?"

"Oh no, of course you are," Gerard said. That was what Cannister's voice really sounded like, he thought. With an English accent thrown in for good measure. "Of course you are, but I'm you... too."

"I don't..." Cannister lifted a hand, stared at it. "I don't believe... I mean, I can't..."

"They knew it would be difficult on you. They told me so. Difficult on you. I've lived in **this** flat my entire life, right? You got out to **see** the world. I've been stuck here,

with tutors and ‘friends’ they hired for me to play with so I wouldn’t get lonely.” Gerard laughed, it was more like a guffaw (that was different, at least) and bits of the cake he’d been eating sprayed out of his mouth. “You know, they got me **girls**, too, they did. Really good ones, though. No skanky numbers for me. Classy dames, these were.” He said it in a low voice, and he bent low, his eyes shifting from side to side. Cannister realized that of course their conversation would be recorded. For posterity.

Perhaps **thinking** the same **thing**, Gerard spoke overly loud “Right! But of course you must have seen wonderful things in the Ewe-Nited States! Tell me about them, right? Go on, then! Go on and tell you brother about your wonderful adventures!”

Cannister leaned forward and put his head in his hands. It wasn’t his head. It was Gerard’s head. He opened his eyes and looked at his fingers. Ten fingers. Brought to you by the wonderful world of Science. He felt he might cry, but then stifled the movement of **his** feelings when thinking how uncomfortable he’d be before his “twin.” He had come to realize, quite early in their meeting, that Gerard Barnes, the genetic stock from whence he came, was a bit of a wanker. It would be funny if his head would stop spinning. When he closed his eyes he saw the small, neatly printed words he’d **only** half-guessed were true in the red book. **Phrases** and sentences he’d briefly dismissed **as** science-fiction. He spoke into **his** palms.

”Did you know Dr. Passer?”

“Who?” Gerard’s voice, after only a short while, was already grating on his nerves. Did he sound like that? Did he really sound that way?

“Dr. Passer. **The** man at Whitchoate. The one who’s in charge.”

”Oh! Right! No, I never met anyone from the lab. Not any of those blokes. I only had the **Nannies** —that’s what they’d call ’em, you know —and I don’t think they were connected too much, right?”

“And you knew all this time that you’d been a test? That you had **this... this...**” Cannister swallowed, overcome, forcing himself to **gain** control of **his** emotions. “This *thing* walking around with your body, with your features? And you didn’t care? You knew everything the whole time and you didn’t mind?” He glanced at Gerard to ~~see~~ the stupid expression on his twin’s face (his original’s face?) and the world doubled around him. He turned back to the window.

“Well...” Gerard was audibly put out. “Well, it didn’t seem like a big deal, right? I thought it happened all the time. Look mate,” he leaned forward, pointing a finger across the room that Cannister barely registered. “These blokes took good care of me, right? They gave me everything, all **this** time. All the movies I wanted. **Books...**”

“What are your favorite **books?**” Cannister asked. It seemed an appropriate question.

“Oh, I got lots. There’s anything with Superman in ’em. He’s super-powered and can beat a train right in two, WHAMMO!” Gerard leaped up, yelling and spitting as he got excited. “And then there’s **books** about Spiderman. And there’s even **books** with aliens in ’em, and these guys, right? They **go** around *blastin’* ’em to kingdom come!”

Halfway through Gerard’s speech, Cannister stood up. Gerard was in mid-motion, turning in a circle, perhaps picturing himself **as** Superman, going WHAMMO through the air at high speeds. Cannister looked down and saw that there was a rhubarb-colored birthmark on the curve of Gerard’s slightly meaty calf. Something seemed to register inside him, some recognition, dimly recalled. He turned in a half-circle of his own, and spoke under Gerard’s tirade.

“I want to see someone. I want to speak to Doctor Passer.”

He said it to nothing in particular. He knew they were around, listening. Behind him, Gerard was making machine-gun noises. “... and this one time? These army guys

had these molecular-activated Tommy-Guns, right? And they were all, 'RRRR-RRR-RRRR-RRR' .."

There was the unmistakable sound of a door opening close by, freezing Gerard in mid-noise. He turned, staring at Cannister with wide, large eyes. "They're here."

Gerard did not appear to be altogether there, in many senses of the word, but the half-realized fear in his eyes could not be missed. Cannister's hands unconsciously went to his shoulders, **his** arms crossing his chest and protecting **himself**. **When** he glanced at Gerard, who moved instinctually to the corner of the room furthest from the entryway, **his original's** arms were in the same position. Gerard stared at Cannister, his eyes shifting from his **twin** to the door.

"They give me shots," he whispered. "All the time. They give me **shots**."

He looked like he might say more, but then **a** man waked into the room. It was Dr. Passer. He was dressed in a white shirt with black pants and a black sport coat. He wore no tie, but the deep colors of his clothes reflected the dark gaze of his eyes. Cannister recognized him instantly, recalling only then the amazing emotion Dr. Passer had displayed at the front door. It had all been because of him — his return to the place of his conception. **The** doctor beamed at the **two** identical men in the room.

"You wanted to **see** me?" **His** question was pointed at Cannister.

"I want to talk," he said. **Behind** him, Gerard whimpered and shied away from the man. "I want to talk to someone who's not a halfwit."

Gerard was too nervous to notice the remark.

After Dr. Passer pacified Gerard, he met Cannister out on the stoop. The day was darkening swiftly, and a line of charming lampposts were guttering to life on the otherwise **still** deserted, narrow street. Between the closely **set** cottages, he could see the lights of Bath, far in the valley below. Cannister held **his** arms around **his** jacket, looking at everything through copied eyes. He was too stunned, he realized, to really be affected by **this** confirmation of **his** fantastic suspicions. But when Passer came out to join him, Cannister was unable to suppress the hope in **his** voice when he asked the most obvious question.

“Are you sure that it’s me? **Me** and not someone else?”

Dr. Passer smiled. He did not seem to be an evil scientist. He didn’t appear **as** intimidating **as** he had on their first meeting, despite what Cannister now knew about the man. **On** the other hand, the man in the wheelchair had not seemed mean at all. **On** the contrary, these seemed like perfectly ordinary gentleman, besides the fact that one was dead and the other was eyeing him greedily.

”I can imagine why you’d wish for such a **thing**. I assure you that we’ve not made that sort of mistake. Surely you see the resemblance.”

”How...?” Cannister realized there were too many questions. There was too much that he couldn’t even think to ask. He found he wanted to cling to hope. “There could be a mistake. People change. I’m sure there were thousands of foster families at that time in Boston. It could be anyone...”

”The tests we ran when you visited our lab in Whitchoate confirmed it. We... tinkered a bit with your patterns so that it would show up in blood work. It was a concern, I can tell you.”

“Why is he...? How can he be so...?”

Again, Dr. Passer smiled. “He’s lived his whole life in a bubble, Mr. Barnes. You had ‘parents.’ You had relationships. He’s **known** he was special his whole life, that he was different and unique. Imagine, finding out when you’re of a certain age that you are single-handedly responsible for the single most important discovery in the world of science.”

“But...”

“We... well, we realized from the **beginning** that an education would raise certain questions in **our** young friend that we... Well, that frankly we preferred not to answer. The head of the Project —whom apparently you’ve now read about, Dr. **Kess** was his name —was quite strict about it. I was in no position to change the status quo when I took over.”

Cannister lit a cigarette. It took a few moments. **His** hands were shaking. “You mean, questions about free will? Independence? Human rights? That **sort** of thing?”

Dr. Passer looked embarrassed. He left the stoop to stand on the street, taking the small steps slowly down, taking **his** time. “**Yes**, frankly. We felt it was best to **try** and control that. For obvious reasons.”

They stood for a while that way. Cannister wondered what Gerard was doing inside. He wondered about the look in **his** eyes at the sound of the door. “Why is he so scared of you?”

“Oh, not me, Mr. Barnes. He’s scared of anyone, really, that comes to the house. It’s necessary he remain in perfect health, Mr. Barnes. Surely you understand that. The Host has to be pure so that we can judge any... **ah...**” Dr. Passer looked around, **as** if the word he was looking for might be located in any of the townhouses that grew deep in the growing shadows around them. “Any **imperfections** in the copy. We noticed, though, that he didn’t seem scared of you at all. He must recognize your relation, surely.”

“Imperfections in the copy.”

“Quite. You. **Yes.**” Dr. Passer took **off his** glasses and rubbed his eyes. Was he crying? ”I must admit, I was a little overcome at our first meeting. I expected you were bright, but I had no idea that your parents had done so well..”

”Who are my real parents?”

“What?”

”Where did Gerard come **from?** Surely you know?”

Dr. Passer looked up at him. The expression on **his** face was strange, odd. “Well, not really, no. Poor Gerard was an orphan in Bloomfield House—that’s a small Foster Home in Bath —when we found him. He was left there anonymously. We’ve tried to pinpoint his birth by genetic sampling, but I’m afraid it’s hopeless. We can’t isolate things like that.”

”He’s an orphan. Like me.”

Dr. Passer shuffled **his** feet over the brick. When he looked **up** at Cannister again, he saw for the first time that here was a man who didn’t know quite what to do with what he’d made. He looked almost embarrassed, **like** a young man on his way to the prom.

”Like you. Yes.”

The evening was fogging over, and there was a chill growing. The lampposts were surrounded **by misty** halos, each one warmly creating its light. A man in an overcoat and wide-brimmed hat walked by, looking curiously at the **two** men, one **young**, one old, standing in their strange tableau on the steps of **22D**. Cannister finished his cigarette, lit another one, the flame of his lighter wavering in his hands.

”What happens now?” He wanted to cry. To weep. To make sense of his lot, of his seeming inhuman life, but the smoke helped to quell that. Cannister saw the coming darkness **as** the only saving grace to **his** humiliation. “Do you take me away? Do I spend the rest of my life—God, is it a life?—like him?”

“Don’t cry, Cannister...”

“Don’t tell me what to do!” Cannister shouted at him. “Just tell me what you’re going to do to me. I want to know what you’re going to do to me.”

“I don’t really know, Mr. Barnes. I suppose ~~that’s~~ up to you.”

“What do you mean?”

Dr. Passer reached up, took the railing in one small hand. He placed a neatly shod foot on the first step. It looked like he might be propositioning the young man before him. Cannister remembered well the intensity of **his** gaze when they’d met in Bath. “We don’t want you to be unhappy, Cannister. Nobody wants that. My friend certainly didn’t, and he was involved with your case from the beginning.” Dr. Passer took another step upwards. Now both of **his** feet were on the first riser. “At first, we thought about forcibly removing you from society, once **your** foster parents died, but even that seemed unfeasible. You were already close to people at college then. Making you miserable doesn’t seem like much of a success. We needed to track your well-being, not your despondence. Keeping you isolated wouldn’t do much good because we need to gauge your body’s reactions to regular stimuli. I’ll tell you, the tests we did at the lab last summer alone gave us years of data. We’ve marked all **sorts** of progress, but we wanted to let you... well, we wanted to *see*...”

“You wanted to see what I’d do.”

“Yes.”

“If I found out I wasn’t... that I wasn’t human.”

“Yes. No! You *are* human, Cannister. There’s no doubt about that. You’re just... you’re just a copy. But no less a man because of that. Certainly no less a man at all.”

“I don’t...” Cannister had forgotten **his** cigarette. A long tube of ash hung **off** the end, limp and dead. “I don’t know what to **do**.”

”Well, of course you don’t. You wouldn’t, would you? But we can help you along that path. You can work with us to solve what we need to learn, and we’ll get counselors to guide you, to help you through **this**. We can’t gauge the psychological reactions to the subject...”

“To me.”

“Yes of course, how silly, excuse me. We can’t truly measure the psychological reactions to your self-knowledge. We need to mark that, to take notes, to **run** studies and tests. But in return, you will live with the knowledge that you’ve changed medical history forever. You! Cannister Barnes. You’re the first of your kind! You’ll lead the way in countless renovations and innovations. Between the combined study of you and young Gerard in there, we can learn *so* much. But, well, we can’t force you, can we? We can’t hold a gun to your head, now can we?” As an afterthought, the doctor added, “We’re not monsters.”

Cannister threw his cigarette to the ground. ”Can’t you? You’ve controlled my whole life up to now, one way or the other. I suppose Rafe isn’t really from Egypt, or Assyria, or wherever...”

“No, he is the Amir, actually. That much is true.”

“I don’t understand why.”

“Why what?”

“Why now? Why would you tell me now? What’s so different that you had to reveal the man behind the curtain? The Wizard? What changed?”

“Well, you read the book, didn’t you? You can imagine how upset I was when I read the newspaper report. I recognized my old friend immediately. We went to London, talked to the prefects, and they mentioned that **this** young man had been involved. When we got your description, then... Well, we guessed right away what might have happened. We got to work right away in sending Prince Quarr after you,

but we had the devil of a time. He didn't want to go. He's taken quite a liking to you, really." Dr. Passer looked down at **his** shoes. Cannister saw at once that while the odd little man might be a genius in **his** field, he was **no** good at lying. Something was being hidden from him. Something important. "When he reported to us about the book, we knew things were untidy. We asked him to convince you to come back here, but that didn't quite work out. There were complications. **So** when you came back to England, we knew you were looking for answers. We saw it **as** reasonable to give them to you."

Cannister stood **still** for a moment before asking **his** next question. "What were the complications?"

"Well, it was **your** friend, actually. He insisted that we let you make the choice. Whether or not to come back here."

Cannister felt his legs grow weak. Rafael had meant to take **him** back with him. That was the important matter he was supposed to discuss. He'd meant to talk to **him** about Cannister being a clone of a human being. Cannister thought of Amelia, how she believed **him** to be crazy. The thing was, he felt he was going crazy, just at that moment.

"Mr. **Barnes**? Cannister?"

Cannister took **his** stomach in both hands and held it, feeling how easy it would be to really **lose** one's mind. To just allow oneself to slip **off** into some other reality. He wondered if real humans were so susceptible to madness, or if **this** was the result of some faulty wiring. He brought his hands up and held onto his head, squeezing the palms to **his** ears, seeing that every thought, every emotion he'd ever had was tainted forever by the knowledge that he wasn't natural, that he was an aberration. Somehow, he found **this** to be a focus point, and he drew **himself back** to normalcy, concentrating on remembering **all** the things he'd ever experienced; all of it seen through **this** strange new filter —**his** new realization of self.

He began to gain control of himself.

“Mr. Barnes?”

“I’m all right,” he said. He sat on the stoop, his stomach sore and tight, and caught his breath. He thought about lighting another cigarette but he worried he might pass out. God knows what they’d do to him if he was unconscious. “I’m OK,” he said.

Dr. Passer stood close by, wringing **his** hands. “I thought...”

“Yeah, me too. I thought so, too.”

It was full dark around them. The evening brought its chill along with it, and both men clutched their arms around themselves. Cannister wouldn’t look at the doctor, but instead kept **his** hands on his head, his legs drawn up and feet resting on the closest riser to the stoop. He sat that way, thinking of possibilities. Of all the possibilities.

“What do you want to do?” Dr. Passer asked. He seemed nervous, **as** if asking Cannister out on a date. “What do you want to do now?”

Cannister shook his head. “If I leave, if I want nothing to do with you, will you kill me? Will you send someone else after me?”

Dr. Passer seemed to ~~think~~ think about, to really consider it. If there were any vestiges ~~insanity~~ insanity in Cannister, they fled with the honest consideration of his question. The idea that even ~~this~~ this man wasn’t sure about his **safety** was sobering.

“I don’t ~~think~~ think so. Whitchoate has gone through a number of changes recently. We’ve got money tied up in many different programs. We’d certainly like to reopen the Project, but if you decided not to...” Dr. Passer ~~let~~ let the thought drift **off**.

“But you understand I’m not inclined to believe you. After what that man wrote about you in that book. I must represent something... some effort to you. You wouldn’t ~~let~~ let me just **walk** away from it all.”

Instead of answering, Passer watched his shoes.

The **two** men were quiet. Finally Cannister Barnes raised his head and looked at the doctor. “Can I have some time? Some time to myself?”

Doctor Passer smiled.

6

When the train dropped him **off** at Windsor station the next morning, there was no one waiting for him. There was no Rafael (he still missed his spice-scented friend, duplicitous or no) just beyond the platform, waiting like a deus ex machina to take him into his arms, to provide for him again. Rafe's last letter finally made sense. He supposed there was that, at least. He stood for a minute, staring into a shop window. The rising sun was only painting the very top parapets of the giant castle a brilliant orange, and had not yet reached the narrow alley of shops by the station. **His** reflection stared back at him. He'd not **gotten** sleep the night before. **His** dirty blonde hair, his blue eyes. They looked humanoid, at least. But they were not the same eyes that looked back at him a day and a half before.

It was fifteen minutes' walk back to his flat, and he moved slowly, smelling the warm rising day with deep, slow breaths. Very early summer mornings had always been precious times for him. He wondered now why that was. There was something about the **freshness** of the air then that appealed to him. The light blue shadows that stood, waiting for that angling line to be brought down to illuminate the world. Even the castle, which stood **as** it always did looming over the town, was becoming brighter **as** the new day's light rose in the east. He moved slowly along the roads, watching **as** townspeople began to awake, to walk with him. Joggers ran by, talking of banks and interests and how little **Mary** said her first word but they weren't there. Step by step, he took his time. **By** the time he reached the old chapel, standing with austerity between the modern trappings of **this** town that had so easily lasted through time, dawn was well at work,

and he began to move his way past the familiar landmarks, all of which were different. He passed human beings, male and female, each time wondering at how different he was from **all** of them. Each time, marveling at his uniqueness among the populace. He passed the American Restaurant, and smiled for the first time since the previous night. He passed the army barracks, the camouflaged soldier ignoring his brief nod hello.

Cannister walked on until he reached the pleasing pastel yellow front of his flat. He stood on the steps for a long while. Day had finally arrived –it was close to ~~six-~~ ~~thirty~~ –and the world was moving onward, unaware that someone New walked among them. He took a breath with his eyes closed, held it, let it out again. He repeated the process, thinking about his copied lungs working to draw in and expel air. Thinking about his copied follicles, filtering out impurities through his nostrils and trachea. He took three, long, slow breaths, and when he was done he opened his eyes.

The world continued to move around him. A small economy car went by, its driver hunched over the wheel and staring out miserably at the un-coffee morning. Nodding, thinking seriously about his situation for the first time, Cannister Barnes spoke aloud.

“My name is Cannister Barnes.”

Nodding again, Cannister took out his key and let himself into his empty apartment. He took the entry **stairs two** at a time, thinking about hot showers and coffee and eggs. He thought about fresh, clean clothes and good music to **start** the day with. There was more on his mind, certainly, but he kept it hidden behind the immediate. **Indian Running**, that’s what Amelia had always called it. He could feel tears threatening, **as** they had been since the night before, but he swallowed around them, preferring the steam of the shower. He disrobed and grabbed his cigarettes from his jacket, opening the French doors to his balcony wide and smoking his first cigarette of the morning, the

fresh, new-day *air* of the Great Park mixing with his smoke and carrying it out into the
clean, clear *air*.

Chapter 19

Cannister Barnes

1

The Great Park, with its wide, road-like path that stretches from Windsor Castle like a river, **has** trails that run all the way to Windsor. One could start at the beginning of the park, which properly **starts** at the Castle itself, and walk **all** the way to the sea, if one were inclined to do so. Cannister is not, but on this morning – August 15, 2000 – with his entire half-life before him, he stands before dawn at the forbidding iron gates that separate the well-kempt lawns of the castle and the now public grounds of the park. Cannister's life has seemingly led up to this moment, nearly a year from the last time he left Windsor, and it is fitting that the morning is warm and clear. The wide expanse of sky overhead is the deep blue of an expensive jewel, its morning stars imperfections in the clarity. Taking a deep breath, he hops up on one leg and when he descends again, he is jogging, moving easily in **his** light gray shorts, his tee shirt wide enough to allow his arms and pecs room to breathe. He runs easily, the result of a summer spent walking every day of the week for **two** hours or more. His new running shoes, compliments of Rafael's "book-keeping" job, absorb the shock of striking the ground. It is only just light, and the Great Park is empty. Cannister, **running** done in the middle of the wide, paved path, races the sunlight. **His** thoughts quite naturally turn back to the year before, when he found himself running through the park at night, fires burning in secret coves of light, gypsies grinding their dark, smooth **hips** to the music. The day before he'd spent indoors, clean but restless, pacing this way and that. Sometimes he'd wept. At other times he stood out on **his** balcony, watching the football players kick their ball this way

and that, shouting and laughing at each other. Perhaps he had decided what to do the day before, or possibly **his** subconscious had told him in the precious hours of the night, but he'd woken up finally remembering what that lovely woman had said to him in the **soft**, burning glow of the bonfire beside them.

“Lines and circles, those are your signs.”

Circles and Lines. **Of** course. Lines and Circles. Cannister had woken up refreshed, knowing the course of action he would take with certainty. It had prompted him, without thinking, to dress and **go off** into the crisp morning, to take one **final** run through the park. He was glad, running now, that he'd unconsciously come here, where the gypsy had actually predicted his fate. It was too late to believe in new things. It was too late in the day to start wondering about the **truths** or fictions of precognition. But Cannister saw she'd been right. About any number of things.

He moved **through** the park, a solitary Adam in that Eden, scattering only the deer. They bounded from beside the path **as** he ran by, **his** shoes clapping gently on the pavement. He smiled at the wonders of the morning: the rising sun, the dark, mysterious trees twisting their gnarls, the deer and rabbits, jumping **this** way and that at **his** coming. It was peace—that was the only thing with him.

It was surely sweat, that saltwater that clung to Cannister's face, high **on his** cheekbones, in the rising light of day. Surely there were no more tears left to weep.

2

Cannister came home, ate a large breakfast of eggs, ham and toast, and washed it down with a few cups of strong coffee. The kitchen of their flat **also** faced the park, and he faced the windows, **smiling** at the blue sky that day. He was glad it was blue.

After breakfast, he moved back upstairs, avoiding the hanging rope in the stairway by ducking around it, and showered in a rush of steaming hot water. He stayed in the shower until he could feel **his** skin beginning to wrinkle, and then came in and toweled **off**. He spent a fair amount of time in the bathroom that morning shaving. Rafael had introduced him to a shaving cream that had the most lustrous aroma he'd ever known. He'd put in the George Michael album that was playing in the car that day he'd gone down to Whitchoate, and he sang lustily along with the familiar lyrics, pausing only once, **his** hand frozen halfway to the sink, the hot water running mightily over the razors there. The words to the first track "Praying for Time," were different now, and he stared into **his** newly strange eyes in the foggy mirror, the steam from the **sink** rising around him.

He shook it **off**, though, and finished up in the bathroom. He put on deodorant, but wasn't choosy about **his** dress. A pair of beige draw-string pants and a loose fitting long-sleeved shirt, gray. He looked in the mirror, nodded, and moved **off** down the hall again to the stairs. They were a steep flight, and it had taken him more than a little time that morning before breakfast to work out the mechanics of it. But he was a decent thinker, the result of being born in a laboratory, ha ha. The rope was attached to the ceiling-lamp that was centered over the stairwell and then was tied just at the head of the flight. Once fitted properly, he would simply have to step out, and the momentum would take him forward, swinging out into the **air**.

He regarded the rope for a moment, thought about how the noose would look hanging in the middle of nothing. Lines and Circles. Of course. There are far greater things than contained in your universe, blah blah blah. Cannister paused, the **rope** taut in **his** hands.

"I suppose quoting Shakespeare isn't bad for your last line, is it?" He said it to no one in particular, but the way the words rang out against the vaulted-ceiling gave it

import, **as** though he were communicating with someone at last. “Not a bad exit scene, eh?”

Nobody answered back. Cannister, with a satisfied grin, placed the noose around **his** neck and pulled it tight.

3

Somewhere close by, an ambulance blared through the **streets** of Windsor. Because there were so many tourists, even at that late date in the summer, it had to move slowly, and the **tall** man with the bald head and piercing dark eyes cursed the drivers, urging them faster. The man watching the **Barnes** place only just reported seeing the rope. Who knew how long the subject had prepared? He might be dead already. Doctor Passer perspired heavily so that drops of sweat beaded quite distinctly on his forehead. He could not believe how much time it was taking to get there, to arrive there. The man outside the flat kept in radio contact, but apparently had yet to find a way into Cannister’s place. There was a gang of schoolchildren playing hopscotch outside **his** place, and people all over the park. He’d be seen breaking in. Doctor Passer cursed under **his** breath, again. These were not secret agents. They were scientists. They didn’t know how to scale walls or break into buildings.

“God, **go** faster! Go faster, damn it!” he shouted, but the other doctors ignored him. They were going **as** fast **as** possible. They were just turning down Cannister’s road when a large cluster of Japanese tourists surged forward into the street, either the lot of them being deaf, or completely unacquainted with loud sirens and flashing lights and their common significance. Doctor Passer screamed aloud **as** they swarmed about the ambulance, some of them actually taking pictures. Gasping, he leapt out of the back and

bodily shoved **his** way through the crowd. Discretion be damned. He emerged from the Japanese contingent and sprinted **off** down the lane, listening to the scared scientist's voice in his earpiece.

"Shit, these kids. They're everywhere! I can't... I'm going to **try** and go around to the other side. No, that'll take too long. Where are you chaps? Where is everybody? Subject is still not visible. Repeat, subject is still not visible. Oh sod it!"

Still listening, unable to respond, Doctor Passer continued to **run**. **His** heart hammered in **his** chest, his lungs drew in sharp, chill **blasts** of air, there was nothing but pain along **his** right ribs. Still he ran. He ran to rescue **his** experiment.

4

Cannister Barnes stood awkwardly at the top of the **stairs**, bending forward and over at the insistence of the noose. He felt that he should **try** and take note of **his** last thoughts. He stood there, his feet just barely on the step, thinking that **as** a unique **species**, he ought to take notes. But it was too much trouble. He was already there, and there was simply not that much time. From the open windows somewhere behind him, letting in the perfect, late summer air, he heard birds from the park blend with the familiar sound of a siren, somewhere far away.

"My name was Cannister **Barnes**," he said, and prepared to step forward. He thought of **his** friends, of **his** loves, of the gypsy and her strange predictions. Surely it **was** adequate punishment for Rafe's betrayal that he die, a wound to Rafe's enduring love. Surely that would hurt **him**. He felt himself leaning forward, heard the straining creak of the rope **as** he began to weigh on it, and he thought of the girl with the summerstorm eyes. If it hadn't been for her, perhaps he wouldn't have cared to examine

his life with Amelia. If not for her, perhaps he wouldn't have gone looking for her that morning when he'd been supposed to leave. And then he wouldn't have run into Rafael, and would not have gone to the Rave that evening, and would not have run into the beggar in the Underground the following morning. How strange was **time!** If not for that one chance glimpse of a beautiful woman.. .

If not for her.

Cannister paused, his fingers slowly losing their grip on the railing.

5

"Oh God," said the tinny voice. Dr. Passer lay, being attended to, on the sidewalk. He was overcome only a few blocks from the flat, and has ordered the man outside to break in. He knew he was taking a chance, breaking into a public building like **this**, but he doesn't care. The possibility of Cannister's suicide had struck him only much later the previous night. Too little, too late perhaps. The small radio by his side twittered as the men worked on him. He felt pain, shooting in small, insignificant-feeling bursts, up and down **his** left side. He wondered at experiencing a heart-attack, at **this** particular juncture in time. He'd taken such good care of himself, **as** well. Even **as** the pain worked inside him, he spoke into the microphone. Hashes **of** light were bursting in small, concentrated flowers just on the corners of **his** eyes.

"What? What is it?" The ambulance was nearby, and they were opening its doors. He opened **his** mouth, tried to shout to them to ignore him, to get to his boy, but he couldn't seem to speak. There was **an** eternity of silence. Oh God, what? **Was** he dead? Had their precious experiment expired?

"He's gone," said the radio. There was a little static.

Doctor Passer felt grief press down on **his** chest like a weight. He couldn't breathe. His voice croaked out something that the doctor inside Cannister's apartment interpreted **as** a question.

"There's a rope. He used a rope."

Flashing **lights**. Darkness **bursting** in great, moving violets of dull, throbbing energy. He tried to speak, **his** young doctor put an oxygen mask over **his** face. He batted him away, straining to hear the radio. They were loading him into the ambulance and **still** he strained to hear the radio.

"... must have known we were coming. He's got it tied to **his** balcony. There's no sign of him, Doctor. I'm sorry. Shite. I don't know what to do. Tell us what to do."

Through the rising darkness, Passer smiled. Even as he lost **his** sight, as the ambulance **started** to rumble and move and scream its way to the hospital, he thought how proud he was, how proud he was of that little creature, who had ~~run~~ away from home. He **was** strong. He was fit. He would survive, somehow, in the world.

The ambulance spun its **sirens off** into the night, passing through the heavily congested roads that gradually grew wider, picking up speed **as** it passed traffic coming to Windsor, and finally rocketing through the English countryside, even **as** the scientist inside moved elsewhere, looking for finer gardens than those.

Epilogue

Post-Evolution

We won't mention the date, limiting ourselves to a particular timeline, but sometime after the great millennium clock's big hand passes the twelve, we part the clouds one final time and arrive in London. London remains, even at **this** vague date in the future, the biggest city in the world. Over **14** million people live within its marked boundaries. It does commerce with every other country in the world, and **boasts** more than seven-eighths of the world's racial ethnicities within its walls. There are more than eight thousand architectural types rising up willy-nilly towards the smog-covered sky, and all of these are divided by floors, by rooms, by walls upon walls upon walls. Even London cabbies lose their way in **its** streets, taking one wrong **turn** can land them in an area they've never been, even if their jobs have led them through the **twists** and turns of this empire for over **thirty** or forty years. London is capitalized and proper like the bankers who live their lives on its mercantile time. London is a mystery, like the thieves who jolt and scurry among its darker lanes, hustling tourists when they can, **running** off forcibly with purses when they cannot make their living in more subtle way. London is, in short, a world unto itself, and if one... oh, let's not be coy... if Cannister **Barnes** were to hide himself, he couldn't pick a better spot. Especially if one were aided by a young man who loved him and had all the wealth and advantages of royalty to help atone for previous **sins**.

It is **this** strange world that we arrive in **as** the fog parts for us, and we see the young man with dark hair who leans over London Bridge, the *real* London Bridge, and smokes **his** cigarette. He doesn't look much older. He works in a pub that's often frequented by Middle-Eastern gentlemen that also serves **as** the "entryway" to a modest

brothel. The young man with dark hair doesn't mind. He writes, privately, here and there, and lives in an unregistered flat under **an** assumed name, all courtesy of Lander Gall, a dark-skinned Arab with an assumed name who owns what is a very nice building of flats in a congested area of the city. It would not be modest of us to mention where. Leave it at that.

The young man with dark hair doesn't **think** of these things. He's had time to adjust. He only smokes his cigarette, looking down the Thames at a much fancier bridge that **looks as** though it should be London Bridge, but isn't. That bridge, half-obscured by the smog and fog of the hot summer day, is Tower Bridge, and perhaps that dreamy look in the man's eyes is because he is thinking of another time, a journey, perhaps, that started on just such a bridge.

Tired of nostalgia, the young man turns and walks off, **his** comfortable shoes moving easily along the sidewalk, unbothered by the steadily flowing thick traffic at his side. He **twists** and turns **his** shoulders among the throng, keeping his eyes on characters he **thinks** might be watching him. He is sure they aren't, but it is **fun** to imagine that he's being followed. Even **this** old game makes him smile, and think about things that are maybe not **as** far past as we'd like to imagine. But the young man with the (dyed... can we not be honest?) dark hair doesn't wallow in memory. He turns **his** mind to other things. He is working in under an hour at the Jackyl Cafe, and he wants to nip a cup of espresso before he goes in. He dodges tourists and Londoners alike, crossing the street when he likes, unafraid (anymore) of jaywalking. Not so long ago, the young man decided that if he was going to live, he would do it without worrying about who might be coming after him.

Down past the Globe theater, through the brick-alleyed lanes of the market and past the winos under the Twelfth ~~Street~~ overpass (and he always **thinks** of it **as** the Twelfth Night overpass, the Shakespeare and the city merging associations in **his** head **as**

always), he moves steadily, **his** hands in **his** pockets, looking around him with satisfaction. He has less money in the bank than he might like, but he **also** enjoys living like most people do. . . day to day. **His** dark-skinned friend has more than once offered to really set him up, but he constantly declines. He **likes** anonymity.

He finally reaches Dill Road, a small, treacherously **thin** alleyway that is sandwiched somewhere between the **tall** iron works and a row of crumbling apartments from another time. The sky is nearly blocked out here, and he wonders sometime if the place doesn't exist in a pocket of magic. The Timekeeper's Inn, the café where he gets **his** coffee, is small, only two tables on the sidewalk and three inside, and often the same three old men are frequenting its business. These tweed-coated geezers have always regarded **our** young man with suspicious eyes, recognizing him immediately **as** an American, not wanting to know who he is and not caring. They have never spoken to him, not even after seeing him every day, **still** smoking their pipes. In their own stagnant way, they are just **as** constant **as** the young man himself. He is always in a hurry when he goes there, and they are always not. Their red-rimmed whiskey eyes watch him **as** slow **as** their **limbs** now move. He passes them **as** swiftly **as** his life passes by.

But the young man stops that afternoon in the dimming blue light of the late cloudy day. He stops because when he comes to Dill Lane, he looks across the street at the Timekeeper's Inn and sees a young woman sitting at the cafe, smoking a cigarette and crossing her long legs, reading a magazine and sipping tea. She sits under the great clock with its Roman numerals that is the Inn's icon. Instantly, **his** entire being grows **still** and

he

simply

knows

that it's her, even before she glances up at him—maybe she does for no other reason than she's tired of reading her magazine—and he sees the delicious, amazing and complex storms of her eyes.

Is it fair to leave him now? Standing there, dumbly smiling across the street at a woman he has never properly met? Perhaps not. But there are mysteries we like to keep to ourselves, secrets we like to look at in the dark of our own minds, and this is, I think, one of them. We will not know what happens to **these two**... it is enough, certainly, to know that for now at least, our young friend is safe from harm. The questions about **his** own being, about how he has gotten to where he is... Well, of course they bother him, but we cannot fathom the belief that has kept him sane, that one day, now in the complete absence of questions about **his** past, he would find this young woman who keeps **his** future. That he would see her there, and she would smile at him and remember him even then, because of something so true and fine it glimmers beyond our sense of life.

If we cannot understand such strange devotion, such faith, then maybe that's why we cannot peer into the next few minutes of this New **Man's** life. Maybe that's why we put our arms protectively, if not somewhat selfishly, across our chests, and turn away **from the** scene. We are always left with questions, with secrets unanswered. It is unfair, but **as** many people are fond of saying to their children, life is unfair.

Turn with us now—let the boy have **his** privacy. If we don't know what will become of him, if we never find him again in the teeming towers and cement canyons of this—the leviathan pride of the Queen's trembling empire—we can be content. We have seen him **this** far, and surely **his** discovery, the zenith of **his** quest, is a private moment we are not allowed to share. Turn with us now, and leave them be. If you must know something of our young hero, this young man, if you must have knowledge to make you content, then at least warm yourself by knowing this:

Cannister **Barnes**, the first and only of **his** kind, both ablaze and **frozen** in the **gaze** of those summerstorm eyes, looks both ways before crossing the street.

But he does cross it, and with each step, moves on through the thick, odd passage of time. And that passage continues to flow and ebb and cross boundaries that we can see and cannot, and **as** always, we find ourselves caught in that passage. It flows over **this** city, **this** London, obscuring these events in its wake, and takes us back to the clouds and back to whatever dream we were dreaming before. It swallows us whole, and we are lost in the blend of its all-encompassing arms. Lost in the passage of thousands of years, **our** own miniscule lives **grown** leviathan in the reverberating echoes of these people and their **lives**, which we see in their magnification are not unlike, but rather so similar to **our** very own.

R.D.

October 2000 -

April 2001

Biography of the Author

Brian Rande Daykin was born in the small town of Kent, Ohio, on the fifteenth of February, nineteen hundred and seventy-two. He spent a few years there playing among star-lit lawns on summer nights before graduating from Theodore Roosevelt High School with no particular honors. He attended the University of Michigan for two years in the Musical Theater program there, where he learned how much he didn't want to do that for a living. After taking a semester **off**, he re-enrolled in the School of Liberal Arts and finished with a B.A. from Michigan in nineteen hundred and ninety-five, confident that a degree in English would serve him far better than a useless degree in the Performing Arts.

Four years later he arrived in Maine, where he studied literature and people before he became lost within the hazel eyes of Kirsten Moffler, to whom he proposed on November tenth of the year **two** thousand. Happily, she said yes. They will be married on July sixth of **two** thousand and two. She is, without a doubt, the only element he's met that can **turn** the past into the future, **and** back again with the **wink** of one stunning eye and a smile.

Something else is bound to happen to him, during some **time** in the future. He awaits that thing with baited breath. Rande is a candidate for the Master of Arts degree in English from The University of Maine in May, 2001.