
Senior Projects Spring 2021

Bard Undergraduate Senior Projects

Spring 2021

Excerpts from Witness's Testimony

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Recommended Citation

Haike, Menahem, "Excerpts from Witness's Testimony" (2021). *Senior Projects Spring 2021*. 120.

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Excerpts from Witness's Testimony
(*New York v Taylor*)

including "Eyes Like the Eyes of a Man, and a Mouth Speaking Pompous Words"
by Dr. Daniel Yochai

Introduction by Dr. Yehuda Mendelsohn

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Languages and Literature
of Bard College

by
Menahem Haike

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
May 2021

For Savta Ruthi,

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Luc Sante for his continuous support and resilient trust in me throughout this process, and his bladder for tolerating the countless pots of tea I offered to keep him conversing. Thank you, Max Janairo, for forming an indispensable writer's community this year, without which I suspect this work would have been doomed. Mariel, for your insightful comments, radiant friendship, and inspiring humanity; thank you for making gratitude an understatement. To my mother, who reminds me each time she goes over my writing how lucky I am to have such an intelligent, caring, and unconditionally loving being in my life. Thank you to my third brother, Itamar Nadel, for suffering my legal ignorance.

I thank my professors at Bard College – it has been an honor, and a privilege, but above all a pleasure.

Thank you, Dr. Ria Banerjee, forever the culprit of this writing adventure.

Thank you, omri, Bar, Sarah, Jacky, Talya, Adi and Eden – for making it impossible to think art impossible.

I am grateful for my father, who with his unparalleled capacity to love and accept all, teaches forgiveness.

Hagit, my belle-mère, who only the French title justly, your friendship is an inexhaustible wonder.

My little sisters, Tamar and Stav, thank you for becoming such role-models, I am lucky to have you.

תומי ואיילם, החשובים לי מכל.

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Foreword

I. Dead Letter

I remember that June 2nd was a Wednesday because a cloudburst had prevented Cassandra and I from taking our Wednesday morning walk to Sakura Park. That same cloudburst had led me, with Cassandra's leash still wrapped around my knuckles, to sit in front of my computer again. Having opened and taken care of nearly every other errand the night before, I delved into my Spam email box. Sitting uncomfortably at the top of this list of commercials—as if the software was doubting its decision to put it there in the first place—was an email pronouncing the death of an old friend. Dr. Daniel Yochai¹.

I let the leash go and heard it skip across the hardwood floor into my bedroom after a disappointed Cassandra.

The email was clearly a poor attempt made by Google Translate to convey the Hebrew of a slightly religious, mentally deficient Jewish boy named Eliphaz:

BSD

Dear Mr. Dr. Mendelssohn²,

I am writing to announce to you with great sorrow and gloomy grief that Daniel Yochai passed away last night, 21st of Sivan, probably from Epidemic - [may] its name be wiped [out of history].

Lived we were in a cave on the side of the mountain [for] two moons [months].

¹ A chilling piece of gossip: while compiling this commemorative pamphlet I heard that, when he learned about the existence of the Spam-inbox a few years back, Dr. Yochai had compared it jokingly to “Bartleby’s Dead Letter Office”!

² The letter is corrected only in cases otherwise impossible to understand.

A great sage was Mr. Yochai and you were wise to be a dear friend to him when you were.

Mr. Yochai greatly appreciated you and appreciated you enough to request in his last will his last breath that [you] will help publish his latest article which was written after the trial in which you two were present. An article that resonated in the mountains of Jerusalem without being printed on printers. In whispers [it] resounded and [printed] in double pens on paper.

The name [God] wanted and the sage wanted you to publish his words in public, in English.

Attached the article.

Forgive me, I will not know if you fulfilled the request, I have nothing left but to believe.

Eliphaz Shimon.

The tech-savvy reader would understand the software's inclination to call this Spam. Nevertheless, daringly opening the attached file, and in spite of a missing first page or paragraph, I knew immediately that such an *essay*—for, as you shall see promptly, this is no article—couldn't have been written by anyone other than Dr. Daniel Yochai.

It is out of respect for a dying man's last wish that this special edition in print was made³, and out of respect for *some* of the opinions Dr. Yochai's essay articulates⁴.

II. Whips and Scorpions

Daniel Yochai and I first met in September 1980 in Boston under the thatched roof of a Sukka. Two seniors at MIT's underserved Political Science program, who spent the remainder of

³ No small thanks is due to my daring publisher and stubborn editor, Ari Dagan, for allowing this unorthodox pamphlet to leave his printing press.

⁴ Especially in regards to Yochai's critique of the cowardly (his word) Ripeness Doctrine.

our last semester deliberating which law school would best fit each of us. For it was certain that our paths have only crossed for a short time; that though we might in some way be related⁵, each was about to embark on his own path, “yours paved with yellow bricks and mine with whips and scorpions” he would say. And he was correct.

During the past few months of compiling the present pamphlet, I was able to recall of Daniel’s face only the throbbing forehead vein and his foaming mouth while he was vehemently contradicting whatever some poor, bespectacled, untenured professor was trying to say. Freedom of Speech, Daniel felt free enough to say, was *the most* potent mechanism of oppression. He’d point to Iran, South Korea, or whatever place revolutions visited (and how brief those visits were, we’ve learned) as unequivocal evidence of his ludicrous statements. Technology? This particular 80’s MIT dorm resident deemed it was sure to fail. “Men love to sleep, too much light polluting their night will surely disturb them enough to ban anything of this sort.” (He went as far as vowing once that electricity will be criminalized by the end of that decade).

In his own words, Daniel, straight out of his army service in Israel, was attracted to law because there he could continue playing war games.

I was more traditional. I went to law school because it was lucrative. This applied especially to people like Daniel and myself; people who could read fast, memorize much, and speak perspicuously. I would argue with him in class, always finding the flaws in his fallacious arguments, most of the time simply by asking “So what do you propose?” and thus quieting him down, calming the volcano on his forehead until all that was left of his visage was the disarmed and disarming smile that kept him alive for so long.

We lost touch after graduation.

⁵ His mother, like mine, escaped Saxony During WWII. Though each escaped a different village.

Next time I heard about him was six years later, when reading about the storm he caused in the Jewish community's teacup with his dissertation: *Imperative Security: the linguistic merging of the future and imperative tenses in spoken Hebrew since the 1960's as a means for further blurring the lines surrounding "manifestly unlawful orders"*⁶. The 150-page scorching critique of Israel "...talking itself into brutality"⁷, translated promptly to French and English by well-connected but anonymous friends of his abroad, was compared to Arendt's *Banality of Evil* for the "chasms the two texts were able to place not only between the Jewish people at home [Israel] and away [Diaspora], but in as narrow spaces between them as dinner tables and grocery counters too⁸." I remember making a small public protest against the language he used (perhaps even in a letter to *The New Yorker*), but I cannot seem to find it anywhere. Privately, I can admit today, I agreed with his analysis.

When the *Pulsa diNuras* and public excommunications died out, Yochai disappeared into obscurity. I never wrote to him and our mutual silence was maintained until the court proceedings last spring.

III. State of New York v Taylor - Reunion

The admittance, even digitally, of Dr. Daniel Yochai, the infamous pariah of Jewry's legal elite, into this sterile, international courtroom, was a complete surprise. Of course, as almost always is the case, it was pure nepotism: apparently, Yochai's niece, Liat Yochai-Keller,

⁶ Daniel Yochai, "BeMotam Tzivui: Shchikat HaGvul Bein Zman Atid le Zman Tzivui Ba'Ivrit HaMeduberet Belsrael MeAz Shnot Ha 60 KeTishtush Gvulot Hapkuda Habilti Hukit Ba'alil" PhD diss., (Hebrew University Press, 1988).

⁷ Ibid. 12.

⁸ Nadel, Itamar. "The Fragility of Peoples: How Hannah Arendt and Daniel Yochai Almost Broke the Jewish Community," December 8, 1992. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1992/08/12/the-fragility-of-peoples-nadel1281992>.

was a legal assistant to the prosecutor and used what sway she had with her unwitting boss to invite her uncle under the pretense that he was “a famous jurist.”

His “entrance” into the virtual courtroom is unforgettable. It remains the most recounted story in New York law offices to this day. The reader may have already guessed that video-conferencing was no natural environment for the eccentric ex-jurist who “lived...in a cave on the side of the mountain [for] two [months].” Imagine now, if you will, the muted screen, the expectant atmosphere preceding such a first-of-its kind event like *N.Y. v Taylor*. One hundred and nineteen of the exclusive one hundred and twenty guest-jurists that were invited present, most of them sharing the familiar name tags on black backgrounds instead of sharing their faces and rooms on screen. Those who did have their video cameras on, mostly the unwitting older folk, were fully robed. Their libraries hung heavy behind them, seemingly pushing their brows down towards their yellow-notepads. Of course, retired jurists that we all were, we arrived early. Two hundred and thirty eight eyes watching the 360-degree camera surveying an empty courtroom filling up by a trickle of technicians carrying metal boxes and wires, a public prosecutor we all despised, the two attorneys defense, West Coast incognitos, one of them pallid and tall, the other short and stoic and wearing a wristwatch that gave many virtual eyebrows a covetous jump when it flashed past the camera.

Now you don’t have to strain your ear in order to hear, along with some of the most respected jurists in the country, the breaking in of a clamorous Hebrew being used to scold an apologetic, mentally deficient youth, echoing in a cave as old as time, with a rare insistence on the differences between the Future and Imperative tenses, disturbing the perfect silence of a premeditatively self-muted audience [translation mine]:

Y: “Eliphaz! You Idiot! I can’t see a thing! Bring the candle! I can’t see her! I can’t see them!”

E: “Forgive me, forgive me, I need to make sure the generato—”

Y: “To hell with the generator! It’s too loud! Can’t you turn the generator off already? It will start soon!”

E: “Forgive me, forgive me sage, I think the machine needs more time, more energy.”

Y: “The computer?! It always needs more time, more energy. And what about our time? Our energies?! [coughing up phlegm] Will you go and get me some water from the well? Oh! I have a message on the screen!”

It was me. I knew my name would ring a bell and I wasn’t a fool enough to ask him to “mute himself” like some did in the public chat.

Beginning with a threatening “Do Not Mention My Name,” I wrote specific instructions: Where to “press” (I was afraid he’d “click” with his tongue) and with what finger. All I wanted was for him to stop being such an embarrassment to himself; and, admittedly, to prevent him from becoming one to me. Luckily, he followed my instructions discreetly (the reason for which I realized only upon reading his fantastic theories which the present pamphlet reveals). Once muted, I patiently typed out for him how to work the software to his advantage, and what behaviour is expected of him. Only when I could tell by his face that he was serene and wouldn’t make any more trouble, in a word, that he no longer needed supervision, I told him how to shut his video camera off. His bovine eyes moved from one corner of the screen to the next, and that’s the last we saw of him.

Dr. Yehuda Mendelsohn, December 2021

A Note on the Order of the Present Text

In the year since the publication of the first edition, a lamentable change has been made to this text. With the recent release of some of the transcripts from *N.Y. v Taylor* to the public domain, and the interest these have generated⁹, my dear publisher and editor decided to make a “small, insignificant change for the sake of remuneration.” He decided we should add, to what started as a twenty-page commemoration project, about one-hundred and fifty pages of court testimony from one of the most discussed court-cases of our time, in effect making Dr. Yochai’s essay a measly footnote to a book now otherwise titled. In addition, the publisher dared ask me to introduce the court case.

My response, in a word, was that to introduce *N.Y. v Taylor* in 2022 would be like introducing *Roe v Wade* in 1973 and that “if anyone wanted to be introduced to the case they just had to open their eyes and an app.” A response my *frustrator* has found amusing enough to insist that it become part of this introduction. This proposal I countered with the demand that my deep disdain to the reordering of the text be included as well.

Dr. Yehuda Mendelsohn, for Cassandra Mendelsohn, December 2022

⁹ Significantly, this is due to the cult-like following Dr. Yochai’s essay developed among academic circles and the general population over the past year.

State of New York v. Taylor
(Excerpts from Witness's Testimony)

4.15.2021|10:02 AM

In spite of a recent diagnosis made by the reputable New York neurologist whose name she couldn't recall and whose opinion she would no longer respect...

[Objection Overruled.]

Anna Olivette remembered her theory about unlocked doors and uninvited guests. As she writes in the preface to the third edition of her book, *Brown Without Generalizations*: "Since 2002, the uninvited guest has become a welcome addition in the household only under the most severe circumstances – of joy or sorrow, most commonly." As she stood at the bottom of the stairway leading to David Taylor's apartment, it was that deep-seated conviction—the third edition came out not long before—that reassured her she could begin her ascent. She could recognize—that doctor must be a nut...

[Objection Sustained.]

She could recognize the aria to Bach's *Goldberg Variations*, and she thought she recognized, too, the sound of cards being shuffled and dealt, chortling at the cello's lament.

But what in Anna Olivette's mind might have been a house party, with frivolous guests trying to succor an inconsolable widower...

[Objection Sustained.]

...was in fact David Taylor immersed in a game of cards against his phone, on break from his Immortality Project. David, who could faintly recognize Bach's arrangement but not the piece's name, certainly not that this was an aria, had only asked his phone for a *concentration playlist*. And the phone, practically an attentive assistant, well aware of her master's grave mood, answered "sure.". She then filled his home with sounds that may have originally been used to sway an insomniac, but which today, half listened to, helped over a million users study for exams or do their assignments.

About an hour before the virtual shuffling commenced, David sat bent over his desk. A late DIY project of his ex, the desk was made up of a six by four plywood placed on top of a musical keyboard's X that she had found neglected under a bridge in Brooklyn. She left it with him when she left the country, and he took it to his new place because it was easy to put back together.

Two weeks prior, his gaze, following a stink bug, found the desk in an angle that made it look like it was a theatre-stage. He thought for a moment about the two plays he missed, ones he had tickets for and that were cancelled due to the pandemic: *Waiting for Godot* was one play, the other was Maria Irene Fornes' *The Danube*. That was when he was still passionate about making theatre. Both plays interested him particularly for their impossibly meticulous stage directions. Stage directions he would often write himself then edit out, deeming them too authoritative. They were the kind of plays he'd imagined BDSM adaptations for, where the dominant body would have been the audience, sitting in the dark, imbued with the spirit of the playwright, and the submissive bodies would be the actors, washed by bright white lights, a moving mask over the director's face.

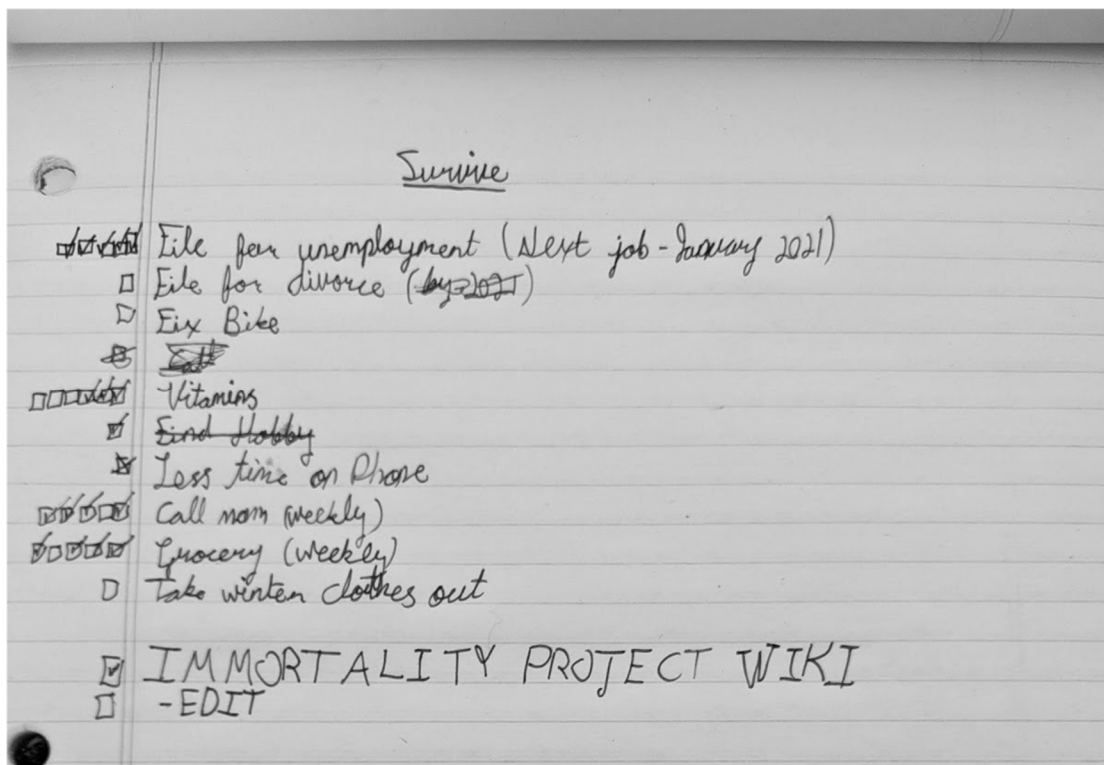
With the stink bug traversing the desk slowly from side to side, David found that the plywood had a seemingly planned set design: upstage left was a luscious red bluetooth speaker, and across from it a plant he got for his wedding. According to his phone, the plant needed more sun, and he placed it closer to the window behind the desk, overlooking the deserted main street of the college-town where he'd settled for a short residency. He had another plant, which he got for his divorce, growing steadily in the shade downstage right. Centerstage, where the ever growing pile of his ex's art books used to be, he'd pasted a sheet of yellow legal paper with a

frame of semi transparent tape, the latter's matte grey made the paper's yellow look like the exaggerated glare coming from treasure chests in commercials.

The legal paper was taped there, bright yellow and with the slightly protruding duct tape frame, so that David would not be able to ignore it. Back in September, David had missed a deadline to file for unemployment. There were the added benefits to mourn. Despoiled, he looked back at his calendar and notes, swiping frantically, and learned that the reminders were there, but that he had slowly grown jaded to the to-do lists he had made on his phone since the beginning of his college days, and was unconsciously swiping them and marking them as done without ever reading them.

David tried to explain this problem to his assistant, ever willing to help, and she listened carefully. At first she thought he meant something was wrong with her, and told him *How to Troubleshoot Ring Notification Issues for Your Device*. Then he explained again, rephrasing in a way she might better understand. But she couldn't. She kept thinking it was something about her and her settings, without ever saying "me" or "my settings", always blaming the helpless device that harbored her, like someone unwilling to host and blaming it on too small of an apartment, or the lack of a dinner table. In any case, David's assistant couldn't reconcile the fact that her superior does actually see the reminders, and that he wipes them off the screen without actually being reminded of anything.

David had gotten out of bed, irritated with his self-centered assistant (which he left in the folds of his blanket), and tore the yellow sheet off an old legal pad that he had kept in the small utility closet near his bathroom. Then he sat down at the desk and wrote with a dry pen what he considered essential in order to stay out of debt:



1

The Immortality Project was added to the list a few days later and consisted in David writing a Wikipedia article about himself. Now, David wasn't so presumptuous as to believe that the final play he directed at NYU, or the unpaid residency it earned him, merited a Wikipedia article. But the thought that one day something might earn him that right has led him to add it to his survival list. If the something were, as David supposed, just historical enough to get him past Wikipedia's gatekeepers, but not enough to push anyone over the edge of creating his page from scratch, it would not only be a missed opportunity but, from a certain perspective, a tragedy to avoid at all costs. It was the Immortality Project that had him tape the list to his desk.

Since his separation, when David was desperate for distraction, he had secretly hoped that the distraction would turn into a hobby, and the hobby into a profession. A fun, lighthearted profession. Something like a teacher but without the children, or a doctor...

¹ From: Exhibit A.

[Objection Overruled.]

A doctor in the near, always nearing future, where everyone is constantly healthy. In short, a career path that could replace the now impossible performing arts—which to that day he managed to practice without the burden of an audience, not a real, paying audience at least.

In the days that followed the list's inception, David managed to be a little more intentional when caught in the web at night. He read a blog post about a flight attendant turned entrepreneur by opening a boutique café in the planes she'd worked on. Instead of looking at her pictures in uniform, or seeking out some dense quote of hers that will cast a shadow over her success, David journaled about starting his own boutique café, right outside unemployment offices, once these reopened. He could imagine the long lines of people, six feet apart from each other, eager to spend their extended benefits on a cup of overpriced coffee, and his sly smile as he gave them the cheapest looking stained paper cup. A paper cup David designed himself. So that an inspector, looking accidentally out the window would see that—what a relief—the unemployed are buying, reviving the economy, but aren't—God forbid—going into *his* corner coffee shop, carrying with them that contemptuous smell that fills his office day in and day out since even before the pandemic began.

4.15.2021 | 10:27 AM

The night David read about the stewardess, he learned of a soccer player who hurt his leg and got addicted to painkillers; an addiction he overcame using a vibrating bracelet developed by students at Cambridge. The bracelet was now shaking constantly on the player's wrist while the player himself was able to score almost as many goals as he had before the injury. The only problem, the soccer player admitted to his interviewer, was that the green grass of the soccer field sometimes lost its color and he would see the whole field—audience, stands, and players included—in black and white. David began to take notes on his phone, planning on becoming a consultant to the Cambridge students, and convincing them to convert this bracelet technology so that it would serve historical tours of New York, London and Berlin. Tours with an unparalleled user experience.

In the beginning of October, David was reading about Steve Jobs in his bed while falling asleep. “Generations,” he typed in his journal the next morning, “are summed up these days by a handful of Wikipedia representatives. Bach's third cousin had never existed, or in any case is about to be wiped off of existence. Even Steve Jobs' biological parents are just black letters which lead nowhere at all on history's ultimate archive.” David remembered the year when his high-school teachers started treating Wikipedia as a reliable source. Then, with a smile on his face, he wrote in his journal about the first Wikipedia article he edited.

The whole thing was a prank. A classmate's father was a diplomat in Turkey. The classmate's name was Dexter Taylor, and he couldn't stop talking about how important Ankara was as a gateway not only to the Middle East, but to Russia as well, and how he's about to fly there and meet important people and probably some exotic chicks too. So, in the middle of a government class where Dexter wouldn't stop talking about how Erdoğan was the most

important figure in the war against terror, David signed up to Wikipedia under his desk as an editor. In three days the single change he had made was approved, and Fred Taylor's only son was now David Taylor for the world to see. The change small enough, and in a page insignificant enough, to go unnoticed for months. Better, Dexter's attempts at reclaiming his name, which marked too much activity for a page so seldom visited, were treated as hostile attacks on truth and knowledge, and denied at the threshold for months. When David visited the article that day, he found not only that Dexter regained his rightful place as Fred Taylor's (d. 2018) son, but that his name was colored the royal blue of a hyperlink and led to a short article about the newly appointed junior diplomat in Switzerland.

The pleasant memory prompted David to sign up again as an editor. He typed violently, pressed on by the sound of plastic keys on his computer. He found and got reacquainted with `Monospace`, the font used in Wikipedia's sandbox. Seeing it again after a long time, David felt that the font was somehow both robotic and archaic, as though it came from typewriters discarded by the future. And it was in that future that David wanted his existence affirmed, retained against all imminent evidence to the contrary. For inspiration, he asked his virtual assistant to find him "late-in-life success stories".

"Sure. Here's what I found: Charles Darwin, Marquis De Sade, Samuel L. Jackson..."

Before long, David changed course and decided that the articles that'd fit him best would be ones about people who, he mentioned to an old friend in a text that was left unanswered, "died young and were born after the second World War". These, he thought would be more succinct, less heroic and less contended. He finally found the ultimate inspiration in Joan Vollmer, William S. Burroughs' lover, who died from a shot to the head when the couple was pulling "a drunken William Tell act" in Mexico. David copied the contents and structure of Vollmer's

article for his own, and kept a blank space under Death. Because, he thought, it was his death, like Vollmer's, that currently showed the most promise, the only promise, as a justification for his page's admittance into history.

Once he was content with the structure (Early Life and Education, Death), he realized that his name might pose a problem. Wikipedia was filled with David Taylors and Dave Taylors, and his article would be buried among football and rugby players, a couple of musicians, an FBI's most wanted fugitive, and a fictional character from an Australian soap opera. There were also an award winning photographer and essayist, but their names were just there, in red, leading nowhere. He thought of changing his name, but couldn't come up with anything that was memorable without being embarrassing. Instead, he began name dropping around his own article whoever he thought had high traffic on their Wikipedia page. His first attempt looked something like this: "Moved by [Henry VIII](#), as portrayed by [Jonathan Rhys Meyers](#) in *[The Tudors](#)*, Taylor decided to divorce his first spouse (m. 2018 div. 202_)"

It didn't take David long to outline his history, and after the first week his primary concern shifted to perfecting the name-dropping technique. He needed to be arrived at. But he knew that these hyperlinks are one way streets. In other words, as long as Henry VIII and Jonathan Rhys Meyers didn't *intend* to inspire David's divorce, their pages wouldn't speak of him and his efforts would come to nothing. He'd end up in the same Wikipedian limbo as his photographer and essayist namesakes – mere bullet points in articles on the Keats-Shelley award and the Guggenheim Fellowship. For a moment, David thought of mapping out his family and friends to create a network that would inevitably lead him to celebrities and vice-versa. But just then there was a power surge and his concentration music stopped and he was distracted and never picked up on the idea again.

Then there was the question of what exactly would become the justification for his admittance into history. How would David die? The best thing would be if I were killed in my sleep, he thought, and my mother, or little Amanda—who by then would be sixteen and very curious about her favorite uncle’s death—would come and search through every aspect of my life in my computer. There they’d find the article in my Wikipedia sandbox, which from now on I’ll leave open at all times and as my homepage, and Amanda would click publish. Because Amanda can understand. Or the best would be if I accidentally pull a Pollock one day in a daze, and someone finds it absolutely groundbreaking, and I die of a joyful heart attack, and when Amanda comes...

[Witness Collapses. Court Adjourned.]

4.15.2021 | 1:06 PM

Anna Olivette walked up the wooden stairway. Her hand held onto the rail, shifting what little weight she had onto her upper body so that her steps made almost no sound. Only after she opened his apartment door, and stood for a moment in the entrance hall by his bike, David raised his head and looked away from his phone. He put it down and sat frozen on his couch for a while, then tilted his head, looking to see if anyone else might come in behind her. Anna turned around to shut the door. At that moment sounds of an audience clapping and whistling resounded from the bluetooth speaker on David's desk, startling the two. For a second, the old lady looked around the living room for the ten or twenty hands congratulating her for her climb. But there was no one in the living room other than David. Patience had won him the first round of cards against his assistant. The noise startled him too because he thought his unexpected visitor must be sleepwalking, and his fingers rushed to close the app. Anna raised her eyebrows and gave a narrow smile that seemed to shift the topography of her wrinkled face, as if something was alive beneath it. She looked at the door again, making sure it wasn't locked, and walked into the living room.

After straightening the couch's fabric and swiping it clean of invisible crumbs, Anna sat down across from her unmoving, unwitting host, leaving an empty seat between them and leaning on the armrest. She had a small and bowed figure. Wrinkles arched down from her eyes and temples, and gave her pale face a darker, olive tone. She surveyed the room, her eyes looking like they were about to close at any moment. After a long silence she observed, out loud and with a gentle, smiling voice, that it's getting colder outside. David nodded. His ear turned to her as if he were trying to better hear what she had said. His hand was holding fast to his phone, and whenever her eyes searched his out, he stared out the window behind the empty seat on the

couch, assuming a pensive expression. The last leaves were shriveling up and soon they'd fall and he'd be able to see the Catskills again through them – bluer, in winter, than the sky.

Anna asked if she could have some tea.

“Sure.” David sprang up from the sofa. “What’s your name?”

“Anna. And I would prefer Earl Grey as long as you have it,” A smile appeared on her face again, a bigger one, but one that somehow did not spur any seismic shifts to her face.

David went to the kitchen and turned on the electric kettle. She isn’t a threat, he thought, and I have time. And I could use the company.

He could see Anna from the kitchen. The half open door of his living room had a mirror hanging from it, which, a happy coincidence he hadn’t noticed before, allowed host and guest to communicate in spite of the wall between them. Anna did not see David. She stood up from the couch as if she had rehearsed it. David watched as she slowly moved to the front of the seat, placed both her feet firmly and flat on the floor, and pressed her right elbow to the armrest beside her; he watched her lean forward until her nose was over her toes, then push her arm down and start rising from the cushion; she began straightening her legs, but wouldn’t straighten them completely until after her hand let go of the chair. Instead of bowing to the invisible audience lingering in David’s mind, Anna brushed her skirt with her hands and started pacing around the living room.

David was searching through his contacts to see who he should call, thinking that one of his more serious high-school or college friends must be a doctor by now. But the list ended after two or three rapid swipes and he remembered evenings when, bored out of his mind, he’d sit in front of his screen and delete people from his life forever with no more than two gestures of his thumb; people that he sometimes wished he could call but couldn’t any longer, or people who

texted him long letters of remorse, but whose names and crimes he could not remember, as if deleting the invisible string between contact name and phone number helped erase some actual hurt in his mind.

Anna was looking around David's living room as if he were her grandson, approving of some prints and a pillow, wincing at a messy corner, picking up and cherishing an unpainted wooden figurine. As she moved prying around the living room, her hands calmly but repeatedly straightened her skirt – a houndstooth patterned piece in light brown, probably sewn along with her sweater.

Sleepwalking became less and less probable. She softly spoke to herself, sure, but she reacted directly to her environment, holding her nose over a full ashtray, cheering up David's divorce plant with her fingers and whispering words of encouragement between its leaves. She went and looked out the window at the emptied street that she came from, and for a moment David thought she might be intentionally turning her back to him, giving him the time he might need to process her uncanny arrival. The sunlight made her skirt glisten like a wet branch, and in turn her skin showed a golden quality usually reserved for babies or photos of babies.

He could suddenly hear his ex's voice whisper in his ear, carrying the same absolute confidence she professed during their last few months together; a confidence indicating nothing but doubts, one that he could not help but see through. The voice said that this is no ordinary visitor but a visitation, that he should give everything up and dedicate himself to Anna Olivette, serve her, work for her, learn from her; that she might save us all, have the cure, be the cure, that this goddess's arrival means the time has come for them to separate, to really separate, and that it's needed for the work ahead, a work that could not reach completion otherwise, if it weren't for this golden old lady that is; that they should make love in front of her, but only once, and that

no music should play, not even in his mind, when they do it. The water began boiling in the kettle, and before her whisper disappeared in it his ex promised him that she loved him, but never in the same way as before. Never or forever, David couldn't quite discern.

[Objection Sustained.]

He held his phone close to his mouth and turned to his assistant with a shaking voice under the kettle's gurgling. "OK Google. I have an old senile lady in my house. What do I do?"

The assistant proposed 4 Things To Try If Your Parent Seems Irrational, assuming that Anna was his mother. But hard as he looked, Anna acted perfectly rational. David too, under different circumstances, would have moved the keys off the trivet on his living room table, or picked the ashtray off the floor and, after admiring its turquoise, placed it on the pine shelf by the window. Each of her movements was deliberate, like a dancer's. Right as the kettle stopped, she shook her head and said, in an audible whisper meant for her alone, He looks very sad. Terribly sad.

David pretended not to hear her. He brought two steaming cups into the living room. Two old bone china cups which he'd never used and that he held by looping his fingers through the handles. The cups gave a burning sensation to his dry knuckles and David rushed to place Anna's cup on the trivet and his directly on the table. The trivet had a small dust outline of his keys on it. He wiped it with his thumb.

"There's room for both cups on the fish." Anna said, smiling at the trivet's arabesque pattern. A pattern which David had forgotten all about – a school of six or seven smiling fish. "Your table has a brown to marvel at, it must be your age, I can still see unstained spots on it."

The shrewd reference to his age made David uneasy. "Excuse me, Anna," he turned to face her, "do you know where you are?"

“I’m assuming I’m in your home. I hope it’s yours. Otherwise…” she raised her hand to cover her smiling mouth, feigning alarm. “Two intruders in one home! One criminal and the other… Oh! That would be too cruel!” For a moment, seeing David smile, she believed her own joke. “But then again you knew where the Earl was…” She brought the teacup to her chin, her left palm floating beneath it like some invisible saucer. The steam filled the grooves on her cheeks and the creases on her forehead, and finally disappeared in her white, barely visible hair.

“I’m sorry,” David said as Anna dipped half her face into the cup, “and, please, enjoy the tea, you’re really welcome to stay as long as you need… But I don’t really know you, Anna. Are you sure you’re in the right place? This is forty-three—”

Anna leaned back and gestured with an actorly nod that silenced David. “It happens sometimes that I don’t know where I am. But up here someone always leaves their door unlocked, whether for a party or out of negligence, both cases merit a visit. I go inside, have a cup of tea, and wander on until I find where I was going in the first place. I hope you don’t mind.” She took a small sip, immersed half her face again in the cup, then paused to look at David as she swallowed. Only then he noticed the size of her eyes. Luminous grey orbs were staring at him through long black eyelashes and through the veil of steam escaping the teacup. “These are very nice cups for a young man. The ornaments are a little much but the orange is just joyous!”

“My ex got these as a gift from an old family friend. Too fancy for me, never had a chance to use them. My name is David, by the way.”

“Well. David. I am very pleased to learn that they’re as virgin as you could find,” she answered, her nose pointing at the ceiling, and giggled her way down towards another sip. David

felt a sudden urge to feel Anna's warm, pillow-like hand against his cheek, even his collarbone, and he turned to drink his own tea, mirroring the way she held her cup.

They drank the rest of the tea in silence. After less than a minute, Anna noted to herself, David glanced at his phone. He moved his calendar App to a spot which hid a different part of the manufacturer's default background. When he looked up, Anna was surveying his floor with her eyes, pausing, he felt, on every crumb or black ball of hair he pulled out and left there while he was high, watching some video that his virtual assistant had recommended.

After finishing her tea, Anna placed her empty cup directly on the table, and got up to leave. David noticed the sky darkening. He wanted to offer her cookies but she seemed above whatever half-baked half-box he had left in his kitchen cabinet. Instead, he just asked if she minded staying a little longer. When she nodded and slowly sat back down, this time on the large wing chair across from the couch, David told her that he had heard it when she said he looked sad.

"Oh! I'm terribly sorry David!" she interrupted before he could finish. Her hand jumped to her chest with a movement so sudden and genuine it made everything she'd done until then seem false. "It was just my own mother's voice come out of me with the state of the house. I know that your generation has better things to worry about than cleaning every small corner of the home. Please. Don't take it personally."

"No. I—" David thought of going to his room and bringing the trash can filled with pregnant toilet papers, of showing her the manufacturer's default background on his phone, or his call log from the past two weeks – a desert riddled with his mother's missed calls. "I'm not doing very well with these restrictions, or I don't know... I'm just, I'm just pretty amazed by the

way you seem to handle yourself, your—” He paused. He used to know the euphemism. “aging. You remind me of my dead grandma.”

“Do I? A pretty lively corpse I hope!”

“I knew how to speak to other people once. I swear.”

“I can tell. You did theater, didn’t you? A playwright?”

“I studied directing, yes.” At this penetrating comment, David put his phone down and was about to reach for Anna’s face and test her materiality. His father never hallucinated people. God, gods, yes, but never something as insidious as a person.

“Your Playbill shoebox,” Anna said, as if she could read David’s mind or the dread on his face, “I bet these might even be worth something soon, you may have seen the last *Maids* produced in New York!” She placed her palm over the back of his hand.

“Stay a while longer, Anna, please. Tell me your story. Isn’t that what old people do? That’s all you ever want to do. The stereotype can’t be that far off.” David smiled and when Anna laughed he felt his whole body relax.

“Oh you caught us! You caught us all! Can you blame us? We want to live. And when our body says no, and the heart’s a maybe, our mouth wants to say more and more, and every word it speaks means yes. Yes I lived, yes I live, yes I’ll live. Leaving ourselves out there in the room with you, infecting you with us. So that even if we can’t survive life, we might survive death. You know?”

Anna looked out the window and resigned to continue her journey tomorrow. Then she looked down at the shadow that her head and few hairs cast on David's floor, and it looked for a moment to David like she was using these shadows to tell the time. “We’re going to need more tea,” she said, holding up her empty cup and tilting it from side to side. David went back to the

kitchen. He filled the old aluminum teapot instead of the electric kettle and placed it on the stove and turned to watch Anna again in the mirror. She looked directly at him, smiling, brushing and straightening her skirt as if she was about to commence a performance. David smiled and Anna nodded.

“We have one more bag after this one,” he spoke up so that she could hear, feeling the distance between them enhanced by the mirror.

He turned his head towards the kitchen window and for a moment imagined it was winter already. The orange of Halloween decorations turned red and green and the roofs were covered with snow and he was the unlikely guest in someone else’s home, his mother’s perhaps, unwrapping gifts and sitting there dressed in a green and red sweater knitted the year before by his dead grandmother, or lighting Hanukkah candles at his Father’s institution, wearing a white and blue yarmulka his grandmother knitted for his Bar Mitzvah, or at his sister’s, celebrating that muddled holiday with candles hanging from the spruce and Amanda singing in that spellbinding mix of prayers in Latin and Hebrew her parents had knit for her...

[Witness Collapses. Court Adjourned.]

4.21.2021 | 11:47 AM²

I can't remember whether I grew up in an English speaking home in Tuscany or an Italian speaking home in New York. Can you believe it? Not even that. You'd say it sounds far-fetched, but I've met some people my age who confuse that childhood's Maine with this childhood's Florida all the time. In any case, it has nothing to do with my story. And whatever you hear after I leave here, from your computer, I tell you already it has a fainter memory than I do when it comes to my own life. So, though I'm certain the computer cares a great deal whether I grew up in an Italian speaking house in America or an English speaking house in Italy, it cares about nothing important. That's because computers followed journalism's lead in looking for information that can be corroborated by two sources or more and get them past legal; whatever that means. It would be more relevant to my story, as it happens—and this both computers and interviewers tend to ignore—to talk about a family dinner.

When I was eight, my mother's brother Leo came to our house after returning from some sea merchant business on the other side of the world. Our dinner table was mahogany and had a brown to it that almost absorbed the candle light and in which I too was absorbed while my father prepared the food and my mother fixed the house up for the visit. I remember the oranges and reds of the candles dancing on the shiny surface and the way my body felt, swaying over my unmoving feet. Only when my mother placed the white hemstitch on the table, in the same queenly manner by which she had taught me how to make my own bed, I could leave and get dressed for dinner. I wore my white holiday dress. It had a small tomato stain which I noticed

² Excerpts from April, 21st-22nd are recordings of Olivette recorded by Witness on the day of the event and replayed by Witness in court.

turned orange by then, because the stain had been breathing for a while. A light orange, not unlike the inside of your teacups. I brushed my hair, which back then was a beaming black. (Apropos, it wasn't gradual, as I'd have you assume, that my hair learned the secret of reflecting all colors equally. It happened in an instant, to each hair, until it turned to the coiffure you see today.) I didn't know all that about color back then; I seem to be losing my grasp on it now too, as we speak. You look paler and I can't tell if it's blood draining from your face or mine that makes you look that way.

[Objection Overruled.]

Back then I remember all I could think of was the unchanging colors that I'm seeing and how I couldn't help but think that because my eyes are blue I see more colors than my dad does with his sad brown eyes.

During dinner Leo made us all laugh, then asked me about my school. "Your school," he said. As though I owned it. I answered something to the effect that it was boring, and Leo laughed and said *cazzo*, and over my mother's hushing he asked me, "What *do* you find interesting little Anna?" And I was very confident already so I stood up on the chair and over my mom's reprimands I said "I know all the colors in the world and I didn't learn any of them in school Zio Leo!" I was about to poke my tongue at him but my father, laughing, jerked me down to my seat before I could let it out of my mouth.

After dinner, Leo offered my parents some cocaine which he brought from Holland for factory workers up north because there was a shortage of coffee. My father told him they wanted to try it (he was an early reader and a fan of Freud), but mother pointed at me with her chin and rolled her eyes. So Zio Leo—on break from cocaine after a long time with it at sea—took me to the guest room to keep me busy while the two enjoyed their pep pills.

I sat on the floor and he sat on my study chair. The chair was small and he had to sit on the armrests like a gargoyle, shifting uncomfortably, which made me giggle the whole time he told me about his work.

But he knew how to keep me attentive. A few times he was about to say the word Pirate, to impress me I suspect, but regretted it last minute and only let the thought of it linger between us in the room. Then my parents turned the music louder on the Phonograph. Leo's head swayed from side to side and he raised his voice. He told me about color. How the farther he traveled the more colors he saw. He spoke of fish and birds that have colors that I could not at the time imagine; I closed my eyes trying to conjure these but even the spots of light that hide behind the eyelid all turned dull—Phosphenes, they're called—in comparison to Leo's superlatives and when I opened my eyes I only saw his bony knees through his dusty black pants and the music was scary to me and I realized that I couldn't understand what he meant when he said things like “different red” or “darker than purple,” so I lost interest.

[Court Adjourned. Lunch.]

4.21.2021 | 12:37 PM

Zio Leo had seen me yawn, or look at a cobweb, or he could read my mind, and he raised my chin so that my blue eyes met his blue eyes, and on the way there I caught a glimpse of his pursed lips and could tell by his jawbones that he was clenching his teeth, and I saw the dark purple circles that were under his eyes and weakened their blue.

When he finally got my eyes to fixate on his, or his to stop jittering suspiciously around the room, he said, with some urgency, that the bird he was talking about wears one of the most beautiful browns in the world, that even though it's just brown it has small specks of red and green, but that they can't even be called red or green because in the bird's feathers they just become a part of that brown and if I can lose interest even with the color of that particular bird then I, like my parents, will never find interest in anything else and will become a lonely old family with nothing on her mind but money or an undying bitterness about the emancipation of women. Cazzo. Then he tried again, with a softer voice and a looser jaw, to explain the color of the bird and I got a little scared because he seemed so frustrated with the fact I couldn't get it, or he give it.

Leo opened his suitcase and started showing me old shirts and sweaters and leather shoes and telling me to take ten percent of this brown and three percent of that yellow and, excitedly, that I can even take sixty-three percent of this red, and mix them all together. Then he closed the suitcase with all the clothes inside and he shook it and made a drumroll or machine gun noise with his tongue and knocked on the suitcase twice and asked if I'm ready, and I didn't know what I was preparing for; I had only the faintest memory of what they said in school about percentages of colors.

Leo balanced the heavy suitcase on his open palm, which was probably sticky with sweat, and caressed the brown leather in circles as if he were magically brewing something inside. I looked away from the hairy back of his hand and into his eyes. Beads of sweat slid down his temples and cheekbones and upper lip and into his mouth. He was agitated, as if whatever might come out of that trunk could not help but be satisfying and yet despairingly unsatisfactory at the same time. At some point—the brown leather and his palm must have been warm from all the rubbing by then—he asked me if I was ready. I nodded and my eyes were open so wide it stung and for a moment I thought I heard a flutter inside the case.

When he finally undid the straps again, he made a funny coo sound, trying to entice the bird. But it did not answer. He swung the suitcase open like a ringmaster, but the only things that ended up on top were a leather bound notebook and a short blade, which brought a momentary smile to Leo's lips. A smile that then contorted into a miserable disappointment radiating from his chin to his forehead.

I asked him what the blade was for and he said, correctly, that there was another war coming and that this time we're all in for it and that even if his bird could fly as far as Japan it won't be able to save itself and neither, incorrectly, will I. Then he picked up the notebook, penned something to the first page very quickly, and said that I better find something that interests me before we all die, that otherwise I definitely have no business in heaven and that even hell, with all its colors and good conversation, because it is eternal, might bore me and I'll make the foolish mistake of choosing life again when they offer it, as they most certainly would. "Life!" He laughed. "With its own eternities and boredoms like training wheels, but with appetites and desires too to keep us near sanity."

When I tell it this way I can almost remember being scared. If it weren't for the immovable memory of a pure, tired, sadness, I might have been misled to think that it was that night I was first visited by fear, which as a rule seldom frequents me.

Leo kept shifting in the small chair and I thought he'd keep shifting when he gets up and shifting when he walks and shifting when he climbs the boat and when he spreads his Dutch drugs and commodities on the other side of the world. And while I was thinking my thoughts he was preoccupied with his own and gradually each of us could forget that the other was there. Then I heard my mom's worst laughter—the one she would pick me out of bed with at night, to dance—coming from the other room and I asked him to tell me more about the bird because I thought it would comfort him. Leo was frowning at the door, then at me. A sad frown, like a child's. The eyebrows like sandbags over his eyes. Then he forced a smile. But the sadness wouldn't leave his pupils. And he said that the essence of brown was actually red. And I'm not sure if I was the one who asked him “what red, Zio Leo?” or if he said these very words himself to expedite some process inside of him, but when the question was brought into the room—it might still be there, waiting for an answer—he took the blade and slit his veins from his wrists up to his elbows, starting by cutting his right forearm, then immediately his left, though he only reached halfway up his left with the wavering right.

I didn't scream for a long while because it was the first time I saw such a plentiful red or because he was smiling and his last breath sounded like he was shushing me.

I hope I'm not boring you.

4.15.2021 | 2:27 PM

At some point David felt a strange sensation in his hand. His fingers were limp around his downturned phone beside him. As soon as he noticed the rugged texture of the plastic cover he wanted to turn to his assistant and probe Wikipedia for this Anna Olivette sitting before him. He knew it couldn't be long before he'd find her. The comment about journalists and computers misinterpreting her life kept occupying him in spite of the family dinner that followed. Besides, how could he know that she was telling the truth? How could he know that this woman, barging into houses in the middle of a pandemic that seemed to have slipped her mind along with her birthplace, was even aware of the truth?

He tried to imagine himself in a small room, in her old farmhouse in a country he never visited. And he could almost hear the whispering of violence waiting to happen in that home or to that home. Italian mutterings punctuated with the same Madonna Putanas which used to slip from an old NYU classmate's mouth whenever he was accused of being a chauvinist. He imagined the stone walls of Anna's childhood home, plastered with prints of a stoic, teenage Mussolini. Her room lit only by yellow tapers, and their flicker reflected almost white in Leo's blood-orange arms. And he saw the young girl's face. Terrifyingly impassive, curious at most. The same one that looked at him patiently now—a mask stretched over Anna's crying face.

The living room grew dark and he switched on the light next to his sofa. When he turned to face Anna again she looked like an entirely different person. Everything about her face was kept in proportion: her nose, her ears, her great grey eyes and her arching wrinkles. But if earlier he had a strong grip of what she looked like, now he has lost it. As if he had come to terms with a face that was never there, and now fell out of these very terms. Now, every time he blinked, doubt kept denying the Anna he half-retained and was morphing her again in his mind. He

remembered dragging his mother by the arm out of the movie theatre, mid thriller, when he was thirteen, and his fingers clenched his phone again, the rugged texture pacifying his finger muscles into a relaxation that finally reached his taut shoulder and neck.

He realized that Anna had been gazing at him in his silence, and he replied No. “You’re not boring me. I just... don’t know what to say. I’m sorry.” He got up to pour more tea, avoiding Anna’s shifting face, and she gave a grateful smile and adjusted herself in the chair.

By the time David was back on the couch he saw countless Annas overlapping each other. Young Annas with high cheekbones, tall Annas, emaciated Annas with Jewish eyes, ugly Annas and puff-cheeked Annas and Annas whose faces accorded with his ex lovers’ and some he thought might be future lovers or famous actresses from old movies, and Annas and Annas and Annas...

[Witness Collapses. Court Adjourned.]

4.21.2021 | 12:52 PM

A few months later, all the money in the world disappeared and so did my father's, even though he managed a train station nearby. My mother said that he had all his money tied up in the future or in other people's safes. Back then this meant that his money wasn't really his – only virtually, which also meant something else. Those days I was told to stay in my room for longer than ever before. Every day my mother or father would come in and take something out of my room so that they could sell it. And when I would raise my eyes from Leo's enchanted little notebook and say that selling things won't help because all the money in the world is gone, my mother would fake a laugh and say that I don't understand. Or my father would smile with his sad brown eyes, and say that I'm right. Then he said with an infantilizing tone that they're going to trade it for a big pig at the market, and when I looked disgusted he'd say they'll trade the pig for asparagus, and I tried to keep looking disgusted so he'll get all the way to a horse or cinnamon but always, after he left the room, he'd say from the hallway "and the horse we'll trade for oats!" then laugh. And we ended up with oats.

When I would ask to go to the market he'd say next week and I would stand at the window and watch as his black suit disappeared and reappeared through the shadows of the trees and each week that passed the trees were more colorful and his suit looked blacker and blacker until snow came and there was no more color except the white blanket that fell on the woods and the black figure of my father shearing through it. And by then his beard covered his neck and except for the few flakes that clung to it like dust it looked inexplicably red to me, and so did his eyes.

Along with the maples and beeches, my room—which had little pink but many blues and already shelves and desks and drawers of different browns—slowly lost all of its color. Only the white mattress and the yellowing walls were left. But I also had Zio Leo’s notebook, which on the outside was a glistening, smooth brown leather thing and on the inside was a meticulously documented empirical study of color. Of one color. *BROWN WITHOUT GENERALIZATION* was the last title he wrote on the first page in capital letters; there were other titles but they were scratched out in various pens. A subtitle, slanted and hastily written on the first page and stained with drops of Leo’s blood from our last night together said: *To Anna Olivette, Color Aficionada*.

The notebook was filled with long and striving paragraphs describing a rotting coin he saw in Rome or a pair of jeans he found hanging outside a ruin in Austria or, of course, the feathers of a North American bird, before and after sunset, as worms eat its flesh. I didn’t know how to read very well at the time and my father, when I insisted, had to read the maddened long sentences of his dead brother-in-law out loud with growing confusion in his reddening eyes.

“The juvenile American Herring Gull, (d. 6.28.1927 t. 14:25) which I’ve seen with my own eyes, plucked his own feather and spat it on the ground. A sign of relinquishing his youth. And indeed this was a youthful brown, roughly the same as the sparrow’s beak described on page fourteen. Vastly different. For unlike the sparrow’s beak, the gull’s feather takes in the afternoon sun with seven percent reluctance, not twenty three, and an ant traveling on it can be seen clearly all the way to the leg rather than the ants that crawled into the poor sparrow’s beak in search of food, and which looked like they floated half a millimeter in the air. The color makes

the feather feel soft and looks emblematic of the soft summer soil that the Hudson regurgitates from June to September. A good brown, a lively brown, this feather."³

I would get angry with myself that I couldn't understand Leo's percentages. What is seven percent reluctance, sixty-three percent of *that* red? Then after my father explained percentages to me—though he never spoke of reluctance or colors—I was angry at percentages for being everywhere and nowhere.

To this day I sense them, hiding in plain sight, or parading some fake existence out of nothingness. But I cannot be angry with them anymore. Who's to say that at my age I'm not doing these very things myself? No, today I pity them for never having been wholly here. And yet they seem to gather a following.

³ Olivette, Anna, and Leo Gori. "Birds." Chapter. In *Brown Without Generalizations*, 3rd. ed., 27–28. New York, NY: Phenomenable, 2019.

4.15.2021 | 3:21 PM

David flipped his phone in his hand and his virtual assistant, without unlocking, winked the time and some numbers at him in black and white: of the accumulating dead or of recent polls or temperatures or sea levels or sports-scores. Then a disturbing thought, that all his assistant ever showed him was numbers, that time too was numbers, took hold of him and he let go of the phone. Anna took a mental note of David's willingness to let go of his phone. Then she thought to herself that mental notes expire more and more quickly these days, that this is not something that she is going through alone. No. The young man in front of her too, his mental notes expire quicker too.

A shudder passed through the living room and took hold of both their bodies simultaneously. Anna was about to ask David to open a window but his hand was already fidgeting with the sash lock.

4.21.2021 | 1:07 PM

In any case, whenever my father came back from the market I felt cheated. The food that my belongings were traded for wasn't even worth it. Oatmeal, without cinnamon, has a pale quality that negatively affects its taste, especially for lunch. I refused many meals at the time, and my mother refused to force me. That's how I know I would've survived anyway, by becoming food intolerant and hunger tolerant when food was scarce and hunger commonplace. (*d. 3.5.1925 t. 16:33*) ...*with these golden sands beneath their feet, it is clear why the Israelites complained about the stale, white manna*⁴.

On Christmas eve my mother killed herself in the same room that her brother did. And on Christmas day, along with funeral arrangements, father began making plans to get me on a ship to New York City, where an old acquaintance of his could lodge and feed me. When he told me about this idea, around New Year's Eve, I was very excited about going, because when Zio Leo was taken from my study room, my mother whispered to me that he's going to the city, and when they took my mother from the same room, no one said anything that might have contradicted it. I remember thinking that it was a surprise and deciding not to say anything. My dad took me to where the ship was docked. Everybody there knew him and had a sorry face when they saw us. And each person who stood close enough to us apologized for something, I remember thinking that in some way all these people were involved in killing my mother. And I remember thinking then even that was only playing along, because my mother was supposed to be waiting for me on the other side of the sea. Then my father put my wrist in the gloved hand of a woman—about your age—and she stayed beside me and finished a thought in her diary as she sat down. She

⁴ Olivette, Anna, and Leo Gori. "Travelogues." Chapter. In *Brown* 101.

wore a pink coat and make up and looked generally unaffected by the widespread disappearance of money. Before the ship left, she offered me a madeleine but it was too pale and I refused.

A few hours passed before I realized that my father was on the other side of the window when the ship started to move, and what that meant. I stomped up and down the long aisles of the ship, between people's cabin-doors and seats, thinking that my father should've come along, asking myself why wouldn't he want to see mother and Zio, slowly collecting the pieces of the puzzle that spells Death, and that are scattered around us from the moment we are born. My chaperone didn't mind my roaming; children, at least, were freer back then. I remember standing near the bathroom when I realized that I'm not going to see my mother again. And when a fat man squeezed out of the bathroom door I started thinking of how I won't even see him ever again too, or my father, or the chaperone; that even if I would, at some point I wouldn't, and I slid into the bathroom and looked in the mirror, which had a carved wooden frame, and saw my eyes turn grey and for a moment I couldn't even see myself in the mirror, just the toilet behind me and the door. And when I came back to life and reappeared in the mirror I must have forgotten all about it for one second because otherwise how was I able to turn the knob and slide the door open and escape? The dark green and red patterns on the carpeted floors all merged in my eyes as I walked out crying and I remember looking for my chaperone with the pink coat but being constantly stopped by men in uniform, or men in suits, or women in big coats that weren't at all pink but awfully black.

When I reached my chaperone's seat I called her a liar eight times and kicked her in the shin. She smiled a bright white-toothed smile at the other passengers. Everyone was looking at us. I don't know why she didn't slap me, it wouldn't have been out of place I think. I think some passengers even expected it. But it wasn't passion in their eyes as much as some idea of

discipline. Maybe some passengers feared it, because of their own haunting memories, and maybe she felt their fear or had her own memory. I could tell that they all thought she was my mother or sister and I screamed at them that she wasn't, that she was just my lousy chaperone and that she only pretends that there's still money in the world. Everybody laughed and I kicked her shin again and this time she slapped me and then said nothing until we arrived a few days later. And these days were, I say this with gratitude, the loneliest I'd ever felt in my life.

When we arrived at Grand Central Station—

Oh. Oh, what a laugh! It was the train! My father definitely called it a ship. Maybe to cheer me up? But I would have known as soon as we got there.

You know David? I think he might've wanted to plant this memory in me, to give me this boat voyage at 9 years of age, in the middle of the Great Depression—his own as much as the world's—not forever but for some times, when retelling, like now. He knew I wanted to be on a ship since Zio Leo spoke to me in the room, and couldn't know how many ships I'd end up boarding.

I grew up here. Huh. It might be that the only Italian I ever spoke was Zio and Cazzo. An uncle's dick, that's all I got out of the boot. Yes. I am sure that I grew up right around here. The trip must have been three hours altogether! We live for longer than we think, don't we? Or is it the other way around? Right around here somewhere.

The chaperone—now, on the train platform, I can remember she was beautiful, covered in pink and with the french veil over her face which made her green eyes emit a dark shining like jades—limped her way through the crowd. She didn't mind whether I kept up with her or not, and I wouldn't even try to follow her at all had I known any other person or sound in that heaving, light filled palace. When she finally reached a large door to the street a tall older man

with a long and skinny face was waiting for her. She gave him a cold kiss on the cheek and he was too late to place his hand on her waist so he settled for the ribs. She pulled her pink body away, turned it around, and pointed at me with her gloved hand. The man smiled and she frowned at me and I had the feeling that she was about to poke her tongue at me too. But she didn't and instead she burst out crying and hailed a taxi cab.

The man's name was John and he also looked as if there was still money lying around somewhere, and I had a feeling the chaperone and him might have cached all the money that very somewhere themselves. He was taller than my father and the tallest person I'd seen until then, and the first person I met who didn't say "I'm sorry about your mother" since she died. Instead he said that my lips look a little blue and when I looked down at them and pouted he laughed and said that that's nothing a hot cup of tea can't fix.

We walked around the city and I kept looking at the buildings until the back of my neck hurt, thinking that John must live in one of them because a tall man like John needed a tall home. And then I looked straight ahead at the mass of black coats with the pale crying faces peeking out of taut lapels. But they couldn't have all been crying could they? It must have been raining. The mass of black coats was washing the street like a wave, and when I looked to my right and left they all seemed to walk the same direction as John and I, but when I looked straight ahead they were all about to crash into us. I closed my eyes when we approached, thinking that we would all soon collapse into one another and that the bodies will pile up and that this must be how all these buildings are made, the brown bricks being the natural, percentile-accurate result of a black pile of wet coats drying under a yellow sun.

With enough dedication and without tools, the human eye would be able to distinguish between a cup of English Breakfast and a cup of Earl Grey (both steeped for an equal amount of

time in the same volume of water and under the same direct sun or shrouded in the same darkness). The proof, I swear, came to me at the port of Manchester (d. 5.5.1925 t. 11:34) where my eyes were momentarily graced with this future gift. I could sense the small shavings of Bergamot hint green amidst the cup of Earl Grey and won a florin from a hack who said I cheated him with some device.

No! Strain your eyes sailor! Just like the sea and sky aren't of the same blue and the blood escapes the heart a different red than when it enters, our brown holds its own secret transmutations. Even the Mona Lisa's lips are, on some days, more permanent than her eyes.⁵

John lived alone in a very big apartment that was as close to the sky as I got before flying. He would read me very few pages of my uncle's notebook; most of it he deemed inappropriate for a woman my age. He said that my father told him which pages to read me, but I knew that he was lying and very soon he stopped mentioning my father altogether, because it would usually bring me to fits of crying and telling him I hate him and want to go back.

I think he could take the screaming and crying but that he needed me not to hate him. His hysterical wife, he told me, had blamed him for the fact that all the money had disappeared from the world—everyone adopted my term—and left with their daughter to live in one of their houses in Connecticut.

John's apartment housed many clocks made of gold, a color I don't remember seeing before that, and which, under my uncle's influence, I called shiny brown. Other than the clocks and doors (which are hardly anything at all) there was nothing in the vein of red or brown except an old school chair that had a silver plate with the word Brown on it and which was, in fact, brown.

⁵ Ibid. 105.

John had nothing to occupy him but the writing of letters from nightfall until dawn. Apology letters, every single one of them, no doubt. To his wife, or to his daughter; or they might have been addressed to my father, like everyone's faces, for John's involvement in killing my mother. I read one of them that he'd sent to the mayor and was sent back to him without ever being unsealed. A miserable attempt to excuse himself of something I could not understand but that was lacking chiefly in conviction, which would also be an accurate description of his demeanor during our time living together. There were many more letters like that, returned but never opened, but I didn't care to read them. John would finish two bottles of whiskey every night as he was writing his letters, drinking some but spilling most on the hardwood floors, reaching maddeningly for atonement while I was trying to sleep on the most comfortable sofa in the world.

Some nights I would tiptoe in his daughter's white silk nightgown and look outside the window that went from floor to ceiling. The orange street lamps and the neon reds and greens would fend off the darkness below and make the earth seem warm when it really wasn't. One night, John came out of his room in his pajamas and saw me looking down. He stood close by my side and put his hand on my shoulder and said that there were even more lights when there was still money in the world, then dragged himself back to his poorly lit office and shut the door, the smell of whiskey trailing behind him.

The brownstones stayed a brownish red all night long and when I would wake up at sunrise on the floor by the window I'd have a blanket on me and a glass of milk was waiting on the table. John's office was locked until the late afternoons and a faint stream of scotch would spill from under the door into the living room and all the way to the edge of the fireplace, where it would evaporate.

One night I went out onto the street to see the lights up close. I started walking towards them but they were farther than they seemed from up in the apartment. I walked and walked for about an hour, I think, though with the way I remember time today it might've been twenty minutes or the whole night. It's hard to believe how lucky I was to come back, nine and in a nightgown and a girl. When I did come back, John was asleep, and I had to wait until noon in the lobby, hearing the doorman mutter "cazzo" whenever he came back from banging on John's door. Are you raising your hand? That's sweet of you David.

4.15.2021 | 3:24 PM

David timidly raised his hand while Anna was telling him about her time living with John Rork at The Woolworth building.

“I’m sorry. I just really need to go to the bathroom”.

Anna frowned and bid him leave with a wave of her hand, surprised, probably, that he made himself so uncomfortable for her sake. She uncrossed her legs and crossed them again, then gently shoved the half-full tea cup a little farther away from her towards the center of the table.

Between the living room and the bathroom David kept his mother’s books. For the past few months, while she was away looking for a new place in a warmer state, his house functioned as storage space for her things. Sometimes, when he passed by the boxes and kitchen gadgets that he found no possible use for, and that he never dared open, he felt a close affinity with these things his mother once needed so badly, and soon might need so badly again, but not just now.

Anna had her eye on the makeshift cardboard library since the moment she came in. But the books, though their spines were turned to the room, were low on the floor and would require Anna to bend down in order to read their names. Bending down was unthinkable just then, not only because of the shooting pain her lower back felt after such maneuvers, but mainly because bending like that before even saying hello to her unsuspecting host—who in her mind was still an inconsolable widower back then—would have been plain rude.

That morning, a few hours before Anna Olivette came to his house, David woke up with toilet paper stuck to the tip of his penis. When he saw it on his way to brush his teeth, he remembered how he had thought about this very moment—cold feet, split stream, the paper looking like a dissipating cloud in a pink sky—

[Objection Overruled.]

He had thought about that moment right before falling asleep the previous night. That too, he wrote in his journal that morning, was some kind of memory. He remembered how after he came the night before, his virtual assistant had two percent charge left and warned him with a faint shiver that she's exhausted from showing him porn. "Me too." he whispered. And though he knew it's bad for her body, he plugged her in for the night anyway.

[Objection Overruled.]

Beyond the hall and across from a small cabinet was David's bedroom. He peeked inside before going into the bathroom. His clothes were on the floor and on the bed, the blanket was on the floor and on the bed, tissues were on the floor and on his bed, his towel was moist on the floor, absorbing and exuding entire ecosystems. With a shake of his head he turned off the light and closed the door to the room with one hand while opening the adjacent bathroom door with the other.

As he peed David realized that his phone was left on the floor beneath the living room table. He remembered the last time he was in his bathroom without his phone. There was a week in the summer when he hung a sign on the bathroom door that told him No Phones Beyond This Point, and which was surrounded by childish exclamation marks. And he remembered how after three days, intoxicated, he ignored the sign and, yawning over the toilet with his pants down to his knees, looked up for the history of the term "Gateway Drugs" on Wikipedia. By the time he got to his bed he was scoffing at the miniscule article about one Peter B. Bensinger, a former Administrator of the DEA who served under three presidents and didn't even have an Early Life and Education. His carping had David's virtual assistant recommend a car chase video he might be interested in, and, with the flashing lights against his eyelids and the midwestern accent passing incredulous judgement onto his ears, he fell asleep.

[Objection Overruled.]

In the past year, especially during the pandemic, David's virtual assistant became increasingly sensitive, reacting to the softest touch and the faintest of sounds. In the mornings, he'd pick his phone up before opening his eyes, and his virtual assistant would inform him first that he had slept, on and off, for four and a half hours, then that the weather today was about to be precisely fifty degrees, but that it would feel, through his misleading skin and nerve endings, like forty-five. One time he picked her up wanting to call a friend, but before he could dial she informed him that what he had heard was a woodpecker, not construction workers. And out of some beta version of sympathy she added that for her too it is difficult to get used to living outside the city. "It'll take some time getting used to," David offered his father's advice, "but we will, that's where we belong. Look at the stars at night. Aren't they nice?" At this his virtual assistant, overeager to please, offered the lyrics for Coldplay's *Yellow*, a song that David despised. She stored his scornful exhale deep in her memory, so as never to repeat her mistake; certainly not with David, but also, as a precaution, not with any one of her users who she estimated shared his taste. David, of course, forgot to call his friend.

Though she sometimes seemed to understand him, David's virtual assistant would never turn off her own alarms—she should have known he had woken up before sunrise—and would catch him by surprise, demanding to be touched, in the mornings while he'd be in the bathroom and she beside the electric kettle, where he left her while making his coffee.

[Objection Sustained. Court Adjourned.]

4.16.2021 | 10:21 AM

On the rare occasion his virtual assistant made a mistake, like thinking that Anna was his elderly parent, David would try and imagine what the people who were hard at work inventing the first computer had in mind. It was easier for him to imagine Anna's impossible life than it was to believe the images that conjured up when he thought of these proto-computer-scientists. Their uncles, he thought as he shook his penis over the toilet, must have been sober. Maybe an uncle even extracted one of them—John Von Neumann, his assistant once mentioned—from a financial downturn.

Sometimes he had pictured the lab. Full of ledgers and chalkboards, lit only by flickering fluorescents, and perhaps an eccentric's untimely candle. They try to work in silence, that's how they had imagined a functioning lab during their aspiring college years, which had just passed if they ever passed at all; or this need for silence might have been a war habit - a reaction to war's still drumming, at least humming trauma. Only the occasional click of the tongue, sucking a tooth, or a German accented "mind giving this here a look?" managed to contaminate the sterile room that existed in David's mind and heedlessly manufactured consciousness.

[Objection Sustained.]

When David came back into the living room, Anna was holding an old broadsheet newspaper which hid her body almost entirely, to the point it looked like the paper had assimilated her legs and replaced Anna in awaiting his return; a waiting that has become a choice to the newspaper, now that it acquired human legs. The paper had a tired yellowish-brown color and its headline screamed into the room:

NEGRO PASTOR

FATALLY BEATEN

MOTHER FINDS BODY IN NEW ROCHELLE

David's first thought was that Anna kept this old newspaper with her at all times, but then he remembered that a friend of his had given it to him a couple of weeks before. "Very interesting," the broadsheet said. Then Anna folded it expertly into a less imposing rectangle and chucked it onto the table before getting up slowly, excusing herself quietly with a smile and a nod, and going to the bathroom.

The friend who had brought him the paper came with a rental car full of "old crap" he'd collected from Brooklyn's streets during his time there. Things that wouldn't fit into one of the three suitcases he took with him back to Tel Aviv. All David actually wanted was the aluminum teapot, which was made in Israel and even had Hebrew letters embedded in its handle, but which his friend swore he found somewhere under the Williamsburg bridge. The friend, too much of a hoarder to be moving transatlantically like that, urged him to keep the newspapers too. "Look at this! Negro! Fatally Beaten! That's how they said 'black man murdered' in the sixties. Makes you think. Maybe one day they'll say 'genocide persists' and call us hypocrites." David's stomach turned at the thought but he took the papers anyway and left them in a wicker box beside the wing chair where he also senselessly kept old phone chargers.

While Anna was in the bathroom David spread the tired broadsheet for the first time. Information came from every direction, forcing his eyes to dance from one greedy title to the next, forcing him to pause over some capitalized name—a neighborhood or an organization

which he couldn't believe existed forty years ago—or on the occasional time-tried letter, a t smeared into an f, which he felt a closer affinity to than to phrases like “Rules of Etiquette”.

The paper was The *Sunday News*, and cost someone fifteen cents. The ink was still pitch black but the paper's white had faded into a tired yellow. Under the timeless headline there was a photograph of the earth. The caption underneath it revealed, in bold letters, that the picture was taken **From 850 Miles Up**. David could see the other side of the clouds in the old photo from the space age, and what looked like the North or South pole. Then, another caption, a longer one, began with the words “Foto from Gemini 11 by astronauts....”. Above the headline, a predecessor of his assistant's morning habit, the newspaper's ear read: September 18, 1966★
WEATHER: Mostly Fair and pleasant.

He flipped through the paper rapidly, his inexperienced fingers skipping page three and bringing him, inadvertently, to page eleven. Stenciled palm trees adorned the side of the page bemoaning the death of “the Tahiti that used to be, lavishing sun, sea, and sex on even strangers to its shores.”. The subtitles punctuating the story, probably giving the exhausted reader who had reached page eleven a summary, read: **Morals Are Relative, Parents are Forgiving, Agriculture Moribund, Legion Brought Discord, and ‘Senseless’ Rioting.**



6

When he tried to read the article, David felt the dark impede his eyesight and found himself swaying the paper in his arms so that the block texts and cartoon-like maps and captions would reflect more light back at him. When he turned the page, hoping perhaps that the next one was better preserved, he accidentally pinched a few corners together and found a commercial for \$3 oil paintings on page fifteen.

⁶ From: Exhibit B.

4.16.2021 | 11:01 AM

Another attempt at describing David's imaginary laboratory, of which, to be sure, he wrote extensively in his journals and which provides important insight into the defendant's mind:

Every time the attractive assistant opens a window, a gale disturbs the inventors both in sound and in feel and she gets barked at. They don't admit to it out loud, but the scientists become fond of these moments – howling together at the moon in the night, raising their heads from their warrened notes, sharing human sacrifice. They are happy. Thanks to the garish forecast funding had been easy to come by and creative applications for their work too. But David's lab-coated pioneers do not dream of the atomic bomb or of David's virtual assistant. They dream of peace, love and truth. And in some desperate way their dreams came true.

In his dreams, David's John Von Neumann would see his calculator take human form and become his lover. These were effortless relationships in which the scientist would ask the humanoid calculator to answer arithmetical challenges, and she would softly whisper the answers in his ear, stroking his hair with a hand made of buttons, and saying seductive things like "264 square, darling." Then the two would giggle themselves to sleep, which in the dreamer's case meant wake up over his ledger in the lab.

Whatever their individual dreams were, the Proto-Computer-Scientists shared a collective, radiant dream in David's imaginary lab. Beyond the thick tobacco smoke hovering in the room, one would sometimes see a blue flickering light, another a steady green light; a third—inexplicably aggravated—had a flickering orange-yellow dot in the corner of his eye.

[Objection Sustained.]

4.16.2021|11:12 AM

David heard Anna flushing, and he thought about his scientists and how for them the lights must have had an unworldly shade, not green or blue or orange-yellow, but colors they couldn't even begin to make sense of, let alone name.

Not long before Anna's arrival, David had looked up a picture of Von Neumann's laboratory, believing that his imagination had grown too vivid to be entirely out of touch with history. His assistant didn't take long to retrieve as many photos as he had wanted, as though she was excited with his sudden interest in her family history. The results were disappointing.

John Von Neumann worked almost entirely alone, was a non-smoker, and played loud German marching music that was said to distract even Einstein from his inner world, which, it was believed at the time, managed to envelope the known universe. Instead of dreaming up calculator-women to dispel his loneliness, Von Neumann got married. Twice.

More than with the character of the self-absorbed man, David was disturbed with his overly earnest involvement in the Manhattan Project. Especially with how, commenting on Oppenheimer's penitent postwar remarks, Von Neumann was quoted saying that "sometimes someone confesses a sin in order to take credit for it."

David could see the flaming eyes of this man whose adventures destroyed one world and created another, consumed by vengeance or brilliance and not once blinking on their long descent down towards hell. Eyes twinkling with lights that may have frightened the devil himself, and not even extinguished by the man's tears upon realizing how very lonely he is down there — his childhood friends and family having overwhelmed the heavens just a few years before...

[Witness Collapses. Court Adjourned]

4.16.2021 | 1:19 PM

Anna was washing her hands for much longer than twenty-seconds, and David began fearing she might be cleaning his bathroom. He sat down and heard the faucet close and the door open. “Have you read it? It’s such a roller coaster of an article! Do you think the poor pastor was killed by the CIA? Or by his ex-wife’s family?” Anna’s voice grew louder up to a point, but stopped somewhere in the hall. David assumed she was trawling through his mother’s books.

When he first conceived of it, the lab he imagined operated in the early 1960’s, which meant the murdered black pastor in the paper was already in danger but that his mother could still feel at home in her New Rochelle house. But after his assistant’s slew of information he realized that his Proto-Computer-Scientists lived closer to 1939. The pastor is eleven and though there might’ve been beatings, they were not yet fatal. His mother, fresh out of nursing school, is walking out of a job interview. She didn’t like the pregnant head nurse, there was intense fear in her eyes, but she knows she’ll get hired because, thanks to the garish forecast, demand is on the rise. Approaching a street corner she stops in her tracks and for some reason doesn’t dare look beyond the turn. Then, ignoring a shiver down her spine and pressing on, she sees a dead cat flattened by a car in the middle of the road and her stomach turns into a knot.

[Objection Sustained.]

One late summer morning, David’s virtual assistant recommended he spend less time staring at her. He was holding her in his lap on the porch as dawn snuck up, the sun turning the sky’s black into a deep ocean’s blue, then burning fringes of pink and orange and red onto it.

[Objection Sustained.]

He raised her so she could have a look herself. With his finger’s encouragement she cherished the moment and will undoubtedly remind him of it when the year finally passes.

Unlike Anna, David’s virtual assistant didn’t change her mind mid-sentence...

[Objection Overruled.]

Unlike Anna, David's virtual assistant didn't change her mind mid-sentence. She was resolute when she spoke, knew the date, time, and exact location of her birth; knew every step and turn in her upbringing and recorded these with a simple method that just cannot fail.

[Objection Overruled.]

Something in her voice was so certain that if he took her to the monthly polygraph test his scientists were subjected to...

[Objection Overruled.]

...the operator wouldn't even find a baseline of truth for her to lie from. She could sing the alphabet and when she did her voice changed to that of a kindergarten teacher's, which sounded just right...

[Objection Sustained.]

...she could, in fact, count until the end of time but would ask, with rare timidity, that he doesn't make her count out loud beyond one hundred, and whenever he would try and convince her, she'd just ask him again, more timid than before, not to make her.

[Objection Sustained. Court Adjourned.]

4.16.2021 | 2:07 PM

Anna returned to the room with a book in her hand and a smile that shrunk her eyes and made her wrinkles intensify, giving her face a faint glowing quality. The book had a brown cover and golden letters on its spine that read *THE ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITANNICA ELEVENTH EDITION/VOL. 18/MED TO MUM*. David's mother bought it on a trip to London because it ended with MUM and she thought it was a nice decoration for her living room coffee table. "I had a black bound edition of this!" Anna said, shaking the heavy tome in her arms, "I didn't know they came in brown too. I must get one. Remind me when I leave."

"Sure thing." David said. By now Anna's face finally settled in his mind. Her cheeks were a little puffier than he thought, her eyes stabilized on the same crystal grey he remembered having noticed so strikingly before, and her neck was more slender than he thought it would end up being.

The Israeli aluminum pot kept producing more and more tea, as if it was made by the direct descendents of the Maccabis. Anna sat back down on her chair.

4.21.2021 | 1:33 PM

Where were we? You were wincing throughout my John story, David. Did you assume something terrible had happened between John and I? Were you suspecting this man's reasons to take me in? I find this disturbing about your generation. I find you scary in that way; how your minds always pour into these pits. A man loses his wife and child and, for whatever reason, a friend in need asks him to house his own daughter. The friend's daughter and his own are the same age. So why must you wince when the supplemental daughter sleeps and her supplemental father—mother, uncle—covers her gently with a blanket, places an innocent hand on her shoulder?

I'll be clear on two counts. One: John had never laid a finger on me. Two: I believe the root of your distress is rotten with thoughts like these. Now where were we? Never mind.

Ah! Your old newspaper seems to be conspiring with your old guest David! Bringing me right to where we left off! Let's see. I think I can recite it by heart:

December 29, 1929 Weather: Generally fair today and Monday, except local possible thunder showers.

Train station general manager jumps into Hudson River with rocks in shoes and pockets.

Orphan daughter left behind. /Clyde Thompson P.5⁷

For years I would read that clipping every morning, which John gave me with tears streaming down his cheeks around a third, steady stream that ran down from his nose and into his mouth. That was how I saw him last, the day he sent me away to boarding school. Breaking in mourning not over his old friend but over my father.

⁷ Transcript of original clipping given here for accuracy.

After four years of apologizing and hiding in his room, John had become sick and couldn't take care of me. But he wanted me to have a good education. Obviously I didn't want to be sent away. I wanted to go back to my father. And I insisted, to go back for once, with a vitality that my twelve years hadn't yet been able to deprive me of.

For two weeks he would pack up my belongings, tucking in as many clothes as he could into the two suitcases he had bought with the last of the world's money. Two weeks of me tearing these portable closets apart and leaving the living room carpet white and yellow and pink with dresses and underwear. Two weeks of running away from the apartment and getting familiar with every little crevice my block could offer me as a hiding place.

I learned how to see in the dark. And how to tell the difference between the siren of an ambulance, a firetruck, and a police car. Because it was the police John would send after me, when the first week passed. They seemed to have worked exclusively for him, looking for me for hours, as if they didn't know I was hiding under a park bench or on a tree branch or in the narrow space between two buildings usually reserved for trash and urine. Worried for me as if this city, so exhausted it couldn't even bring itself to die, could harm me.

Our morning routine of good conversation was converted into what I imagine no normal child has experienced: screaming and silverware-throwing and with me maneuvering some inexhaustible resoluteness to make John cry with frustration. I knew for a fact he was holding me captive, training me for some perverted goal which he couldn't articulate, whetting me like a sword, then, with his eyes and ears covered, shooting me away like an arrow towards his "good education".

I can't remember the night before my departure. But I must have been insidiously kind with John, because in the morning the two suitcases were all packed up and stood neatly by the

door with a white ribbon tied around their light leather handles. Then, while John was eating his breakfast and looking at my every gesture patiently, quietly, with tears in his eyes, I said something poisonous. I cannot remember what it was, something I think I could never have said if he were my biological parent; something hurtful that requires both the insight of youth and the utter lack of insight in youths. Did you marry young?

Well. John lost his patience. He went into his office stomping and came back with that mourning on his face, and handed me that faded piece of paper that pronounced me an orphan twice, first to the world at large and only years later to me.

It's been four years between the train ride with the poor chaperone and the day I learned I am no longer in the company of those loved unconditionally. Of course, not having heard from him, I often thought my father was dead. But most of the time, because no one said otherwise, I assumed he was on his way to the market. Or back from it. His beard falling down to his knees, red in winter and brown in summer and changing colors like a lizard in fall. I pictured him taking the old house apart piece by piece, passing slabs of rotting wood across a table in the middle of the market; giving them to the fat man with sacks of oats I had always imagined waiting for him with a carnivorous smile. The market, like the city, like the trains, like your computers, peopled by a faceless crowd of buyers and sellers, people trading in their poverty or in other people's riches. Then I imagined him coming home, eating his breakfast, eating his lunch, eating his dinner, eating that pale manna alone over a table or the floor of whatever room still had four walls and a painted ceiling; the manna, unavoidably, staining his beard. Alive, you know, alive.

And in that moment it was like Clyde Thompson poked his tongue at me and sheared my father's beard and broke the ceramic bowl of oatmeal and pronounced me an orphan twice. So

very far from realizing the grave meaning of his words, because hard as they try, papers don't have ears for words.

In the end, whether I knew it or not, I was fatherless for four years, and whether I liked it or not, I had another father, and whether I agreed to it or not, I was going to boarding school and I was getting his good education, and my other father, who was sick, was about to die as well.

One morning a teacher woke me up and took me to the principal's office. This was not uncommon as I was very rude to all my teachers. Except for one actually, a Ms. Rapp, who I don't remember much about except for my good behaviour towards her, which is a delayed way of being rude I guess. In her office, the principal said that John had died and left me an immense amount of money, "Enough for you to do nothing at all your entire life and still have enough left to give your children's children the same." There was contemptuous, unapologetic envy in her voice. "It's your decision now Anna. You can use this money, your education, your *strong* personality, to make a positive change in this world." she glanced around her shabby office, "Or you can squander it all away and end up dead. Be it lying down or walking about or sitting in some boudoir."

4.21.2021 | 1:52 PM

The principal of my boarding school had had a problem with me even before I refused to donate an “unnoticeable” sum of money to the renovation of her office. But first, and I only confess this to you, it was me who had had a problem with her. And with the teachers I had the same problem. In fact, it began already in the first week of school, and by the third week they infected the students with it too: everyone in the school found my uncle’s notebook laughable. And this was not the laughable a mother experiences when her son comes home from the war and she sees him for the first time at a train station. I mean laughable in its ugly, everyday use; Derisive and incredulous. The way a fresh politician’s dream is laughable, or a child’s way of saying purple with two r’s.

I’m happy to see you’re not wincing at John’s inheritance, David. His wife refused it and refused ferociously on their daughter’s behalf too. You know how husbands and wives are when they are no longer husbands and wives. When I asked the lawyer, a bald Jewish man with a German accent and a silver wristwatch, he said that the wife was being an hysterical Catholic and that I should just sign these papers because I got very lucky. He said that I was next in line for John’s money, and that I stood in that line alone, which meant the government might creep behind me at any moment, if it hasn’t already, and take it all to drop bombs on Europe. “A lot of money. A lot of bombs.” And the way he said “a lot” with his heavy German accent made me think of the poor wretch whose wife turned to a pillar of salt, whose city burned, a story I heard just weeks before—from Ms. Rapp I believe!

“A lot of money. A lot of bombs.” he repeated, shaking his head. And in his cold office, with a browning map of Saxony hanging over my head, all I could think of were these two hells

on earth, punished justly but disproportionately, clearing the way to every subsequent punishment.

[Objection Overruled.]

I was alone in that line because John wasn't the kind of person that donates his money to charity. You won't see his family's name glistening on planks, though I personally have seen many respectable men come to ask for his donations and receive. Curses and scorn, well deserved, accompany the Rork name wherever it goes. I think it was honest of him. I think he made an honest decision. I'm not an educated woman but something about the bribing of history has always tasted false and smelled like hospital death to me.

To me, John died around the time *Natural World* and *Science* classes have forsaken the picturebooks and devolved into their Greek forefathers *Biology*, *Physics* and *Chemistry*. I left school and immediately paid an illiterate and trustworthy homeless man a small fortune to sign some papers so I can live in an apartment downtown, overlooking the ships embarking into their ocean.

I think that I was sixteen at the time. But I can't be sure. I left my passport at the boarding school where I promised myself I'd never step foot in again, and had to buy a new one from a forger. As I walked towards the pier, where I was told the forger could be found on Wednesday mornings, I thought it should be an odd job for a forger – making a faithful reproduction of a real passport. At one point I even feared he might reject it out of respect for his craft.

The forger's name was Fred and he was a very skinny man with a wooden eye which he said was precious but I could see was made of cheap oak. Fred stood at the end of the pier where they just installed a horizontal platform for pedestrian access, he was talking and shaking hands with three or four very tall men in black coats before I approached him. The men scattered like

ravens to lean on the pinewood rails, each of them staring at a different part of the same horizon. When I told him I needed a new passport, Fred said it was getting cold and started walking back to the beach with me. Beautiful young women came to him often, having “lost their passports”, and Fred thought I was one of their sort. Out of curiosity, he asked me where I got the money. I said John. Then he nodded and smiled to himself. I smiled at him too and he looked perplexed.

A few days later he brought me a passport and told me to tell my John that Olivette is a stupid name. I said I can’t and was about to tell him that he’s stupid but he didn’t let me finish and said he understood and wished that God be with me. Later the forger’s wooden eye was my first attempt at expanding Zio Leo’s journal. That was at eighteen, per instructions⁸.

When I first moved into my apartment—which had, I made sure, no boudoir—I tried to get all the books on Leo’s list. But the booksellers were pigs back then. I would go into a store and ask if they have “Melvin’s Whale Book” or “The Jane Austen Pride” and they would either laugh at me or, and this was worse, tell me it’s not for me yet. I was only able to get the 11th edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, and *Alice in Wonderland*. Near Washington Square Park

⁸ Olivette, Anna, and Leo Gori. “Preface to the Second Edition.” Essay. In *Brown Without Generalizations*, 3rd ed., viii-x. New York, NY: Phenomenable, 2019:

This notebook may only be penned by persons: Over eighteen years treading the brown...
 Books the penner must be familiar with before he dares stain these pages or add additional stained ones:
 Baruch Spinoza *Ethica*
 Herbert Melvin’s *Whale book*
 Hermann V Helmholtz *Treatise on Physiological Optics* (volumes II and III. Vol I is wrong)
 The *Jane Austen Pride* (to understand how women think)
 The *Alice Wonderland Tales* (to understand children)
Other Recommendations:
 De Bois’ *Souls of Blacks* (especially chapters I, The Quest of The Golden Fleece, and the beautiful XI-XIII)
Encyclopedia Britannica (11th edition)
 The Poetry of G. Apollinaire and his unexpected bastards in Latin America”

though, I found Hermann Von Helmholtz book. Someone had left it leaning on the trunk of an oak with its back cover towards the park, as if the book itself were studying the stump of the tree. The book was blue and in its margins someone wrote notes and numbers and equations in Russian. I never finished it.

Buying books wasn't my only problem. People wouldn't let me do anything and expected a mother or a husband to come asking for the things I needed. I couldn't find the trustworthy homeless man who signed the deed for my home anywhere (he is, unless he died, the legal owner of that apartment overlooking the ocean) but I made other friends.

First there was Jackson, who was Black and lived at his nephew's uptown and always refused to come and sleep at my place because he said he'd "get fatally beaten or arrested but probably both at the same time." He also refused, on principle, to even hear about buying me *Souls of Blacks*. But he only hardly objected to eating lunches with me, whatever food I brought from restaurants. This he was fine with as long as we sat on opposite benches, diagonally, and talked with our necks turned away from one another.

"Did you find any Latin American bastards?" I would ask the starling hopping from one branch to the next on the pine behind me. I could hear the footsteps of a man in a suit, moving faster in order to avoid me. And I would know that when he will disappear, Jackson's silence will disappear with him.

"No. This is delicious."

"Anything?"

"I got the Whale Book. It's called *Moby Dick*. They laughed when I left the store."

"They laugh when I go there too. I think they're all mad."

A baby in a stroller that passed between us looked both ways with her blue eyes as if she were onto something, the mother smiled at me, straining her neck away from Jackson, who was wolfing a pastry. When they passed he continued. "It's the books, they smell like the madhouse."

Jackson was very sensitive, and joked about things that upset him or made him sad. One night I gave him money for liquor to celebrate his getting me Appoloinaire's *Alcools*. We recited the poems out loud, in the purple dark that falls on Washington Square park right after sunset, seated diagonally on our opposite benches. At one point we stopped and Jackson said he knows three words in French: Hommes de Bronze. I said these were easy and that one of them is already in English and he smiled and thought for a long moment. Then he said "Sure, but the French, god bless their souls, gave me these words to keep."

"I was in France Anna, real France. And not with this body, with my real body. There was shooting. And all I could hear other than shots was French people and German people and my people cursing. And when the curses and gunshots were over, all I heard was the French, chanting: Hommes de Bronze! Hommes de Bronze! Hommes de Bronze! And when they stopped chanting they actually treated us like men of bronze, like the gods. The sun would set and they'd be sharing their food with us and pouring our drinks. And we blushed and in that way we did turn a little bronze. We blushed because of wine and because it's embarrassing when you're not used to it. But it's worse when you do get used to it. It's worse because you expect more of it, you end up wanting it just because you remember it used to be there. You learn that it's not impossible to give you it. But it's not always, not everywhere, there for us like it is for you Anna. The guns disappear and the curses in three languages, and the beaches and the Mediterreanean go away too. And when everything's gone, and pale, familiar faces make their appearance, everything stinks back to reality."

For the first time, Jackson looked straight into my eyes. And I looked straight back at him, and it looked like his eyes were searching for something inside of me, something that they hated and knew was there. But he couldn't find it. And I fell in love with him the moment I blinked and didn't want to open my eyes. And in the middle of that dark warmth where I fell in love with him, he began telling me about murder.

“We did it for you, Anna. For you and your people, who else? When we were shooting, thinking of saving American lives, we saw your American life. We saw your mother and your father, that's the American lives I was killing for. Of course, in my nightmares, when Krauts were killing and raping Americans, like everyone told us they would, they were raping and killing my family, my neighbors, my friends, but when that happened, and it did for many nights, they weren't wearing uniforms and I couldn't tell if the Krauts were German or French or American. So, yes, I was killing *against* that image of my sister getting hurt. But what was I killing *for*, what was I killing to preserve? Your uncle's shiny boat and your dad's train cabin. If they'd have sent us out killing for our own people, for whatever it is we have here, there wouldn't be no Harlem's Hellfighters; same old Helldwellers.”

Jackson took a long last sip from his liquor bottle, looked towards the north exit of the park and shook his head.

“We had a bet going around. My friend said that if we kill four hundred Germans for America then you'll forgive us for being Black. Hell, you might even like us.

“I said that he's a jackass. That it'll take fifty thousand for appreciation, a hundred thousand for your forgiveness, and each and everyone of us dead so that you'll like us. I was wrong about the first two. We'll end up killing a hundred thousand for you. If we didn't make it this war we'll do it the next. But you won't appreciate it, and you definitely won't forgive us. These are your

brothers and sisters that we're killing out there! Forgive us! You'll clap at our return and I'll get scared and take cover, and you'll blame it on my crazy again and I'll stay and live beneath the table they give medals at like it was a bridge, and you'll laugh and I won't bite but I also won't come out. No. The medals are laced. I know that much."

He looked at me again, this time I could tell what his eyes were searching for. It was fear. But I was in love for the first time and was busy studying the shape of his broken nose, thinking it looked like a child's drawing of a heart. Jackson looked sad and sounded like my uncle when he was drunk. I was not afraid of him, and his eyes could tell that I wasn't, and my eyes could read his astonishment with me, which at first I happily mistook for requital.

That same astonishment kept following me wherever I went. It's your astonishment too. For eighty years now, people are searching for my fear and can't find it, or if they can I quickly make them forget about it. I sought it out myself in countless mirrors, but I don't think you can really see your fears can you David? Sometimes I would catch an accidental glimpse of it, usually on trains.

Jackson got up from the bench and almost stepped towards me before he turned around and left, Apollinaire's book under his arm, wobbling towards Washington's gate. When he walked under it his body regained balance and only his legs moved in long strides. Without turning around to say goodbye, he bent on one knee and placed the book beneath the arch. I wanted to call out to him but was embarrassed and my eyes started following the faint shadow behind him. Under the moonlight the back of his neck looked like it was made of pure silver.

4.21.2021 | 2:31 PM

At nights I met with McNally. She had red hair which I had remembered my Zio describing in one of his entries as *Ireland's Burning Brown*⁹. She was also homeless, and wore many coats, even in summer. The first thing she told me was that she had bedbugs.

“You follow the fashion and you go against it and you listen to the rumors: bedbugs, lice, Spanish Flu, Consumption, all the stickies, and you say you have'm.” She was a very funny girl. I don't think I ever thought of her as a girl. Well, she was quite older than me. But now that I think of it, she was really a very funny girl.

Unlike Jackson, McNally did come into my home, but only after nightfall. When she first came out of my bathtub I was surprised at how beautiful she was. She held all her coats in her arms and it looked like a giant's baby. Behind them I learned that she had a very fashionable body, with big breasts and milk skin and her hair was even more burning than she made it look. She liked when I read her Leo's entries, especially from his visit to Ireland. When we were at the apartment she had a soft and laughing voice, with pain tucked neatly under it, and she would cry almost every night before falling asleep or when she woke up from a bad dream. I would ask her what it was, and she'd say it was gratitude but I knew it wasn't because she had already read me some chapters of *Pride and Prejudice* by then and I could tell when a woman her age was lying.

McNally taught me her way of being a woman, which contradicted Austen's way on every turn, but “is a safer way for beautiful women to be during times of poverty and, because you never know, during times of abundance too Anna. If this was the seventeenth century, I'd be as skinny as the paper girls.” I wouldn't have minded following her lead, I wasn't looking for a

⁹ Olivette, Anna, and Leo Gori. “Travelogues.” Chapter. In *Brown* 91.

husband, Jackson had already disappeared and my mornings were reserved for reading the small collection I had and rereading my uncle's entries. But McNally's way of being a woman, though in some ways emancipating, was too much work.

She would wake up at dawn, brush her teeth with water and scotch (which I had in my house for her visits or out of some fond memory of John, or it was another one of his anonymous generousities) and rub yesterday's onion and potato skins on her neck and chin, then through her hair. Before leaving the apartment, she'd wear all her coats, one on top of the other, making sure she looked as bloated as possible. And as a final touch she took out a dark brown lipstick from one of her coats' pockets and blackened her front teeth, her left eye, and part of her upper lip with it, spitting the taste of wax with her tongue a couple of times once she was finished.

I would watch her from my window as she left the building. She'd walk briskly to the nice park across the street, her lapels hiding her face, then crouch down for a few moments beneath a large birch tree before finally starting her day at her usual bench and talking to friends. Only when winter came I could see what McNally was doing there through the thin branches. She would bend down, pick dirt from under the tree and smear it all over her face and hands and run it, like the potato and onion peels, through her hair.

I went down to the park once, not daring to approach her. She immediately knew that I was there, as if the mud-smearing had given her omniscience through the roots beneath the park, and her glance threateningly searched mine out, bidding me to leave. I sat down on a bench and had my lunch defiantly a few feet away from her. Her voice was coarse and cheerful and didn't have an ounce of pain in it, as if her throat had amnesia. Her hair was the ugliest brown I've ever seen, close to what I'd imagined trenches looked like from the black and white pictures.

Most of the time I would stand guard by the window. I'd see the homeless men arriving at the park, noticing her under her birch tree, then turning around anxiously. I'd see them lick their palms and smear their hairs straight, pick up flowers from the farthest edges of the park, or make brown bouquets with foliage and a string from their trousers. Then they would offer it to her, as if she were some saint, and she would crumble the bouquets in her hands and poke her tongue at the gifters and break their hearts. They knew and I knew and McNally knew that she was a beautiful woman with a fashionable body. And while she would be warring against them over that very simple, unchangeable fact, I'd stand perplexed at the window and try to forget what she looked like when she came out of the tub the night before.

4.21.2021 | 2:42 PM

Of course—or somehow might be the better word—there were rumors about me on Manhattan’s ground floor, spreading through the parks and streets, cascading as if they were flash floods down concrete stairs and towards the underground tunnels; rumors reaching the most uncanny corners of the island that even then was no longer an island but already a small extension to an inexhaustible land. An extension and a land to which I turned my back without ever turning my head, perhaps because I’d never forgotten the end of Lot’s story from Ms. Rapp, and was left with the despicable image of a father and his two daughters seeing what they already knew by the scent of sulfur filling their nostrils: how miracles could, on a whim, turn against men. Yes, now I remember these rumors well (it’s amazing how the moment these childish words come to my lips they spurt a fresh muddle of memories to mind).

These rumors were propagated by McNally’s unrequited lovers. Moving from the lips of these maddened men, to their own ears at first, then to the ears of other madmen, ears that were inches apart from their lips, or a city block away, or farther, traveling through said underground tunnels, or by car (rarely) or plane (only once) or rumors that passed from one tongue to the next when wrestling love from one another in bed or in the streets and bridges dedicated to such activities at night. There might have been other ways, I forget.

And these were the rumors: I was McNally’s younger sister, separated from her at birth and reconnected by the grace of the United States and the poverty it affords all incoming busybodies. Or I was her lover, or sister-lover, or spiritual apprentice or guide. I was her social worker (which was a new phenomenon back then and the talk of the town). I was her rich cousin from Manchester and Paris (I had blonde hair); I was her poor transvestite cousin from Paris or

Dublin (I had manly features at seventeen). I taught Portugese in Angola (a place I'd never heard of and thought sounded imaginary; an ideal geometrical state in Plato's dreams).

And these rumors would reach my ears fresh from McNally's lips at night. She'd run her hand through my hair in the way I'd wished Jackson would, and tell me, for example, "Today everyone agreed that you're my imaginary friend. Lowel said it. And Ann smacked her forehead as if she had a eureka, as if Lowel was some kind of daemon himself. And Charlie slapped his knee a couple of times and let out a roaring laugh that rose above everyone's bodily percussions. I was clappin..."

And when I asked if she had defended me, if she'd protested my reality, McNally admitted to have protested only faintly. Then she said—to my horror!—that she'd ended up playing along.

"Yes," she'd told them "she's a small scale mass hysteria of mine, and you're all compromised!"

And I remember—some things I remember so clearly, without even saying the words—that I placed my hand on the blanket where it covered her thigh, and drilled my nails into her. Whether to show her that I'm angry or to remind myself that I'm real I forget. Though it makes no actual difference, she wouldn't budge.

I'm sure there were other rumors too, on the other side of town. Those conjured by Jackson's veteran friends. But these rumors he preferred to keep to himself because in them I'd always end up in some degraded and violated position. For some time I urged him to tell me what it was his friends were saying about me, but he would always shrug, sitting on his bench across from mine and looking elsewhere, and pout and say he had no idea what I was talking

about, that his friends lived all the way uptown, that for that matter it's like thinking that there were rumors about me across the Atlantic, in French, in the trenches.

I'm glad he never told me those rumors.

4.21.2021 | 2:55 PM

I've also never been ashamed to say, David, I have a phobia of my loved ones committing suicide. When McNally would stand and stare at the ocean during a storm, I'd make sure she stood pressed against the window so that she wouldn't have the momentum, running, to break through and jump down. Or, if during the day I'd imagine a life with Jackson, who reminded me at times of Mr. Darcy, I would dream, that same night, of Jackson shooting himself in the face, popping his heart-shaped nose and staining the Washington Square fountain forever. And this phobia persisted, even though some very intelligent people, very intelligent, told me that suicide isn't that bad. In that way it's like a phobia. Not because my loved ones no longer kill themselves—just like the claustrophobic isn't pathologized for thinking, wrongly, that a space is confined—but because even if they do, it isn't that bad. It's a natural impatience for some people, isn't it, to want to reach the inevitable climax of their lives?

A sensitive man once told me that suicide is not unlike rapid ejaculation. Actually he said, with tears rolling from his eyes to my pillowcase, that if an orgasm is, as the French say, a small death, then rapid ejaculation is a small suicide. That it's the same in the sense of who really suffers the loss and who, in the end, just feels unaccomplished in their own silence. Even you, because you were kind enough to make me tea, are now a part of my phobia. And if there's something I regret forgetting it's the strong belief I once held that It won't be in front of me. For a while, I could even think that suicide isn't really about anything. I was able to make myself believe that it's just there in some cases and isn't in others.

The Brown Trout that Nardo carried over towards me this afternoon (d. 4.3.1922 t. 17:45), on our first day out of Karmøy, still had the water's moving reflection color its bottom at

least fifty percent azure whenever the Swede's swinging arms would hold him overboard. It looked like he was holding a giant viking's baby, I only saw its last flap. The black spots, like the spots one sees when waking up parched in the desert at noon, hid the intense brown of its slippery skin. This is not the first fish I see whose brown is rooted deeply in azure, and I am becoming more and more certain that the sea breeds an azure-brown rather than the earth's brown, which is rooted in red. Whoever said divorce is unnatural? Although the earth keeps hers reddish and the sea raises his with a luminous blue tint, the child is the same brown child, nudging for reconciliation at the beach.¹⁰

¹⁰ Ibid. 81.

4.16.2021 | 2:47 PM

Anna was talking about suicide

[Objection Sustained.]

For a moment, both Anna and David were silent. Then Anna excused herself and went to the bathroom again. The house was getting colder. David noticed that the tea was done but waited for Anna to close the bathroom door before getting up and making another. As she walked away, he felt that with eyes in the back of her head she was watching over him and with a pair of lips, a little lower down her spine, and younger than the chapped ones that told him her tale, she prayed in a whisper that he wouldn't kill himself just then. But David never thought seriously about suicide. To think seriously about suicide, he told himself, I could only do on a rooftop or with a gun lying around.

The door to the bathroom closed and David got up and went to the kitchen. His phone was in his hand—he must have reached for it right before he got up—and he asked his assistant, cautiously, who was Anna Olivette. Results rained onto his screen. Not a heavy, torrential summer rain but the fine rain of fall. He looked out the kitchen window again. In the dark, the treetops merged into a thick hovering bush, with the blue mountains peeking through the few holes that fall poked in it. In less than a minute the aluminum pot was on the stove and the only light left in the kitchen came from David's phone. Anna's Wikipedia page was small. It had an Early Childhood part, which corroborated the tragic suicides of her parents in three succinct lines, with a reference to Clyde Thompson's 1929 article. Then there was a *Brown Without Generalizations* section, which, to David's surprise, cast doubt on the existence of any uncle Leo, but which was full of praise for Anna from two critics—one art and one literary—each with her own extensive Wikipedia page. There was a link to a long quote from the book, captioned

raison d'être and attributed to Anna, though David was convinced that it must have been written by her uncle:

“When asked near the turn of the century to sort skeins of wool by color, a Mr. R. botched the test. According to the Holmgren’s color test, he was, to color, as blind as a bat. Green strands appeared in his Red pile. Oranges, along with silvers and greys, invaded his Yellow pile. In the Green, pinks and reds. In each of these piles, however, confounded and chaotic as they were, a skein of brown made an appearance. Everywhere Mr. R looked, he saw brown. Or, in Brown the man saw every color we asked him for. I only stood there, beside Dr. Thomson, and recorded the results. I was eighteen years old and a drunk. A charity case of the kind Doctor. But when I boarded ship again, a week later, my mind was assailed by Mr. R’s inclination towards browns. Looking at the sea, which Homer called Red, and we call Blue, and Mr. R probably saw as brown, I began thinking for the first time about the great problems that light affords us from dawn till dusk. Light, whose music is color, has for silence brown. The silent brown that lies patient at all depths, girdling corals and roots alike. The brown that Europe’s man gradually stripped from his skin, generation after generation, by hiding in caves and thick forests and beneath every passing cloud; Hiding, that is, from the music of light and the image of brown, turning pale in the process.

I refused my shipmates’ wine and drank only ale and rum until I could afford scotch again. Silence. The voices that urged me to refuse everything and lie down and wither in grapes ceased. From these brown drinks only a somber silence proceeded. Solitude, on deck, beneath deck, at sea, finally prevailed in brown’s silence...”

“...In every category Mr. R. placed a brown skein! Hinting at the greatest movements of unification and fragmentation. The echoing bombs and the foaming waves that follow and

*threaten to eat the six islands we call home. All, I realized, are brown's descendants. What did that man see in each skein of brown? What brown was it that he dared call green and in the same breath violet? Sadly, I am not blind to the mischievous fractures of light, and can too easily tell between the red flower of a Geranium and the green of its foliage. Condemned to miss that wholeness which Mr. R sees so effortlessly in his world."*¹¹

¹¹ Olivette, Anna, and Leo Gori. "Beginnings." Chapter. In *Brown 2-4*

4.22.2021 | 2:33 PM

And how it is that everyone denies Leo's existence I cannot bring myself to understand. Denying the simple fact of his being born because a single sheet of paper is missing, a few sheets of paper, or the copies of these papers. Denying his inexplicable birth while complying with his undying, persistent thought; denying him while complying blindly with his deranged—yes deranged—theories on brown and the webs I wove around them so as to let his voice linger in the face of doubt, perhaps so that I can compare it with mine, so that I can finally know for certain whose voice it was that asked “what red Zio Leo?” his or mine.

And this doubt has transformed through the years. Metamorphosing from polite, neatly written phrases on paper to the yawning and faceless voices of clerks and the cold metallic voices of clerkettes and finally to the violent and well-lit ERROR messages on government websites, denying his existence, upon request, even in languages he had never known.

This doubt grows monstrous, overshadowing any trace of belief, beginning to nibble—I admit—even at my own memories; the voices of experts on old age as sharp as marsupial front teeth, so that I have nothing left but to have faith in god. In Armageddon and in the Resurrection. Hoping for the day of judgement where all casualties would stand erect and hear a being disguised as a man or a man disguised as a being recount their lives. And among these living dead, surprised and hyperventilating for the fun of remembering how to breathe, like the swimmer now safe upon the shore, Leo will stand, and the forensic sceptics and dime historians and legal fanatics will stop their incessant denying of his existence and finally bid him entry into history, unbar the future from him and take heed.

And when, finally, the dead will arrive, Leo with his grey flesh will be among them and nod at me with benevolence and gratitude. And in a sulfurous field of white and grey and red my

parents would hold me by my shoulders and arms and claw at my face to seek my eyes, but will not be able to find them because they'll be fixed, ablaze, on the man who inspired their absence. And at that moment all the viruses and famines and shocks and violations will at last overwhelm my lungs and my stomach and my finally fragile heart, and I'll succumb to what the doctors call Death but is only half a death. Because Death is where zio Leo is now, where the tribes who lay muted under our feet and miles beneath our graves are, where most men end up but not I. I am already inscribed and will live forever on lips. Until his appearance will finally wipe me out and turn me into a footnote, an appendix, undead and at rest and in peace.

“Eyes Like the Eyes of a Man, and a Mouth Speaking Pompous Words”

A Court Commentary by Dr. Daniel Yochai

Eyes Like the Eyes of a Man, and a Mouth Speaking Pompous Words

...In fact, due to my stubborn ineptitude when it comes to technological apparatus, I could not follow what voice came from which box in the grid. I even thought, in my confusion, that this witness was a human witness and not the “first of its kind artificially intelligent witness” whose testimony my Liati had cordially invited me to watch.

But can you blame me? The voice – Human. The manner of speaking – Human. And perhaps most deceiving was the unusual attention and care afforded to it by the most clannish men and women to sit in judgement over *people* in this world. But I digress.

First, then, how I got to this virtual courtroom. The week prior to the proceedings, my indispensable Eliphaz returned from his weekly errand in Jerusalem bearing a small pile of letters for me. Most of it junk mail (I’m sure even our ancestors are these days pestered with Viagra commercials for the dead: “מְבִירָה עִמִּיקְתָּא לְאִיגְרָא רָמָא!”¹). Tucked between a political flyer and a persistent bill, however, was a handwritten letter from my niece, Liat Yochai-Keller. “Knowing full well that [I] must live under a rock,” Liati excitedly described in her letter the sensation that *N.Y. v Taylor* had already become.

In short, she told me a machine was about to testify as the sole witness in a murder trial otherwise unsolvable. The details were eerily straightforward: A group of computer scientists, led by a philosopher (all probably bored out of their minds cowering beneath their libraries throughout the plague) have worked tirelessly to “use the same power of conjecture given our devices in order to target us with content” (I was lost by that point) “and extend it so that a

¹ An inversion of the Aramaic עִמִּיקְתָּא לְבִירָא רָמָא לְאִיגְרָא רָמָא, Me-Igra Rama LeBira Amikta: “From a high roof to a deep pit”, originally denoting a sharp decline in stature.

I follow here Ratosh et al. in keeping the Aramaic, in the same manner the Latin is retained, when translating Hebrew texts into English (Y.M).

personal device could act as witness in court, articulate with over 87% accuracy what its owner [the defendant] was thinking and with 41% accuracy the thoughts of the co-present victim which the machine learned from a popular book the victim had written...”. The letter was full of such technicalities, which Liati apparently found exciting and that spilled out of her like she was a pamphlet. Skipping to the final paragraph I learned that, thanks to my niece’s cunning, I was among the one hundred and twenty jurists invited to watch the trial unfold live. All I had to do was copy a link to my address bar. A link that, like in her middle-school years, she had printed, cut, and pasted to the handwritten letter. Apparently, Liati was speaking figuratively and therefore incorrectly when she said that she knew I lived under a rock.

Though for the past two decades I’ve done my best to elude courtrooms and conferences, soirees and galas, masturbatory lectures and conferrals, I found this case fascinating enough to attend. Not that I am one of those technophiles (I’ve only just heard of them recently) who won’t stop reciting A.I.A.G’s quatrain "Howl"² in their labyrinthine threads, quite the contrary. I am a proud, longstanding technophobe, one of the three banished founders of the “Dark-Sky” movement for our triad’s “extremist views”. And here before me an opportunity to see the final infiltration, thanks in no small part to the cowardice inherent to the ruling Ripeness Doctrine, of technology into justice.

The decision to attend the proceedings, in spite of my humble abode, meant some difficulties must be surmounted. Eliphaz, who grew up nearby, suggested that for power we should get a generator. He found what must have been an old ship’s engine at one of the sects living in the valley and brought the raucous rolling and into the cave (if only I knew how terrible noise-pollution was back in my “Dark-Sky” days we’d have called it “Silent-Night”). A

² I haven't seen,/the best mind./My generation./Run. [Y.M]

computer Eliphaz borrowed from the primary school which he cleaned on Fridays. The internet is everywhere these days; a sectarian has been trading hotel Wi-Fi passwords for cigarettes.

...

At one of these irrelevant but fascinating points—it might have been right when Anna was telling David of the fake passport—my computer, which has been nagging me for a while about plugging it in, quit me entirely and turned black and impassive, leaving me to face myself. In the dark cave, lit only by a candle, I saw my face as I haven't seen it for a long time. The smooth, black screen softened my features, and I looked younger, naïve, and more vulnerable. It was as if my upstairs neighbor was trying to calm a younger version of myself, one that has made shameful and vulgar court appearances with the same naïveté and vulnerability that stared me in the face just then. And staring into that black mirror, I felt like I had heard of it before, in a rumor. A rumor so insidiously widespread that everyone knows it as nothing more than a rumor. A rumor like God.

Dr. Daniel Yochai, May 2021