

TRAMPLED

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a novel

written as Gaud Rockefeller
by Eddie Corona

part of the Brick Jayne universe

“Dragons are real like a *motherfucker*!?” Marcus said. “They are *real*, and I can tell you how it *is*!!?”

Squire ate his sandwich on a school picnic table. The year before Santa Barbara high school had been an open campus. A school shooting, the year before in *Oxnard*, prompted a lot of the regional educational facilities to close up... “*at least temporarily*.”

Marcus shook his head because Squire wouldn’t say anything. Marcus looked at Squire, and wanted to knock the bologna and cheese sandwich out of his *hand*. He wanted to jump the fence and run for *Taco Tia*... where they used to go the year before every day when they were *juniors*.

Squire finally said, “If you let me swallow my *food*,” he drank from a carton of chocolate milk, “I would listen to you!?” He looked at Marcus, looked at some pretty girls as they walked in the distance—their school books were close to their chests—and he thought that it was over. He shouldn’t *be* there. He should be on the set of a show like *The OC* where he could go up to the girls... instead of listening to his wrestling buddy.

Marcus said, “I don’t want to *wrestle*, any longer!! I want to go out for track, and I want *that* to be the way I get my *letter*!?”

Squire opened his jacket, and showed Marcus his chest through his shirt. “*This* is how I got my letter last year, and if you work *out* today, you can get yours as *well*!?”

“I’m not going to *do it!*!” Marcus said. He took off to his class after hearing the lunch bell. He felt like he was in a daze, and didn’t want to go to class.

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“So Marcus is *tellin’* me, Holly, that his family raised him to be a *Christian*... and that he was gettin’ all these mixed *messages* because he was in *BIOLOGY!!!* And he was thinkin’ of bein’ a *doctor*, by then, instead of a sportscaster!!! And he was *confused* because...”

Squire was interrupted. “The *evolution* thing!!! He thought he was an *ape*, again, because that’s what they’ve been *doin’* to those guys since...”

“It’s more than that, because his mother started talkin’ to him about *Morris*, or someone along those lines, and Marcus changes his mind on his research topic for economics—it was supposed to be about *Sports Center*, and the viability of more broadcasters... just in case he should opt out for a *news anchor* job!”

“He’s good *lookin’*, Squire,” Holly said, “and he has a *Denzel Washington* flair about him!” She raised her skirt a bit when more of the prep squad came in. They were at a Carl’s Junior, and they were having a good time smashing their crisscut fries into ranch dressing on the mats in front of them. “I wouldn’t date him to save my life because my dad already *said*...”

“*That if you date a black man, he wouldn’t fund your way to college, next year,*” Squire said. He sipped from his chocolate shake, then grabbed the last three of the crisscut fries and shoved them in his mouth. “I think that’s why he’s *doin’* his research, *because*...”

“*Babe!!!*” Holly got up and grabbed her cheerleader friend by the neck. She felt good to see her. Squire had to wait for the rest of his explanation.

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Marcus made his way to MacArthur Park in Los Angeles, the next day. He had a cousin whom lived there, and was glad that it was Saturday (the prior night, his school had beat neighboring *Oxnard* by a whole *shit* load of points in football—Holly cheered for them, and Marcus started to fall in love with her). His cousin talked to him, and suggested he not touch the “evolution thing” for the economic research project. Marcus asked him if it would be good for his *English* final. “You can’t do that, *either*,” Jaylin said. “They want *women* to be English majors, and if you’re *successful* at gettin’ your points across, you’ll lose your athletic scholarship to the *University of Santa Barbara*.”

“I might go to *San Diego*, I told you, and...” Marcus looked around at the joggers and wondered why he wasn’t out there working his body.

“Why didn’t you go out for *track*, last year!? You’d have a leg up, and you wouldn’t be *worrying* about this mess!?” Jaylin looked around at the joggers. There were a few women, but most of them were men.

“I *told* you that I was working all year to save up for *that*!?” He pointed to his van. It was an old *Econoline*—black, and faded to the point it almost seemed *rusty brown*—and it used as much gas as most *trains* took, or so he thought. “I needed a *ride*!?”

“So you’re doin’ this piece for economics or *English*, and you’re set on the *topic*!?” Jaylin conferred. He wanted to roll a joint in front of Marcus, but decided to wait.

“I don’t *know*!?” Marcus left because he didn’t want to contemplate it, any longer. His cousin had a point. If he did it for economics, the teacher was going to ask the *relevance* of an evolution topic, and if he did it for *English*, he might get blasted out of the water. He wanted to do it for economics, and validate it by talking about “Jimmy the Greek.” Rumor had it there was a *sportscaster*, a long time ago, whom said that black people were more successful athletes than whites because they had more *ligaments*. That didn’t make a lot of sense to Marcus because there were almost as many white people in the NFL as there were *black* people. Then, he opened up a Rand Atlas and found out the black people consisted of roughly twelve percent of the United States population—same for Hispanics—and *two percent* was for people of the *Hebrew* descent. That surprised him because of all of the people he was fond to see the movies (*and home video*) like Adam Sandler, Ben Stiller, Jon Stewart, and *Tom Arnold*. He couldn’t *believe* it.

Marcus decided to keep the topic for his future studies. He didn’t want to get controversial so soon so he talked about Chris Berman and the rest of the *ESPN* gang.

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Holly Rydell made it into UCSB without much of a problem. She didn’t date Marcus, whom lettered in wrestling *and* track, and she didn’t date *Squire* (she *wanted* to date Squire, but her father inferred that she ought to stick with a neighbor boy for her homecoming dance... and her *prom*, and he promised her he could make it worth it by buying her an *automobile* when she went to college). Holly was mixed up, inside, and it *started* to bug her, the same things that bugged Squire and Marcus when they talked... and she started to do research upon it. She was told, like Jaylin had told Marcus the year before at MacArthur Park, that “the evolution thing” was touchy... and a *lot* of people thought it was as touchy, if not *more* touchy than abortion had been in the years passed.

Holly stayed quiet. She opened herself up to having a “*real*” boyfriend. Now that she was at UCSB, she wouldn’t have to worry about a thing.

Marcus wound up going to San Diego State University. They lost touch with one another. Squire was able to get a partial ride through a grant to *UCLA*. He lettered in three sports, and he was proud when he first stepped on campus. It was everything he dreamt *Westwood* would be.

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“Marcus Blacksmith” was a national name by the end of Holly’s sophomore year in college. He was a walk-on for the Aztecs, and when their premier senior running back blew out a knee midway through Marcus’ second season, he filled in, and he filled in *well*. Joseph “Squire” Wilton was not such the name as “Marcus Blacksmith.” He made it for the shotputting squad, but he couldn’t hold his own in football... because the coach said they didn’t need any other six-one *linebackers* (he wouldn’t settle for strong safety, when offered, because he believed he didn’t have the speed to keep up with the tight ends of division one college football). He had a girlfriend—they had coffee together, often, on campus—and he *started* to think that college shotputters were really trained to throw *grenades* for war officials upon graduation. He pushed ideas like that out of his head... unless he needed something “controversial” for his college papers. He and his girlfriend *Claire* went to the Getty *Museum*, occasionally, and they were always left grabbing for more. Once in a while, they would go to the Norton Simon museum after home games played at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, and they’d make love in local hotels before heading back to campus.

Holly Rydell *watched* Marcus Blacksmith on television, quite often, and she would brag to her sorority sisters that she *knew* that guy back in high school... but she had a hard time saying “Marcus Blacksmith” so often because she knew him back in Santa Barbara by his first name, primarily.

Joseph “Squire” Wilton—*Joey* to only his girlfriend, and *Joe* to everyone else—shed his nickname, and started to make an identity for himself. He thought, often, of what Marcus wanted to do with his biological research topic, and decided to drop it. He would talk about it to Claire—*Claire Wilton*, if everything went well in the future—and she would drop the subject. “If it ain’t *broken*, don’t *fix* it!?” she would say. “We’re havin’ a good *time*, here!?” She looked high into his smile. Five-two and six-one—it made for a spectacle when they walked down the halls. “We don’t need to *blow* it by adding a *race* issue!?”

How am I going to get a job if I’m not taken seriously? Joseph thought. He said to Claire, “You’re *right*, honey!?” He kissed her.

By the time he was a junior at the school, he was ready for a *tad* of controversy. He wrote a paper concerning Jimmy the Greek, whom had been fired from CBS for purported racial remarks. In his final paper for *Psychology 231—Sports Psychology In The United States*, he wrote midway through:

...so the problem therein lies that there is blatant hypocrisy, in this country, and it is indicative of the fact that the Columbia Broadcasting System openly referred to Jimmy Snyder as “Jimmy the Greek.” When questioned, I have to say that I am an Anglo-American of British descent, but if I have to refer to my friend, Marcus Blacksmith of the San Diego State University

Aztecs, I have to wonder, "Is he Afro-American? Black American? Negro? African-American? Or has the politically correct lingo of our contemporary world changed again without me knowing? Am I in *danger* of losing my job if I get it wrong?"...

...the issue no longer is if we are prejudiced to the black man—there are millionaires in this country whom can help them, and they often do through the United Way's programs for the youth and low-income families—but, *Does the white man have rights to express himself now that he has become the collective minority in the state of California?* I would say "no," we have not reached that point yet, because this is a *national* issue, and anything that happens in California is reflected in the rest of the United States, if not the rest of the world. Chaucer, in *The Canterbury Tales*, writes that "...the guilty think that all talk is of themselves..."¹ Is California *guilty* of something to believe that the rest of the nation would follow suit if we were to allow "white men's clubs" for the struggling men whom are trying to find their identities? That is a topic for a philosophy class moreso than it is for this one, so I will diverge by declaring that...

Joseph Wilton—never Joseph "*Squire*" Wilton when typing term papers—cited Ray Manzarek in his research from the Doors. He talked about the UCLA connection to Jim Morrison, and hoped it would score points with his professor. He talked about how Ray Manzarek was known to have said that it was *okay* for the black people of the country to be blatantly racists because they didn't have the *power*. He said white people *should* refrain from using racist language because it was dangerous, when used in sensitive forums. Personally, Joe Wilton thought the tide was turning against the white man, in the country, and he wanted to fight back without arms. He didn't cite the Chaucer work correctly (his three by five cards were scattered across his room, and he cross-referenced the wrong source), and his teacher said that a lot of his conjections were unsubstantiated postulates which needed further work. In all, he got a "B+" for his paper, and he was *pleased*.

Joseph "*Squire*" Wilton went to Baskin Robbins with his girlfriend on the night he received his composition back. She smiled at him with glee, he was very much in love, and then he asked her what

¹ Barry Sanders, Sudden Glory—Laughter As Subversive History (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1995), p. 166.

“conjections” meant. She said, “Open to *conjecture*!!! ‘*Speculation*,’ in other words!!”

“Oh!!” Joe Wilton said. “I couldn’t find it in my *dictionary* when I got home!!”

“You need to throw away your pocket *dictionary*, then!!”

He kissed her and they were in love. Together, they listened to UFO when they got back to the dormitory.

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Joe Wilton turned down the stereo in Clarissa’s dorm after they made out. He started to talk about his geology report which he had to have done by the following Friday. He said, “With all these *ideas* in my head... I don’t know what to *think*!!”

“Halite, gypsum, and anhydrite!! I will *help* you with this!! Inner core, outer core, Gutenberg, discontinuity!!! I’m going to *help* you!! Lower mantle, transition *zone*, and upper mantle!! It’s really not that *hard*!! Mohorovičić, discontinuity, *crust*!! It’s really quite *easy*!!” With each word, she gave a shake of her hips. She sang, afterward.

Joe Wilton admired her voice but pestered, “I have all these *racial* things going on in my head because I miss *Marcus*—my old frien’ from up state—and I miss... *Claire*... I’m going to need you to do more than *dance* for me... because I can see *dancers* on Sunset if I take off down the *street*!!”

“I *know*!!” Clarissa said. She asked, “Can you start calling me ‘*Clarissa Amanda Wilton*’?? Because I think I’m going to *marry* you when this is all *over*!!”

“You study the *Rubin* pyramid over *there*!!” Joe pushed her aside when she came to seduce him, “And I’ll study at the mantle over *here*!!” He thought for a couple of seconds, and he looked at the diagram in *front* of him. He said, “I used to wonder why I had to study geology to get my sports education *diploma*... but I’m starting to *see*!! I think this is *racism* in a covert *way*!!! And the strata that I’m looking at represents the different classes of *society*!!”

Clarissa ripped the page from his book and put it in her shirt. “You don’t need to *know* about this, *yet*!!” Joseph wanted it back, and she knew it. She crumbled it up, and tossed it his way.

In the corner of the dorm, there were a pair of dolls. One of them was Chucky, and he was rubbing his ass into the face of a *leprechaun*. Joseph got the idea from World Wrestling Entertainment—the *WWE*—and it was supposed to symbolize an attempt to lose superstition. He glanced at the guy in the top hat with Chucky’s butt in his face. He said, “I’m starting to think of Marcus’ *theory* of evolution, as *well*!! And I’m starting to think that *enchanted shorties* really *exist*!!”

“You’re *fuckin’* with me!!” Clarissa said to Joe. She combed his scrubby chin with her fingers.

“I’m going to do my *report*!” he said to her. “Please keep *dancin’* if you want to... but please don’t blame me if you don’t do well on your *report*!! Or your *tests* next week!!”

Claire brightened up. “I need a *mocha*!.” She walked out the room, and could *feel* the people hitting on her before she even left for the door. She was that good looking.

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“While you were away, I was on the internet—I got bored from studying—and I found *this*!.” Joe Wilton tilted the computer monitor to Clarissa’s direction

Claire held her mocha in her hand and was astonished by what she was seeing. She had brought home (she felt *home* in her dorm and never referred to it as anything else while she was with *Joe*) a *World Weekly News* article in which two twin bikers were on Harleys. They were six hundred and fifty pounds, *each*, and they rode along in the Arizona desert. Claire couldn’t believe what she was seeing in the two guys (*apparently*) because her jaw *dropped* when they started kissing each other in the naked fashion. They were rubbing one another’s fat rolls, and one guy started to put his finger into the other one’s butt. The guy on the left’s mustache had mayo on it *ostensibly*, and the black/ silver makeup of it seemed to remind her of cinnamon tortilla chips from down the road for some reason. She couldn’t believe it, and asked, “Do you think it’s computer *animation*?? Or do you think those guys are for *real*!?” She got closer to the screen and set down her cup on the table. “That *could* be a *fat suit*!.”

“You were telling me that I should buy a *motorcycle* to save money on *gas*... and I *bought* this—it rated at nine ninety-five on my *debit* card—to show you that...” Joe didn’t know what to say, and he gladly accepted a french kiss from Clarissa.

“I *wanted* you to buy a motorcycle, but I was *joking* because we’re not out of *college* yet!! And I said, ‘*They ride motorcycles!! Why can’t you?!*’” She was amazed. She asked, “What *else* did you find when I was away??” She kissed him on the forehead.

“I got some Chinese ladies puking in each other’s mouths from the same *web site* and they’re in their birthday suits in a *tub*... but that’s not what I want to *talk* about!! Oh!!! I have a lady from *Mexico* whom claims to be *Britney Spears*... and she’s *ridin’ a donkey without clothes on*... if you know what I *mean*!!!”

“Shut the fuck *up*!.” she said... but she was happy.

Joseph Wilton started to talk about *extraordinary fable*, and he had never seen six-hundred-and-fifty-pound guys riding motorcycles. He never saw anything *close* to it. He said that it was myth—*maybe* a fabrication of computer video—and that he finished studying for the night regarding geology. He cracked his archeology book, and he started to think about the things that were taught in his preceding year’s *mythology* class. He was thinking that fat guys were *real*, no doubt, and he had seen believable stories on Ricki Lake and the like... but to ride *motorcycles*!? He started to think about the tall guy at the *Ripley’s* exhibit on Hollywood Boulevard—it was a hop, skip, and a jump away from his study hall, and he liked to go there to release his clouded head on occasion—and remembered that the tallest man ever was *white*...

and he was surprised. It was a guy that was more than eight feet tall. The *shortest* person was white as well, and she stood at about two and a half feet from the best of his memory. He remembered thinking *not* to trust stereotypes, and his *chemistry* class taught him a thing about extrapolation. He remembered putting dots on a grid to predict temperature in the Kelvin sense in relation to pressure and volume. It wasn't perfect but if enough dots were plotted, a general grip of direction could be predicted by a linear form. Every now and then, a measurement was taken which was erroneous—a “dot off the map”—and it occurred because he wasn't careful... or because “God wanted it that way” as he would tell his professor when asked why it didn't align with everything else. The *white* guy was like that, in his mind, and he was a “dot off the map.” By and large, he would have expected the largest man to look a lot like *Shaquille O'Neal*, and he would have expected the shortest person to look a *little* like Gary Coleman—he didn't know why—but it shocked him to see that both were white... and the “off the map” teeny-tiny *lady* looked a lot like a dwarf. As a matter of fact, that's what the caption *called* her.

“I don't think those guys *exist*, but if they do... they *surely* don't ride Harley *Davidsons*!! I think it was a photo op, and I think they *simulated* 'em riding for the cover of your *paper*!!” Joe said. He drank from some of Clarissa's mocha. It was lukewarm by then.

“*I know* it was a photo *op*!!” she said. She approached him, and hugged him. She kissed him on the side of the lips and then Joe felt *trapped* by her, of all things. He started to study *fox hunting* from his explorations of outlandish history from the prior year, and he felt like a *fox* perpetually pursued by a predator. It sucked for him.

* * *

Joe and Claire headed for the Griffith Observatory when all of their studying was done. They didn't need to go there for academic reasons. They wanted to go there for aesthetics. On the way over they talked about myths and the power of culture. Joe stated, “Do you know where *los dos* busiest *McDonald's* are in *California*???” with a semi-Spanish accent.

“Westwood and *Hollywood*?!?” Clarissa joked. She laughed.

“No! Fontana, California and... *Barstow*!!”

“*Why*?” Claire demanded.

“*Vegas*! An hour away from L.A. you stop for your first restroom break in *Fontana*... and then you shit in *Barstow* right before the final *stretch*!!”

“What's your fuckin' *point*?!?” she wanted to know.

“There's an *AM/PM* that people keep talkin' about in *Fontana*!! There was a maroon-haired guy *there* and he had blue hair sometimes... and once in a while, he would dye his hair *yellow*!!”

“*So*? People do that on *Sunset* all the time!! Right around *show time* if you have a band ready to *play*!!”

“No!! Not in *Fontana*!! In *Fontana*, you’re *blue collar*!! And if you deviate, you get kicked *out*!! You go to jail because they accuse you of bein’ on *drugs*!! But here in Westwood and Hollywood, it’s practically *expected*!! It’s *normal*! It’s almost a *sin*, if I can use that word, to *be* a square in this *CITY*!!”

“So what’s your *point*!? I don’t get it!?” Clarissa drank from a chocolate shake. She picked up the habit from her boyfriend Joe “*Squire*” Wilton.

“Well, *internet* rumor had it that you could stop for gas at AM/PM, you could head to McDonald’s for burgers and a *leak* break... and then you headed on your way to Vegas for a good *vacation*!?”

“*And*?” Clarissa asked.

“They couldn’t *find* the maroon-haired guy there!! They think it was a *symbol* of the high school team’s *colors*!! Maroon and gray are the team’s *colors*, and they *KICKED EVERYONE’S ASSES* during the eighties in high school football!! Even our Charles White got his ass spanked there—it was actually his *nephew*—and Crespi lost to them even though they were supposed to *win*!!” He looked at Clarissa, liked her cleavage, and thought he was a madman for putting points together that seemed to not make sense. He didn’t feel like a *student* away from Westwood. He felt like a *madman*. He said, “The *maroon* guy is a *MYTH*!!! Clarissa, I *tell* you that it’s a *myth*... and the *parents*, I’m guessing, told their *kids* they could see a guy with maroon... or blue hair to *satisfy* them when they stopped!! I *went* there last year on the way to Laughlin and there is no such *person*!! And the *employees* didn’t remember a maroon-haired guy... nor did they *remember* a *blue-haired* guy!!! I think people did it for economics!!”

“Are you going to tell me more about McDonald’s...? or are you going to *go*?” Clarissa pointed at a *powderlime*-colored light in front of Joe, and saw a tinge of anger when he felt insulted.

“McDonald’s *by the way* is the second largest employer in the United States behind the actual *government*!! Did you *know* that??” Joe drank from his soda.

“You’re not taking *econ*!! Where did you hear *that*??” Clarissa dropped some of her shake on her lap after trying to spoon too much of it, and after the car hit a pothole.

“Social circles at *school*! And they said that the *original* McDonald’s is located in *San Bernardino*, contrary to the fact that people believe it was in *Illinois*!! Another *myth*!!” Joe gulped his soda. He couldn’t wait to get to the observatory telescopes.

“The first *franchise* is in Illinois—I already *heard* that one—and yes, the first actual McDonald’s was build in San Bernardino where *E Street* is at a lot of where car *cruisers* went... and *Bruce Springsteen* did not build it... contrary to popular belief!!”

“So why don’t people go to *that* one since it’s not too far off from the other one in *Fontana*, I wonder!!” Joe demanded.

“*Traffic*, bitch!! The other one is located off of Highland right before the big *Barstow* sign which everyone sees!! I think I went there once, actually, and it’s near a high school with a big *cardinal* on it!!” Clarissa scooped a solid chunk of milk shake off her dress and tossed it casually onto the pavement outside as they sped along.

“You’re a whore for knowing things *too*, I noticed!! We’re goin’ to get along *fine* when we’re married because we’re not going to be *stupid*!!” Joe started to drive up a winding road past the Greek Amphitheatre.

“Don’t count your chickens before they *hatch*,” Clarissa said. “Nothing ever goes as *planned*!!”

“It’s a hell of a *notion*!!” Joe said. He sped along, they got to the observatory, Joe felt claustrophobic when he got inside, but he liked that he had a pretty girlfriend to go along with him on outings. It made him feel *married*, already.

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“‘One-Eyed Bandit’ was written by *who*?” Clarissa asked on the way home from the observatory. It was a good time.

“Eddie Corona of *Eddie and the Whistlers*!!” Joe said. “I have it on CD and I downloaded it from *KaZaA*!!”

“*No*!! It’s *Eddie Macral* who is *in* Eddie and the Whistlers... and *rumor* has it that *Locomotive* is really the band that put the song *together*!!” Claire sipped from a chocolate shake. She couldn’t get enough of ‘em.

“*No*! That is a *lie*!! And *Locomotive* is a fictitious *band*!! Freight Train wrote songs that sounded very much *like* Eddie and the Whistlers and people didn’t like them... so they gave credit to a made-up band, *Locomotive*!!”

“*Bitch*!! You don’t know what’s going *on*!! Eddie was a *Raider* fan, and he *wrote* ‘One-Eyed Bandit’ for all his friends in *Oakland*, where he *lives*!!” Clarissa nearly choked from swallowing too much milk shake too fast.

“*Honey*!! Eddie lives in *San Francisco* and he would *not ever* wear a *Raider* hat!! He’s a *Niner* fan because of his friend, *Dave*... but he supports the *Cowboys* because his mom wanted to be a *cheerleader* for them!!”

“First of all, he *is* a Cowboy fan when he’s not rooting for the *Raiders*, and he wrote the song... It doesn’t *matter*!! What’s your *point*!?” Claire asked. She got frustrated with Joe for the first time all night (it usually only happened in the dorm).

“You brought up the ‘*One-Eyed Bandit*’ song for a reason, so I think *you* had the point to make!!” Joseph passed the light where he had earlier in the day nearly been bumped from behind because he didn’t notice the change in color.

“*Myth*!! I was tryin’ to say that it was perfect *myth*!! Everyone is trying to say *one* thing about the song, or the *band*... and we’ll never really know unless we *meet* them *would we*!?” Clarissa waited for a response. She played with her fingers.

“Rumor has it he plays at the *Coconut Teaser* on Sunset and if we can get there in time we can

watch him!!! He plays with Pearl Jam on the road and at home he *plays with...*” He looked at Clarissa and saw that she didn’t care. “I’m going to finish my geology studying tonight, and I’m going to do good on the test coming up. I can *feel* it!!”

“*Bitch!!* You are one lazy *loser* and I can’t believe they let you into *UCLA!!*” Clarissa finished her shake then started to look out of the window and into the tiny shops as they passed.

It’s because I don’t play football for the team! Joe said to himself. He wanted a new girlfriend and he couldn’t wait to go to graduate from school in another state.

* * *

“The next thing we have to study is the troposphere, the stratosphere, the mesosphere, the thermosphere, and the *ozone layer* right over the first thing I mentioned here.” Joe handed an “A+” paper to Clarissa. He suspected she was sleeping with other students because she refused to look him in the eye.

“Those are fucked up *terms!!* They refer to *classism*, and if you remembered your *mythology* good enough from last year, you would know that *Sheol* is really in one of the under crusts of the *world...* and the Hebrews call the same place—it’s the *Greeks*, now that I think of it—‘*Hades!!*’ And if you were smart, you would have put that in the paper, *risked gettin’ kicked out*, but been *raptured* by the Getty guys in a matter of weeks, because of your *artistic expression!!*” Clarissa managed a smile, but Joe Wilton suspected she was sucking cock earlier in the day. “Give me *that!!*” She looked at the “A+” on the paper written in red. “You would have gotten a ‘B+’ if you would have done what I *said!!*”

“You with another *guy??*” Joe asked. Claire was rubbing her top lip.

“I think I have *cold sores* comin’ out soon... and *yes*, I *like* someone from the football team!!” Clarissa broke up with Joe in front of around ten people. She didn’t feel ashamed. She added, prodded by an inkling of duty, “Those are *similes* that you are learnin’ about, *Joe!!* If you take me seriously but don’t *tell* anyone, you can get *by* at this school!! When you see your friend *Marcus* come around, you have to talk about the troposphere, because that’s where he’s *allowed!* It’s going to cue us in not to talk about financial matters which we don’t want him *part* of!! If your professor comes around, you can talk about the *stratosphere* as if you’re studying... and we’ll give ‘im concealed insights about what’s hot, and what *isn’t!!* If you see the couple of *bikers* from the magazine, you *definitely* have to talk about the *Gutenberg* level of the Earth’s crust... because we’ll take off to our *dorms* because we don’t want to *deal* with them!! You understand??” Clarissa winked at one of the *pseudo*-onlookers (*she was really in one of Clarissa’s classes and pretended not to know her during the conversation just in case Joe Wilton got irate during the breakup*). “It’s *okay*, Sally!!” Claire said. She felt relieved.

Joe asked, “Before you go...” He looked her in the eye. “What level am I at??”

“You’re in the mesosphere, but you’re comin’ down because they don’t *like* you up there in the *thermosphere!* It’s okay, though, because in twenty years they’re going to die off and you’re going to be

controlling things!/" Clarissa looked antsy, and wanted to leave.

Joe Wilton asked, "Did you really want to *marry* me??" He wanted to see the answer in her eyes, but found it difficult.

"There is too much outside pressure, and when you learn of hurricanes and tornados, you'll know what I'm *talking* about!/"

Joe Wilton felt scared. Subtly, Clarissa Philips made a knife-cutting motion with her fingers, then pointed to Joe. It was *so* subtle, and it was hidden, that none of her friends behind her could see. Joe's heart dropped a bit, but Clarissa Antonia Philips skipped away and was greeted by all ten ladies whom had seemed not to know her.

Joe went to his dorm, and laid his face down on his bed. He wanted to cry—he *demand*ed himself to cry—but was unable to. He felt worn. He felt *bad*.

* * *

"*Hurricanes* travel seventy-four miles per hour, or *more*, by definition *Lu Hsun*," Joe Wilton said to his roommate whom he hardly saw. "Louis Pak" was his real name; he went by "Lou" to most people; but Joe Wilton liked to call him "*Lu Hsun*" after one of Lou's favorite authors. "Storms technically travel faster than thirty-nine miles per hour... and they are called '*tropical cyclones*' if the temperature is greater than eighty degrees *Fahrenheit*... and they give the fuckers *names* once they reach thirty-nine miles per *hour*, you know??"

Lu Hsun shook his head as if he didn't know. "I am a *business* major!/" he said.

"Call the next storm '*Clarissa*' if you talk to your friends in the *weather* bureau, *okay*?? I *know* you have friends *over* there!/" Joe said.

"You're an insulting *white man*!/" Lou said. "But I know that you've been hurt, so I won't report you to the authorities for a stipulated *threat*!/"

"You're on *crack* half the time you're away from the *dorm*!! And yeah... Her family is *richer*!! They would side with her over me if it *came* to that!/" Joe looked at the *Chucky* doll in the corner. He regretted not taking the *leprechaun* back because Clarissa had offered it. "I just want to *vent* and when I'm done, I am going to get back to my studies... and I'm not going to *kill* her!/"

"*Revenge is a dish best served cold*," Lu Hsun said. "You'll *like* it!/"

"I've *heard* that a couple of times since the *breakup*!! I think people are *talkin'*, huh??"

"*Yep*!/" Lu Hsun took some papers from his side of the central desk, then sped out of the room.

* * *

“I have a *headache*, Lou!!” Joseph called to his roommate.

“I have the perfect *solution* for you!!” Lu Hsun whistled, and within a half minute, Dennis Colby from the dorm next door came into the room without knocking. “This guy is *sick* of wrestling, and he wants to letter in *football* over here!!” Lou referred to Joseph.

“He *can't*, Lou!!” Dennis stated. “He *sucks*, and he doesn't have enough discipline for our *squad*!!” Dennis squirted out of the room without saying anything else.

Lou said, “I *knew* you would complain because I was called ahead of time! Claire's new *boyfriend* slammed you to the matt, and you landed head *first*!!”

Joe said, “My *pride* doesn't hurt, ironically!” He rubbed his head. “It's my fuckin' *head*, for once, and I haven't felt this way in *years*!!” He rubbed. “Can you turn in my *paper* for me?”

Lou Pak accepted Joseph's paper. ““*The Moon and the City*’ it says! What is it *about*!?”

“*Innuendo*, Pak!! I got it from my *girlfriend*!! She was callin' my balls my *nuts*... and she was callin' my nuts my *things*... and she was callin' my things my *other* things... and I was gettin' *mad*, after a while, so I decided to use it for my *archeology* survey of American *culture*!!”

“What's it *about*!?” Pak asked.

“*Primitive* Moon cultures...” Joseph Wilton began.

“The *Arabs* have them on their *flags*, quite often because the religion of *Islam*, and the *CRESCENT MOON WITH THE STAR*!!” Pak said.

“*Yeah*!! But they can't figure out why the Moon looks so close at the *horizon*... and why it looks so close that you can *touch* it... sometimes!!” Joe said. He saw the look of interest in Pak's face, and was happy. “So I *said*, in there, that the Moon *fucks* with us... and now that we have *satellites*, it *CAN'T* fuck with us!!”

“You did no such *thing*!!” Pak said.

“Actually, I *did*, but I used the words of the primitive cultures to explain my *point*!! THEY believe, *Pak*, that it might be true, so I put it in my *paper*!!” Joseph laughed as hard as he could without his head splitting from a migraine.

“You're going to get *reported* to the board of directors, *one of these days*!!” Pak said.

“*To the MOON*!! Pak!! To the *MOON*!!” Joe rubbed his head some more.

Pak went down the hall with the paper in his hand and thought he could feel an *energy* from it. He slipped it under the appropriate professor's study office a few minutes later, and he laughed all the way back... *except that he felt empty*.

* * *

Pak came back to the room and found Joseph Wilton asleep. The next morning, he didn't bother waking him up even though he knew that he was sleeping through his Friday classes. Pak thought it was

great that Joseph was a free *man*—he genuinely seemed to be free—and he thought Bob Dylan had a lot to do with it. Actually, Joseph Wilton didn't listen to a lot of Bob Dylan's songs, but the *sentiment* was true around the people that Joseph hung around (it was hard to get away from Bob Dylan music in their part of the dormitory). "Whey you ain't got *shit*, you ain't got shit to *lose*!!" Pak said. He hoped Joseph heard him through his sleep, then he took off to his morning class. He came back an hour and a half later, and Joseph was still sleeping... except that he was slowly waking up.

"*Goddamn* you, NEITZSCHE!!!" Joseph Wilton yelled into the air.

Pak didn't know his level of consciousness, so he gave him a few more *seconds*.

"*Goddamn* you, NEITZSCHE!!!" Joseph yelled again. He rubbed his eyes. He looked at Pak. He said, "Fuckin' *Neitzsche*!! It's not his *fault*, Pak!! But it's *happening* to me!!"

"*What?*" But Pak knew. The sociologist who taught Joseph in his freshman year said that *Neitzsche* would eventually be influential in his life. He said that white men couldn't go to the *DMV* anymore, let alone the *bathroom*. They were *picked* on, and everyone that had ever heard a good "*WASP*" joke knew that "White Anglo-Saxon Protestants" were the *new* target of *agreement*. It used to be blacks, and before that, it was *women*. The weak ganged up on the strong individuals until the wearing down process was completed. Joseph *felt* it. All the "jock movies" of the past wearing down on him. Clarissa's dad whom may have watched *Grease* and took out aggressions on the physically strong... and then putting ideas into her *head*.

"Fuckin' NEITZSCHE!! Where are you when I *need* you!?" Joseph yelled one more time, rubbed his temples, then headed for the bathroom. He showered, and felt a lot better than he had felt before. It just wasn't good enough to satisfy him.

* * *

Steve Jadeson and Clarissa Antonia Philips were making headway around campus. He was one of the better wrestlers, and she was one of the prettier cheerleaders. They lived together well off campus at Steve's nearby home (he grew up in *Westwood*). Claire would go to see him wrestle, and she fell in love with his "cauliflower ears." Steve would look into the crowd and *wink* at her every time he won a match.

Clarissa thought of Joe Wilton, quite often, and she wondered what she saw in him. He was a *nerd*—by UCLA standards, he was a *nerd*—and she started to feel ashamed that she ever went steady with him. She looked down at Steve, one day during his matches, and she thought she saw the future: Joe Wilton would be the CEO of a large corporation—*maybe featuring his very own name... or at least utilizing his nickname, "Squire"*—and she would feel ashamed that she picked the guy with the bulging ears where *Spock* would have points.

She didn't care. She was in love, and she was happy. She had papers coming up in the looming days. Steve had a final he started studying for three weeks in advance. When it came down to it, she was

afraid of both men. They were large, and they could break her in a second if they ever felt rage.

Clarissa watched Joe's wrestling matches—they were all unofficial because he prepared for the study of professional wrestling. He stuck to Roman- Greco, though, because he hoped to try out for the next *Olympics* when they came around. He suppressed the humiliation of having his body sacrificed for the sake of what his coaches said was the "common good." He didn't *like* his ears the way they were, and he came to find that when he went to clubs in tight shirts, it only invited antagonism from smaller thugs. He almost *wished* he was smaller, and he almost wished his final senior year was over.

Joseph Wilton was a year younger than Steve Jadeson, and he had no such problems. He started not caring about his postulates when he submitted term papers to his professors. He thought about the wild remark Clarissa had made about his geology report, and he decided to kick it into action. At times, he would be criticized severely. Other times, he gained recognition by his professors. That made him feel good. That made him feel as if he could compete at a higher institution of learning, again, in another place. He was thinking of *Kansas* because he wanted to be a Jayhawk. He thought about *Cornel* and started to ask around about what it would take to get into a private school on the east coast.

He studied, and he let his wishes drift in and out of his mind.

* * *

The year was winding down, and Joseph Wilton was doing good in all his studies. A week before his finals, he said to his roommate Pak, "I want you to start calling me *Squire!*!"

"*Why?*" Pak asked. "You don't even play *guitar!*!"

"*Listen!*" Joseph ate peanuts. "That was my name when I was a *kid*, and when I go back to Santa Barbara for the summer, I want *them* to treat me like I'm *young!*!"

"You're an *old* man!" Pak sarcastically said.

Joseph Wilton did well on his finals, and Dennis Colby would come in, on occasion, to tease him about the way Clarissa was getting along with her new boyfriend. Joseph blocked it out. "I'm trying to get the racial *hatred* out of me... and my head is swimming with *pogroms* of nineteen-oh-five *Russia*, and things along those lines!! I'm thinking of Xenophanes, and I'm thinking that those people on the *Getty* hill are really toying with our *lives!!* As if we're the *mortals*, and they are *not!!* I'm thinking that I'm a *prisoner* in this small dorm, and I can't *wonder* why it is that *rich people* send their *kids* here!!"

"Because they're *kids*," Dennis said. He drank from beer in an aluminum can (usually, he made a habit to pour it into a plastic cup to give him the "party kegger feel"). He walked around the small room, then continued, "*Hebrews* used to sacrifice their kids, but they called them *goats!*!"

"*Cubs* are from bears; calves are from *cattle*; and *kids* are from goats!! I remember, *now!*" Joseph said. He reached into his minifridge then pulled out a beer of his own.

"And they want to sacrifice them to the *world!*!" Dennis said. On the inside, he wanted to cry. He

thought of the *Melendez* brothers, and he thought that they were genuinely deprived beyond comprehensibility. He believed it was like having a steak tied above a pack of rabid wolves. It made them salivate, and it made them attack one another if they didn't find an outside prey soon enough. The money was *like* that for the kids, and they would be better off emotionally if the promise of it never existed. That was Dennis' thought, then he said, "My folks *love* me, *right*!?"

"That's *sarcasm*!!" Joseph said.

"It's meant to *be* sarcasm, because I don't think you're seeing that they don't *love* you out there!!" He pointed beyond the walls. "They don't *love* you... and that's why *we* take care of you!!"

Joseph understood what was going on, for the first time. It was a *right of passage*. It happened in other cultures, but he believed that losing his virginity was all it took to become a man. That was easy enough, and he was grateful to Claire for the opportunity to avoid ridicule for the rest of the year. He was *wrong*, actually, because things had gotten "hot and heavy" with Holly, many years back, and that's when he *told* everyone he lost his virginity. He was at the cusp of believing it was something else: That losing *parents* was the right of passage in the college world. He was *ready*, but he had to prepare to go back without hostility or else he would have a bad summer. "Do you have any recommendations so I don't get into fights with my *family* over the summer!?"

"Say you don't *know* me!!" Dennis Colby said. He felt good with it. He drank the rest of his beer, then sped out of the room like he always did.

Joseph Wilton popped back into academic mode, again, when Dennis left. He turned to Pak, and pondered, "The Hebrews used to sacrifice a spotless goat every *year* for every town in their land. Then it became a goat every year for the entire *NATION*!! Then it became, according to Christian theologians, that they sacrificed a spotless *person*!! They call this the *scapegoat*, and Justin Martyr calls the victim *Jesus Christ*!! Where do *you* stand on the issue, *Pak*!?"

Pak turned to Wilton and was mildly intrigued by it. He said, "It is the *VICTIM* of the ages because they won't stop *talking* about *HIM*!!!" Pak reached for a beer in the cooler, and was glad that they had each other to talk to.

* * *

Dennis Colby had just concluded his last exam, and he came into Joseph's dorm *glowing*. Joseph still had one more exam, that night, and Pak was at the desk studying. Dennis yelled to Wilton, "*He's studying on his own!! We have to beat him up!!*" It was a reference to a popular cartoon sitcom on the *Fox* network. "We have to beat him *up*!!!"

Joseph laughed. He had a little less than three hours until his night exam, but he didn't plan to study another minute for it. He was burnt *out*. "I was talking to this *guy*, Dennis, at a local shop not far from Hollywood and Vine. I *went* there because the song kept ringing in my head, and I was listening to

Panama by Van Halen—it was a really good trip—and then *Hot For Teacher* came on because it was a rock blocks weekend on *KLOS*, and... this guy says to me, ‘*I’m the real Mister Charrington, and I can get you anything you want!!*’ I says to him, ‘*You ain’t shit, little buddy, because I read the book yurra referencin’ in quite the time... and I came out of it with different conclusions than ANYONE else!! Even the Cliff’s people!!*’ So he looks to me strangely, and says, ‘*I want to hear it!*’”

“And? What did you tell ‘im!?” Dennis asked. He was genuinely inquisitive, and he reached for a beer to hear the story. There were only three left in the cooler, and he thought there would be no more new ones in there because the end of the year, and all. He was wrong, because later that night, Joseph wound up buying another twelve pack while he packed up his things after his final.

“I said that *we’re* the FRONTIER STATE... and *they* are fightin’ for *us!*!” Joseph grabbed a beer for himself, and left the last one to Pak. “I said, ‘*It’s PROJECTION PSYCHOLOGY to believe that Iraq is our frontier border, and Vietnam was it before all the shit hit the fan about...*’”

“Wait!!” Dennis said. “You’re tellin’ ‘im stuff about *us!*! About our school for *free?*?”

“*Yeah!*! Cuz I *wanted* to... and I felt like Julia because everyone around here treats me like *bitches!*!” He wanted to cry, but they were fake tears that would have come out... or at the very least, they were tears of joy from almost completing another semester at a high-priced, high-profiled *school*.

“You’re *funny!*! And if I see you at the *Laugh Stop* later this year, I’m going to kick your ass after the *routine!*!” Dennis said.

“Cuz it’s *TRUE, Big Brother?*!” Joseph said, but by then he was feeling like “*Squire*” again because he said everything with absurdity.

“You don’t scare *me!*!” Dennis said. He drank half of his beer in a gulp.

Joseph flexed his arms. “These can break your *neck!*!”

Dennis waved him off, then rubbed Lu Hsun Pak on the back of his neck. “How are you going to *do* tonight??” Pak was legitimately afraid that if he didn’t ace his final, his father was going to pull his funds from him and he would lose his convertible *BMW*. Dennis rubbed the tension out of Pak’s shoulders. He said to him, “You need to try out for *wrestling* next year!!” Dennis headed for the door, “Thank you for the *beer!*!” he said, then turned around and saluted toward the ceiling.

Pak asked Joe when Dennis was gone, “Could you really break his *neck!*?”

“*No!*!” Joe said. He stared into the air as if he were a nineteen *forties* movie actor. He said, “*No one* can break another neck on *my* planet!!” He looked at Pak, saw mild disapproval, then remained in character, “We have *heart*, over here... and to break another neck is the death of *EVERYONE!*!”

* * *

Joseph got home to his place in Santa Barbara, and there was a mild celebration for him. Marcus Blacksmith made it, and so did Holly Rydell, and some of the girls from her cheerleading squad. Joseph

said he was happy to see Marcus, he gave Holly a hug, then Joseph's pop *Jake Wilton* told them all that the punch was mildly spiked. They all laughed, and they feasted on a turkey even though they were months away from *Thanksgiving*.

"I got the *shit* beat out of me on the *football* field!/" Joseph claimed. He was sitting on a picnic table in the back of his own house, and he felt good.

Marcus watched Joseph pound some mashed potatoes onto his plate, then grabbed them. He said, "I would *not* be a national name right now... if it weren't for *you guys*!/"

Holly wanted to tear. "We *have* your back if you don't go into the NFL this year!/" One of her cheerleading buddies rubbed her leg. "We have your *back*!/" She grabbed some cranberry sauce.

Marcus said, "I didn't *declare* for the NFL because I didn't want to leave the *school* so early!/" He scooped some sweet corn onto his plate. The pumpkin pie was next.

"I don't want to say this, but you're going to *sell-out* before it's all done... because they know who you are, they're going to line up the *sponsors*, and they're going to turn you into a talking *chia pet*!/"

"Don't fuckin' worry!/" Marcus said. "I already have it figured out because I talked to Steve Garvey's family, and I talked to people whom *know* Marshall Faulk! It's going to happen—yes!—but don't pity me, because on the other side is a world without *war*!! I don't have to worry about Compton where I was *born*!! I don't have to worry about struggling to be a doctor, like *Wilton Joseph* here, might!! I don't have to *worry*!/"

Holly was proud that he was going to make it. That was the right attitude it took, and she knew it.

Joseph Wilton changed the subject. "Have you guys ever saw those *Ames ROOMS*? They're really *cool*!! A guy goes in one corner, and the checkers on the floor are distorted so that when the camera takes your picture, it looks like he's half the size of his buddy in the same *room*!! And the windows are slanted to give the same perspective as *well*!/" Joseph felt two feet tall and thought of the Beatles. "You've got to *hide* your love away is what everyone's *telling* me nowadays!/"

Jake slammed his potatoes to his plate. "*What?* Are you going to be leaving home for *Detroit* next because you're not having *fun*!! I grew *up* with the John, Paul, Ringo and *George*... Joseph!! I *know* what you're *doin'* to us!! Guilt trip!/"

Joseph calmed, and he felt some shame. "I'm gettin' my *ass* kicked there by people that are larger than me on the wrestling mat and on the *football* field!! If I don't do something *soon*, I'm not going to make it into *graduate* school!/"

"I'll pay your *way*!/" Jake said. His wife approached him and consoled him by soothing his stomach.

"I'll lose some *pride*!/" Joseph said... but he registered it in his mind as a possibility. Nicki Wilton—*Jake's wife*—didn't look her son's way. Joseph knew about the competition between a son with his father *long* ago... and he decided "not to compete." He didn't turn on the *charm*, and he stayed out of his father's way. It kept bridges from burning, and he believed it kept his parents together. "*Mom*!" he finally

said. “Can you finance me and Holly going to the *movies*!? Because I’m *poor*, and I’m not ready for a *summer* job yet!?”

“You *hate* me!?” Joseph’s father said.

“I *predicted* that!” Joseph said. He took off from the lunch table, went into the house to get his basketball, then went to the front driveway to shoot some hoops with himself. Ten minutes later he was joined by Marcus and Holly.

“You’re *good*!! Don’t worry!! You’re *good*, and we’re going to take care of you at my father’s company this summer... if you want a *job* there!! You hardly have to push pencils, and we’ll make it easy for you to glide into your *senior* year!!” Holly asked for the ball.

“My dad didn’t *raise* me to be a *pencil pusher*... but I’ll take the *job*!!” Joseph bounced the ball to Holly. They were happy. Marcus put his arms around each of them and they felt like three peas in a pod.

* * *

Joseph and Marcus took a walk on the beach (*they didn’t feel like fags*). Joseph wasn’t working far away at Holly’s dad’s place off the shore. He worked in an office with a good view of the pier. Marcus walked along the approaching and receding wave breaks, and Joseph walked a little further inward. They approached the pier which was a half mile in the distance. Marcus asked Joseph, “What’s it like to be walking next to one of next year’s first round *draft* picks?!”

Joseph asked, “Do you remember *PLAN B* free agency?”

“I was a *kid* when they enacted that, and I don’t remember a whole *lot* of it... except that my dad said that the Cowboys snaked Jay Novacek and another tight end from the *Cardinals* for about nothing... and it made them into a *Superbowl* winner!!”

“I don’t think it’s that easy, and I wanted to talk about a transition to *full* free agency—I’m talkin’ about having one designated *franchise* player, and two transitional players to protect.” Joseph kicked sand.

“It’s the only way the union would *agree* to the thing, *huh*??” Marcus peered into the distant Sun.

“I’m sayin’ that I don’t have a *choice* about my roommates next year in the dorms next to me! And I don’t have a choice about ‘*protecting*’ Claire from leaving UCLA if she *transfers*!! I’m sayin’ I don’t have a *choice*, and when *you* leave as a speculative ‘*transitional player*,’ I have to deal with the league and hope they give me *compensation*!!”

“The league would be *SOCIETY*, and Claire would be your *FRANCHISE PLAYER*, huh?” Marcus felt a tinge of jealousy. “Why am *I* not your franchise *PLAYER*!?”

Joseph felt better because he believed that Marcus wanted him around. He said, “It feels *great* to be around a top five pick!!” He held Marcus by the shoulders and looked into his eyes. “I hope you knock ‘em *dead*!!”

Marcus shuddered a bit and he knew somehow that the innocence was over. He wouldn’t play

with Joseph anymore as kids. They would toss the football around, but if they played tackle at the beach, it jeopardized millions of dollars for Marcus. They would see each other in the future, but “Blacksmith” on the back of a jersey would be the *majority* of times that Joseph would see Marcus. He was pretty sure of it.

“That would be doubleplus ungood if I *didn’t* crack the top ten, *huh??*” Marcus asked. He started to walk toward the pier again.

“*Yeah!*” Joseph said. He wanted to be a corporate executive for the first time in his life. He was walking toward Holly’s dad’s office, and he believed his athletic life was over, for all practical reasons. “I’m going to knock ‘em dead *too*,” Joseph said. He was thinking about the scum in the proletariat he started to hate.

* * *

The summer was winding down, and Joseph started to lose his feelings about Claire. Holly had rereplaced the place in his heart where Clarissa Antonia Philips had been. Joseph understood a thing about burning bridges, and he learned it from being a *jock* on the high school wrestling squad a long time ago. If he asked someone to try out for sports, he would give that person a six-month window in his life. If that person didn’t work out or *try out*, he had to write them off because he planned to go to college on a *scholarship*. He didn’t have time for half-assed *dreamers* speculating they could be the next *Kurt Angle*. They had to put their money where their mouth was, or else they would be down the road. A lot of “geeks” would be written off because they were in “*no man’s land*,” and as Joseph would later find out in college history of modern America, it was the worse place to be in trench warfare!!! You had to dig yourself in behind the barbed wire, or you would *die*. “Geeks,” as they would be publicly called for pestering, stilled talked the talk, but refused to walk the walk. As it was, Joseph “*Squire*” Wilton hardly had time for his workouts, his father’s lectures, and times with the “real deals” on the weekends.

Joseph Wilton didn’t have an explosive summer around the Fourth of July because he was still working so much, and he had lost touch with most of his high school buddies *besides* Marcus Blacksmith and Holly Rydell. As a matter of fact, Marcus had taken off back to San Diego to “catch some rays” early, as he put it. Holly was around, and he found her increasingly irritating as the “daughter of his manager” instead of “the old frien’ from high school.” Joseph Wilton sang “*Summer Nights*” a lot in the final before he had to take off back to UCLA, but there was no one to sing the female part with him. He envisioned *Olivia Newton John* around the beach, but he couldn’t get a grip on whom that might be in real life. Bitterness started to creep within him, but he kept his head up. He no longer expected to make money from athletics, but he was glad that he had a partial scholarship to a fine school for having participated in them during the years’ past. He thought he was destined to work in a corporate office, and he didn’t mind. That’s the part the *scared* him.

Joseph walked along the beach at dawn on the Friday before he had to board a bus to head back to

Westwood. He thought about Clarissa on occasion, but he thought more about burning bridges. The place of *limbo* was one of the worse places in the afterlife according to many theologies and graphic oral *illustrations*... he had come to find. He had to push Clarissa out because she was a *no-show*; she was a *loss*; she was a spastic *nerf\ fag* and he had gotten those terms from a movie he had watched drunk with *Marcus* back during high school. He had been drunk—it was one of his first intoxications—and he couldn't remember the movie's name... but he could remember what appeared to be a *sequel* right afterward (they had rented five movies, that day). It was "*One Crazy Summer*" and Joseph, as he recalled the flick, was embarrassed that his summer had been incredibly *dull*.

On the way back to his dad's car—it was a beat up jalopy—he saw *Courtney Cox* on the advertisement at a bus stop. He thought about her, and he thought about how they must have it *made* in Hollywood. Courtney looked so confident and happy. Joseph had been through Hollywood many times and idealized what he imagined about the locals, but thought that *maybe* the grass was greener on the other side. It *sure* wasn't green where he was at. As a matter of fact, it was sandy brown, and the coldness of damp beach sand underneath his feet started to remind him of loneliness.

Joseph "*Squire*" Wilton thought the reserve, support, cover, and firing trenches of the western front of *Germany*. He thought of the barbed wire, and he thought of what Clarissa did to him: She broke up with him, and started to date someone he *wrestled* with. In a lot of way's she was doing to him what he had done to the "geeks" of his high school. There was a point that he had to write them off because they wouldn't commit to a different path. Once he started to call them "geeks" in public, there was no turning back because public ridicule is not forgotten. There were plenty of instances in which he laid awake at night and *almost* wished he could freeze time. He wanted to still play basketball with the people whom wouldn't make the team—they played "*horse*" in his front yard a lot in middle school—but that wouldn't suffice as time went on. If those "*geeks*," as he came to know them by, could only *know* not to bother him in public after refusing to even give athletics a try then they would have a chance to remain buddies when graduation was over, either of high school or college. They went into "*no man's land*," as Joseph came to know it from his history class at UCLA, and they got shot down publicly—they couldn't come *back*.

Joseph started to think that Clarissa Antonia Philips did the same thing to him as he had done to the "*geeks*" (inside, Joseph knew them as "losers" more than he thought of them as "geeks" because *someone's* got to lose in order for people to win, he came to find, but it was politically incorrect to *call* them "losers" since *Beck* started singing about it). She made a public display of him so that he wouldn't come *back*. She had to cut her loses.

As Joseph put the car keys into his dad's jalopy, he knew that he was only partially accurate in his assessment: *Women*, he came to find from speaking to purported feminists on campus, don't work the same way as men. They have someone lined *up* when they break up, and men tend to think that "playing the field" is the way they'd go. *Women* like to have a committed man, whereas men prefer generally to have

loose women whom would rather give “one night stands” than anything else. *Women* tended to lose their worth—their physical *beauty*—as the ages went on, whereas men tended to *build* themselves into people of reputation, stature, and *importance*. *Women* tended to be indirect about their communication, whereas a man would tell you *straight out* the way it was.

Joseph pondered these things, drove home under the night sky as the final elements of daylight disappeared, and looked into his headlights. There were moths in there (he *pitied* the ones which would be squashed against the windshield, but pitied himself *more* for having to clean it off the following day), and there were thoughts in his head which were reflected of their scattered flight pattern. He wanted to push out his thoughts. He found himself unable to do so.

“*Claire!!* Where *are* you?? It was a *lonely* bear...!” “Squire” hoped to enroll in a music class as an elective during his final year. He had second thoughts about remaining in physical athletics.

* * *

Of all the trenches that Joseph Wilton studied, he thought the *communications* trench was the worse. It sat far back, the soldiers didn’t have machine gun rifles, and they could be *ridiculed*, he thought for not engaging in heavy combat. They were *needed*, though, or else the Allies would have been slaughtered. As a college student, he felt *chickenshit* for not being able to go out and experience the things he was studying: World poverty; the ozone layer; global warming; the pending energy shortage in terms of petroleum; and wars and conflicts scattered throughout the sphere called *Earth*.

In his first week back to school, he dropped his athletic class—he was going to have to compensate for the partial scholarship, but a *Stafford* loan would balance his financial situation—and he enrolled in a lute playing class. He didn’t want stress, and he thought about the “dumb jock” classes he had heard of when he was a kid: *Carrying Coaches Clipboard 102*; *Basket Weaving For Meat People 322*; and *Pushing Pencils 220* so on down the line. Lu Hsun was no longer his direct roommate, but wound up being in the dorm room *next* to him. His new roommate—a person he was remotely familiar with—seemed to be a engineering nerd, and Joseph thought he was going to get along with him fine. Clarissa Antonia Philips came by on Joe’s third day back, and she thought that nothing was wrong—that Joseph “*Squire*” Wilton would greet her with open arms. She approached him and said, “Are you ready for the big *year!*? This one shapes your *life!*!”

Joseph stared absently at the space behind her and said, “I think I’m going to puke because you’re *talking* to me!!!”

Claire’s demeanor dropped and she replied, “You’re not going to *get* anywhere with that *attitude!*!” She still remained cheery, and tried to get past Joseph with the three books she carried at her stomach-level.

“I just thought it’d be good to make a new start, and I thought that it’d be better that I never *talk* to

you again.” Joseph was amazingly honest with himself when he said it, and it surprised him.

Clarissa tried to make her way past without a word, and she when she was five feet past Joseph, she said, “*Fuck you!!*”

Joseph went into his dorm room, he felt like a *zombie*, and he couldn’t fathom that she even tried to talk to him. He wondered if he pinned the wrong person, the year before, and maybe *that* was the reason he felt cursed; maybe it was a *millionaire*, or something, and he couldn’t tell where the negative energy came from. He decided not to contemplate it, and started reading for his early classes. He shut everything else, and became a nerd... *even thought he wouldn’t admit it to anyone.*

* * *

Joe didn’t take to his music class, and dropped it at the end of the second week. He read ahead, and liked what he learned. In place of his music class, he enrolled in an *iron works* class—it was essentially an art class for people whom wanted to construct structures which wouldn’t be viewed, in his opinion. In the music class he learned that the octave had twice the wavelength as the home note; the fifth bisected the octave in perfect harmony; the third bisected the fifth and the home note; the major triad consisted of the first, the third, and the fifth; the *minor*, which felt “sad” (as the music instructor put it), consisted of the root note, a flatted third, and the *fifth*. There were augmentations and sevenths. There were a *million* things, and it all felt *Greek* to him.

Joseph withdrew from his music class because he wanted simplification. He was in his *iron works* class when he realized that it was actually *work*. He withdrew from that, as well, and searched for classes which would meet graduation requirements, yet not be too hard and take away from the load of other classes he had enrolled in.

Claire decided to torment Joseph with her cheerleader friends. She was still seeing the jock wrestler on other parts of the campus, but she was popular enough that people in Joseph’s dorm would play along with a *scheme* of hers. She pretended to be in love with Joseph’s roommate, and that lit him up. She came to Joseph’s dormitory room one day. Joseph said, “I didn’t invite you!! Please *leave!!*”

She passed up Joseph (she was wearing her cheerleader’s outfit). “You can see *tomorrow* with those glasses!!” she said to Stewart Lane. “I *love* your glasses!!” She gave Joseph’s roommate a sensual kiss on the lips.

Joseph sat down on a wooden chair in front of the dorm’s desk. “I *told* him he could see tomorrow cuz they’re so fuckin’ *thick!!!*” Joseph shook his head in disagreement, felt faint, then put his head down on his work.

Claire french kissed Stew, and made her way out of the room. Joseph didn’t see the french kiss, but he heard Stew say, “She *lip-locked me!!!* That bitch *lip-locked* me, and she said she was goin’ to shove pencils into your *ears* if you don’t start *treatin’* her right!!!”

Joseph felt nauseous instead of faint, now. He shook his head some more, pretended that he didn't hear what he just did... and *tried* to read through some of his class notes. "I'm studying about *Napoleon*, of all things, right now!!! 'Never start a land war in *Asia*' is what I keep hearin' over and over!!!"

Stewart approached Joseph Wilton, grabbed him by his shoulders when he turned, and said into his eyes, "That bitch *kissed* me!!!" He was excited. "That's the first *kiss* I've had here since I *enrolled*!!!" He thought about "off campus"—there had been a lady whom worked in a *goth* store that he was attracted to. She kissed him on the hand when he bought one her rings for fifteen bucks. He was happy about that, and thought it compared. "She *kissed* me!!!" Stew said again.

Joseph didn't know if he was being played. Finally he said, "I *slept* with her last year, *you* know??"

"Fuckin' dumb *jock*!!!" Stewart said. "You would make up *anything*!!!"

* * *

Joseph went to his morning classes and returned to his dorm at noon. Stewart wasn't there because he had afternoon classes. When Joseph finally saw him again, later that evening, Stewart said to him with confidence. "I'm goin' to *tap* that shit!!!"

"*What? Huh?*?" Joseph asked. He didn't believe what he just heard, and he suspected it was the first time Stewart ever said it. It was almost as if he was hearing a parrot in human form.

"I'm goin' to *tap* that shit!!! That's my goal for this *semester*, Joseph!!! I'm goin' to *tap* that shit... and you have to *help* me!!!"

Joseph considered saying to Stewart, *Okay!! I'm goin' to help you... and when I get married to someone else besides Claire, I'm goin' to give you my name, number, and address so you can tap my new wife, as well!!!* Joseph decided on humoring Stewart because he didn't want to be reported to the dean for a threat. He knew it would boil into that if it went the route of sarcasm. "I'm goin' to *help* you!!!" He thought of *Fast Times At Ridgemont High*. "You have to play *Led Zeppelin 'Four'* when you tap her... and whatever you do, *don't* take her to *ice cream*!!! Cheerleaders *hate* ice cream, and they think it's a gateway to daterape drugs!!!"

"I'm goin' to *tap* that shit!!!" Stewart said again. "She *winked* at me as I came home to my *class* here, you see??"

Joseph said, "*What? She...? Hey!!!* You're in a *dorm*... not in a *class*!!!"

"*Yes!!* But I'm goin' to *tap* that stuff... and I'm goin' to school her right *here*!! Right on your *bed*, if you don't mind... so don't be surprised *if*..."

Joseph cut Stewart off, "I'm goin' to get some coffee at that fuckin' place near the library... or wherever it is!!!"

"You got it *right*!!! It's near the *library*!! I had some *coffee* with..." Stewart began.

“Are you *fuckin’* with me??” Joseph asked. He let things ride. He opened his history book, put his finger where *Napoleon* left Gaul for *Russia*, and thought about the coffee he’d be drinking in five minutes unless plans changed. He didn’t want to be there. He didn’t like his new roommate. He didn’t like what Claire was doing to him. He didn’t like his situation.

* * *

A pastry sufficed for Joseph’s voyage out of his dorm room. He didn’t care who he saw, and when people called his name from the pillars of the library, he ignored them. He wanted his pastry, he didn’t want to talk, and he hoped Stewart would shut up when he got back to his place. Stewart greeted him with a biology anecdote, “They say that *MAN* evolved from the African savannah and we traveled to the north of *Europe* where we eventually boarded ships and came to the *New World!!!*”

“Don’t let blacks or *Indians* hear you call it the *New World!!!*”

“*Okay!!* Political correctness, and I already *know* about that because they say that *Native Americans* really aren’t *native* Americans because it was the bears, the mammoths, the eagles, and the *tigers!!!*”

It shocked Joseph. “*Yeah?? Go on!!!*”

“So they *tell* me in this ‘secret society’ called the *Elks*, long ago—it was actually the father of somebody whom recommended I come here instead of *Fullerton* or *Irvine...*”

“Don’t put down the *Anteaters*, because they’re good people, and I *know* a couple of them!!!” Joseph said, and tore off a piece of his pastry.

“They *said* to take evolution with a grain of *salt!!!* There are mimic species in the Arizona desert which are red, black and *yellow!!!* One of them is poisonous, and the other *evolved* to look like the poisonous species because it *protects* them from scavenger *birds!!!* Bees and wasps are the same, because one stings and the other *bites!!!* So fish came out of the Mediterranean, long ago, and they tried to mimic *apes...* and gorillas!!! And that’s how we got *Adam and Eve!!!*”

“It’s Adam and *Steve*, if you ask the *homos* on campus... don’t say that until you *graduated* because the biologists like to hear their dogma *back* to them!... and your *sharp buildings* that you design!?! They’re going to look like limp *penises* when that cheerleader girl comes back to you and breaks your *heart!!!* They already did sociological *surveys* on it from a host of dejected architecture engineers!!!”

“You’re a mean *son-of-a-bitch!!!*” Stewart said. Secretly, he was glad that Joseph was his roommate.

Joseph bit off the last piece of his pastry, then crashed on his bed. He didn’t sleep for another twenty minutes, but he was glad that he was able to sleep. He woke up the next morning at six *ante meridiem*, and started the day over.

* * *

It was barely the end of the third week of Joseph's senior year, and he felt like he was there a million *years*. Stewart started to complain about "the cheerleader" not coming around. He said, "In biology, they're telling us that *Saint John's Wort* is not a good remedy for depression, and *accepted* chemical drugs such as *methylphenidate* is the *solution!!!* And then some *feminist* jumps up out of her *seat* and says, '*UCLA* is an arm of the pharmaceutical lobby and cannot be *trusted!!*' There was silence in the room, and everything went on like normal... like she didn't *say* anythin'... but she was embarrassed, and I could *tell!!!*"

"You're goin' to *tap* that shit, *aren't you??*" Joseph asked. He was joking, but Stewart couldn't detect it. He said to Stewart in advice, "If they start *smokin'*, you've got to say, 'You just blew any chance you had of *suckin' my dick!!!*'" Joseph laughed to himself. Stewart was a sophomore, and Joseph was seeing elements of himself in him, even though Stewart was an engineering major with an emphasis on urban developmental studies.

"I'm *not* goin' to tap that shit because she's *bald...* and I was thinkin' that the *cheerleader* girl probably blew any chance she had of suckin' my cock by not comin' *back!!!*"

Joseph had to bite his tongue for a while, then he said, "Those people in biology don't understand something!!!!" Joseph went to the desk to get ready for his Friday morning class. He was still waking up, and felt a bit groggy. "You have to remove your *vices* before you can overcome *depression!!!* You have to stop sleepin' around, gamblin' your tuition money away, and gettin' *drunk* when you should be *studying!!!* If you can remove the *source* of the depression, it's a lot easier than administrating the solution whether it be Saint John's Wort, or the *other* thing you mentioned!!!"

"*Rikki Styles* is the girl who's a feminist!!! She spelled it: '*M-e-t-h-y-l-p-h-e-n-i-d-a-t-e*,' and she did it pretty *quick!!!* I think she knows a lot of that pharmaceutical lobby, and I'm startin' to fall in *love!!!*"

"Maybe we'll have a *Rikki Styles Lane* in the future!!! You have to watch out for those feminists because they're worse than the *cheerleaders* when they've been dropped!!!"

"*Slash your tires*, and stuff???" Stewart asked.

"*Worse!!* They'll come to your dorm and put *pencils* in your ears!!" Joseph said. He felt as good as he could under the circumstances of confusion, numbness, and a fading emotions of loss.

Stewart laughed. He thought of the cheerleader whom told him that she was going to shove pencils into Joseph's ear. It felt sensational to conjure her image in his head.

* * *

"Disassociative *therapy* is what you need to get over your feelings of *angst*, Joseph!!" Rikki

Styles said to Joe. “You can’t hang on to the images of your girlfriend in your head or it’s going to eat you like a *cancer*!!” Rikki became a studying partner of Stewart Lane, and in the fourth week of school, they prepared for a biology midterm together.

“You don’t need to *tell* me about that!! I went through sophomore biology, and I went through introductory *psychology*!! I don’t need to be told what I need to do, and what I *don’t* need to do!!” Joseph shuffled his papers. He was studying for his *History of Europe 231* midterm and it covered the years from *Fourteen ninety-two* to *Eighteen ninety-eight*. “You’re going to tell me, ironically, that I’m suppressing helpful thoughts if I’m successful at what you’re saying, and that I’m avoiding *reality* in doin’ *so*!! They *all* do that, and they’re trained because it keeps money in the pockets of the psychologists around the *world*!!!”

Rikki felt insulted. She had an abnormality about her ears in which she would feel excruciating pain if a person so much as contacted them lightly. Stewart, not knowing this, tapped her earlobe and said, “Why don’t we go to the *library*??”

Rikki felt both insulted and physically hurt, now. “I’m goin’ to *go*!!!” She packed up her papers, books, and pens. She left out of the room. Stewart looked at Joseph with distain and trepidation.

Joseph said, “I’m going through as much midterm stress as *you* are!! Don’t *look* at me like that!!”

Stewart thought he was right. He picked up his biology book and highlighters and headed for the library. “I’m goin’ to *tap* that shit!!” he said to Joseph. He was talking about Rikki Styles. Joseph wondered how she found out about *Claire*. He wondered how much Rikki Styles knew, and pushed it out of his head.

“Good *luck*!!!” Joseph yelled when Stewart left through the door. Holly Rydell, an hour’s drive away in Santa Barbara, was studying for her midterms as well. She thought about calling Joseph, but didn’t do it. Joseph said to the empty room when Stewart was gone, “Where *are* you, *Holly*??”

* * *

When midterms were over, Joseph Wilton tried to make amends with Stewart Lane and Rikki Styles. He gave them forty dollars to spend on the town, and he started talking to them like normal people, instead of nuisances which got in his hair during his final year at UCLA. He already started to inquire about transferring, and obtained information from the University of Kansas, Northwestern University, and *Pitt*. He thought he had a great chance of switching his major to business marketing, and he planned to give the three potential schools equal attention. Rikki Styles thanked him for the forty dollars and said to him, “I was *poor*, last year, and I was riding the Santa Monica Big Blue before I transferred to UCLA. My uncle—he’s a fashion designer near Rodeo—gave me a one-year scholarship, and he said that if I did well here, this year, that he would finance my final two years!!! Thanks for this spending cash, and I think disassociative therapy is the way to go with your *girlfriend*, even still!!!”

Joseph was a bit drawn back. “The *disassociative* therapy would *work* if you would quit bringing up her *name*!!!”

“I hadn’t said her *name*, buddy... and there’s a Santa Monica original native band by the name of *Oingo Boingo* which sang a song called ‘Fill the Void’!!! You ought to listen to it because it’s all over your *face* that you haven’t gotten over your former lover!!!” She approached Joseph and whispered angrily into his ear, “*Stewart doesn’t know the name of the cheerleader who’s harassing you, but I can tell your former lover gets under your skin*!!!!”

Joseph Wilton drew back again. “I could kick his ass for knowing anything, I can kick your ass for gettin’ in my face, I can kick *her* ass for leavin’ me in the middle of *turmoil*... but it’s goin’ to do me no *good*!! I’m goin’ to sit here, I’m goin’ to *study*, and I’m goin’ to let ‘time heal all wounds,’ because when it comes down to it, *sometimes* the clichés have more relevance than all of your mountains of *research*!!!”

Rikki Styles drew back. She said, “That’s *offensive*!!! But I like your *style*!!!” She knew a thing or two about *style*. Besides having an uncle in the fashion industry, by virtue of her name she *heard* everything there was to know about style... and *more*.

“Let’s *go*!!” Stewart Lane said. He took off with Rikki Styles to *Haagen Dazs Ice Cream*, and they listened to Led Zeppelin “*Four*” when they were on their way back.

* * *

It was the weekend, and Stewart was wondering why Joseph Wilton was staying and reading. He asked him, “Don’t you ever stop *studying*?!”

“If you saw me *last* year, you would know that I was out every weekend, and I *didn’t* study on Saturdays, even if it meant saving my *life*!!” Joseph continued with his *Du Bois* book.

“Why are you reading about *African slavery*??” Stewart asked. He opened up his architecture book and started to thumb through it.

“My *friend*, Marcus Blacksmith—you’d probably know of him from *national TV* if you turn on the set right now and watch the San Diego State *Aztecs*—had this idea that *evolution* didn’t take place in the same way that *you* thought it didn’t take place, a couple of weeks ago!!”

“You’re readin’ a *history* book on the African condition!! What does that have to *do* with it?!” Stewart put a book marker one third of the way through his book, then set it on his bed.

“I understand their *culture*, is all!! It says here that they were a victim of their *plight*... and I started to think about the ‘projection psychology’ that we all *go* through!! The British still think we’re *brats*, if you were to ask any of the exchange students on this *campus*, and the *BLACKS* know a little more about culture than *we* do!!!”

“You’re sayin’ this because we’re ‘returnin’ to our *roots*, again’ huh??” Stewart looked at the buildings on the cover of his architecture book and noted that they were all sharp and pointed.

“No!! Not necessarily because the Southern whites of Du Bois’ time were as enslaved by the *North* as the Negroes were enslaved by *them*!! The theory, according to many in the *South* is that the Civil War was an *economic* war—everyone knows that because of the invention of the *cotton gin*—and the North wanted to maintain control when the South was goin’ to *EMANCIPATE* the black folk, *anyway*!!”

“You’re sayin’ that because they were gettin’ along together in *church*, and the North *co-opted* the idea that they were goin’ release them from official bondage, and declared *war* on the South by coercion, agitation, and *trickery*!! You think that *Fort Sumter* was a farce, or at the very least, you think it was a gross exaggeration of what was really goin’ *on*!!” Stewart reached for his backpack and started to look for his architecture syllabus.

“I’m sayin’ that I’m a *student*, and it’s all open to *speculation*!!” Joseph Wilton put his Du Bois book back into the desk drawer, and turned to Stewart. “They talk about *voodoo*, in here, and they talk about the Baptists and Methodists bein’ the first *Christian* religions of the black man... but he *organized* under voodoo pretenses, originally, and it oriented in his tribal religions from *Africa*!!! I’m sayin’ the original black man was *illiterate*, and he didn’t have a *choice*... but when he learned how to read, he read *Matthew, Luke, John and Mark*, and he learned that *they* went through some shit, just as well as *he* did!!” Joseph looked out of his dorm window at the pretty women crossing the lawn. “*They* have voodoo, and they use computer internet to *administrate* it!!! I can’t prove it, but every time I leave this room, if I go to the north, I hear people talkin’ about my exgirlfriend... and if I go out through the south, I hear how I was pummeled last year!!! They don’t even try to *hide* it, and it’s almost as if they’re tryin’ to keep me in this room for fear of bein’ ridiculed by things that may or may not be *true*!!!” Joseph sat on his bed.

“*I know* what you’re talkin’ about!!!” He tossed his architecture syllabus toward the room’s waste basket and he said, “If it goes in, you lick *nuts*!! If it misses... you’re *pussy whipped*!!” The paper rimmed off the top of the basket, and bounced back toward Stewart. “You’re *pussy whipped*, it says!!”

Joseph got up and clutched Stewart a gentle head lock. He said, “You’re a *motherfucker*, but that’s what’s *happening* to me!!!”

Stewart laughed, ran out of the room, and yelled into the hall, “*Joseph Wilton is a pussy whipped MOTHERFUCKER!!!*” Joseph could hear his laughter from down the hall, and he picked out his Du Bois book, again, and started to read.

* * *

Joseph read an hour’s worth of *The Souls of Black Folk*, and some corresponding interpretive analysis of it. Stewart came back and said, “What would you do if I told you that the vast majority of *Homeland Security*, the *FBI*, and the *NSA* are Republican... and they are *Protestant*!?”

“*Kid*!! I learned that two years ago, if not *three*!!” Joseph tossed his Du Bois book toward Stewart.

“Okay!! What if I tell you that our *SOCIOLOGY* professor is on his way to the Federal Building near *Whole Foods*, an’ that he is goin’ to demand through *picket* signs that each of the major agencies be fairly and accurately represented in terms of religion and political affiliation!?? Would you want to go and *MARCH!*?” Joseph held the Du Bois book in his hands for a second, then tossed it onto his bed.

Joseph said, “I went through that as a *freshman!!* Go on your march, shout ‘til your *lungs* bleed, then tell me how it goes!!! Chances are, we’re not goin’ to turn to a parliamentary form of *government*—tell that to your *sociology* professor—and there will not be five percent *Greens*, twenty-five percent Catholics, and, and fifty percent *women* in our government *buildings!*!”

“You think he’s an *idealist*, and he’s not goin’ to make any real *change!*!” Stewart tossed the book back at Joseph.

“I’m sayin’ that he *has* to do that because he’s a *SOCIOLOGY* professor!!! You’re goin’ to feel like a hippie of the sixties for about forty-five minutes, then you’re goin’ to go to *Starbucks*, and you’re goin’ to drink from your plastic cups and talk about saving the world from *pollution!*!”

“You’re a *jackass!*!” Stewart said to Joseph. “Study your fuckin’ *voodoo* in your Du Bois book, and don’t wonder why people don’t *like* you out here!!”

Joseph said with a smile, “*Fuck off!!* Okay?” He was in glee, then Stewart ran down the halls yelling that there was a “*wanker*” in his dormitory room.

* * *

Stewart Lane returned to his dorm room a couple of hours after leaving. He said to Joseph, whom seemed to try to be napping on the bed, “It went *well!*!” Stewart tossed his Starbucks coffee cup into the waste basket. “Our teacher got yelled at by some cops for bein’ too close to the *curb*, and the *feds* came out of the *building!*! There were three men, one woman, and the head guy says to us, ‘*Hand over your petitions and we’ll consider your grievances in a timely manner!*’ I laughed because he was wearing sun glasses, and I thought of all the stereotypes on *TV!*!”

Joseph Wilton tossed his *Du Bois* book into the waste basket on top of Stewart’s coffee cup. He said, “I was readin’ through your *biology* book, if you don’t mind, and I was noticin’ that...”

“That is my *biology* book with additional *references!*!” Stewart looked down onto his opened book which was situated on his bed. There were highlight marks of yellow and orange. “What are those *articles* you put there??” He looked at some photocopied work.

“Stephen Jay Gould, and other biologists diverge from Charles Darwin, and other tradition botanists in that they believe in *rapid* evolution!! You were talkin’ about it the other day from the guy from the *Elks* lodge whom told you not to take credence to what’s written in there!!” Joseph looked at the nodding agreement from Stewart, and began to feel appreciated. “So I have some *other* articles in which *lizards* are dropped off on islands which had previously been barren of reptile species—this was done by

University of Washington people—and they *predicted* how they would evolve based on *tree trunk* size!! Sure enough, fourteen years after they dumped the same species of lizard on different islands, they *evolved* pretty rapidly in accordance to *leg size*!!”

“You don’t just *step* inside to *fourteen* years!!” Stewart said as a joke. He enticed, “Tell me *more*!!”

“You’re goin’ to have to read the articles for yourself, because there’s details in there that *I* don’t get!!” The photocopied papers were black and white, and the photographed captions didn’t turn out too well. Joseph was regretful of that. “I have to study *feudal* Europe for another midterm research paper, and I’m startin’ to feel the juices flow in my *head* about it!!”

“You’re a fuckin’ *moron*!!” Stewart said to Joseph. Even though he saw apprehension in Joseph’s look, Stewart was glad he was speaking his mind to him. He would have otherwise guessed that a jock would have pounded a nerd, like himself, into *oblivion*.

* * *

Stewart Lane read quietly from his architecture book for a couple of hours—the *biology* stuff he was going to wait to study during the evening—and Joseph Wilton rehashed the *European* studies while he took notes for his paper. He broke the silence in the room by saying, “So *Renée Zellweger* is out there, and she’s a feudal *lord* as far as I’m concerned, if not a direct *QUEEN*!!”

“What are you *sayin*’?” Stewart asked.

“History repeats itself, and with economics as sharply divided as they *have* been, she’s in practical *royalty* position!! Eric Dickerson was holding out for a million per year in the mid-eighties... and the most prolific back in the *NFL*!! Ten years later, *Alex Rodriguez* is making twenty-five million per *year*... as a *baseball* player, mind you, but the economics *changed*!!”

“So you’re sayin’ she has a *fief*, she has *vassals*, she has lords... if she’s a *QUEEN*, and she has the same stuff that’s semantically the same as pre-medieval *rulers*!?”

“*Yeah*!! That’s what I’m puttin’ in my *paper*!!” Joseph said.

Surprisingly to Joseph, Stewart said, “I *agree* with you, actually, because those *casting* agencies down the road don’t *care* about your degree!!! If you make fun of *Renée*’s former lover, *Kenny Chesney*, I bet ten bucks you get a job at Creative Artists Agency!!! If you say you didn’t like *Cinderella Man*, a thug from the *street* has as much of a chance to get a job there, if not *more*!!!”

“Create *Artists* Agency??” Joseph mused. “Are they *hiring*?”

“I don’t *know* that that’s where she works, but a lot of the Hollywood crowd *goes* through them!!!”

“An *anecdote*!!” Joseph mused again. “How *clever*!!” He felt like a professor with new amusement for anything new to him said.

“So the *Carolingian Empire* crashed of the pre-medieval ages, and you think that they represent

what in today's society!?" Stewart wanted to know.

"*Industry*, of course, because we are no longer *manufacture-based* in this area as our primary market in this area!! Everything is *image*!! I'm in luck because I'm good-lookin', but they say the 'dumb jock' look is on the *out* in this area, just because of the cycles of *history*!!"

"You don't want to be an *actor*, though!!" Stewart assessed.

"Of *course* not... but if I *did* want to be a *vassal* for Renée Zellweger, or any of the other Hollywood celebrities, I would have an '*in*,' right? Because of my size and my willingness to *pound* people!!! I can get a job at a bodyguard agency with *ease*, right?"

"No, *actually*!! The 'image culture' needs you to work for *Halle Berry* because you're white and she's *black*!!! Kid Rock has a black lady drummer, and that seems to be the *trend*: To *look* intercultural, but really uphold the white values that my sociology teacher said they still *do*... even though they *say* they don't!!!"

Joseph snapped back into his thoughts of the earlier protest march. "That was rather interesting what you said about *Homeland Security* and the *NSA*!!! The Clinton Administration was like that!!! His first term was *genuinely* reflective of a lot of America's cultures, and by the second time around, he had a lot of California *white* guys do his jobs for him!!!"

"Do you think that's why they tried to *impeach* 'im?!" Stewart wanted to know.

"*No*!! I think they were jealous, uptight *pricks*!!! And I think the French were *laughin'* at us because they have *open* romances with mistresses in their government!!! And we were in the *black* for the first time in more than a generation!!! Along the line of what you were saying earlier, *Ken Starr* was probably a Republican whom couldn't get laid on his own... so he picked on Clinton, the *Democrat*, to get his mojo!!! I think it was worse that the CIA lied about *MWDs* than Clinton lying about stains on a *dress*!!"

"You're a *motherfucker*!!" Stewart yelled at Joseph. "*Monica Lewinski lives* around here, *don't you know*!?"

"Fuck you," Joseph said, "It's just an *observation*!!"

"A *good* one," Stewart reconsidered. "A *good* one, and I'm going to use that in my sociology paper!!"

"*Reference* me, and I'll give you five *bucks*!!" Joseph said.

* * *

Rikki Styles came to visit Stewart Lane as Joseph Wilton started to handwrite his term paper on medieval *Europe*. Stewart volunteered Joseph's ideas to Rikki, and she spewed out what he should be writing. She was in the middle of a psychology research paper of her own, and it was on abnormalities. "*Renée Zellweger* is in the CIA, and there's a certain class of us that can *say* so. I am rich beyond belief, and if they *tried* to throw me in mental health on the basis of delusions, I just say that I'm writing or

developing a plot for my *English* lit class!! And you are the object of her *affections*, right? And she's doin' cocaine, and it allows her to project herself to places where her physical body is *not*!! And if she tried to meet you, she would have paparazzi on her ass because it's a widespread *conspiracy* in Hollywood that they write the lives of our people for their daily dramas in the form of *soap* operas!!! It helps keep the crowds in control, in *other words*!!!"

"Are you takin' abnormal psychology and *paranormal* studies??" Joseph asked. He was interested, and started to take notes from what Rikki Styles was saying, but he dared not incorporate them into the outline he already had laid out.

"So she has *millions*... and she's been entrusted by the producers and studio execs to keep control of the *populous*!!! And if there was somebody better to do it, they would *do* it!!! But usually, they bring someone up through the Hollywood ranks if they have had some form of *trauma* in the past!! Norma Jean was from a poor, small town, as was *Susan Sommers*!! They were raped, in all likelihood, but the papers would never print that because they were popular *icons*!! Marilyn Monroe, as Norma Jean is now known, is as popular as anyone will ever *be* in this area!!"

"So it's another case of the haves and the have-nots controlling society, and even though the general populous is in *awe* of *Renée Zellweger* because she earns five million per film, if not more, while they earn twenty dollars per hour *tops*, we're not to be envious of her because it's the *execs* that make the inevitable calls about who's who, what gets published, and they have the *billions* to work with instead of the multi-millions!!!"

"If you didn't know the stats so much, I would almost think you're *sarcastic*, Joseph," Rikki Styles countered, "But if you want to be part of the *crowd*, you really have to learn to be a lot less *direct* to the general audiences whom eaves drop on you and your buddies at the coffee houses!!!"

"*Stratosphere* and things like that, *huh*?" Joseph asked.

"How'd you *know*?" Rikki Styles asked. "Did someone *tell* you!?"

"*My girlfriend, last year*!" he said. He wrote about a classist system of medieval Europe, brushed over *Renée Zellweger* as a modern lord, talked about hidden "kings" in today's world, and postulated arguments concerning vanity, and the *lack* of the need for the "real" power-brokers to have their pictures on the front covers of magazines, not needing their faces to stare *back* at them. He wrote about irony, and how the best of them *run* from fame, as Elvis Aaron Presley was rumored to run from fame before his disappearance from the world in nineteen seventy-seven. He was marked down for not using the word "death," but Joseph started to believe that Rikki Styles was partially right—there was a "secret society" that knew answers that the "common person" did *not*. In Rikki Styles' oratory *exposé* on abnormal and paranormal psychology, she mentioned that when people claimed to have been abducted by *aliens*, it was not considered to be a delusional thought because it was a widely-held belief that it *happened*. Joseph Wilton found that odd, but did not add it to his paper. He believed there was a greater chance that Elvis was still walking around *Graceland* than aliens abducting his brethren and administrating anal *probes*. He

believed that those people—the ones claiming to have been abducted and been experimented upon—were really people that were seduced or coerced into sexual activity unbecoming of personal morals. He believed that “anal probes” were really explanations to general populations that the person or persons had their first orgy activity... and it didn’t go as well as *planned*, maybe ending in homosexual experience or spontaneous unsuspecting aroused interplay with overweight plumped fatty women. Joseph Wilton asked Rikki Styles, after receiving a “B-” paper back, “Have you ever been anally probed by *aliens*, Rikki??”

Rikki admitted to being anally probed, but she said that it was by the *basketball* team!! Joseph thought it was funny, and laughed for a few minutes straight.

* * *

Thanksgiving was approaching, and Rikki Styles spoke to Stewart Lane in front of Joseph Wilton while she thumbed through Joseph’s paper on medieval Europe as it applied to contemporary society. She said to Stewart, “So I’m in *Frederick’s Of Hollywood* and I’m tryin’ to understand what’s goin’ on there, and this chubby wrestler comes in from our *biology* class!! He has a goatee, and his hair is slicked back in a way that seems to remind me of *Pat Riley* of the *Miami Heat*!! He’s wearin’ glasses—*dark ones*—and I say to him, ‘I know you from *biology* and *Stewart’s sociology class*, huh!!’ The guys says, ‘I’m doin’ a *survey* on modern women, and I’m trying to explain their emotions as they buy lingerie because they are prompted to do so by their *husbands*!’ And I say to him, ‘You should have had one of your *lady* friends do it, because you’re not goin’ to get an *accurate* account of things bein’ that you’re a chubby *slob*!’ I was mad at that point, and he pulls a pencil from his pocket, of all things, and he starts to write down what I just *said*! And then it hits me that that’s what the guys from *Homeland Security* did to your *sociology* professor!! They put ‘im under surveillance, but they used *guys*!! If they had used pretty *women* to tail ‘im, they would have had a lot different perception on what or who he *was*!! You said your professor was paranoid about bein’ followed by investigators in heavy *coats*, right??”

“*Yep!!*” Stewart said. He reached for Joseph’s paper which Rikki Styles had stopped thumbing through.

“I wonder if they do that on *purpose*!! I wonder if they ‘peg’ someone they don’t like, and then use *agents* whom are neither attractive nor *subtle* to fuck with people’s *heads*!!” Rikki Styles thought about smoking a cigarette. If she *would* have, Stewart would have no doubt been able to use his “you just blew any *chance* of sucking my *cock*” line for the first *time*.

“If my professor was right that they peg *Democrats* to investigate moreso than *Republicans*, you are *on* to somethin’!!” Stewart said.

Joseph grabbed his paper back from Stewart after the speculation. “You can go on tangents from *tangents* all day, but if you *go* too far... it won’t be long before they’re after *you*!!” He tossed his research paper into the garbage and thought to ask Rikki Styles some more about paranormal studies because it

interested him past what he needed to know for future research.

“You wrote about Francisco Pizarro, but I believe *Hernando* Pizarro was the basis for the inverted *SUPERMAN!!!* You wrote about Machiavelli, but you seemed to indicate that *The Prince* doesn’t have as much relevance in modern society!!! I think you were wrong on *that!!* You said that De Soto was lookin’ for the *Fountain of Youth*, but I think you mixed ‘im up with *Ponce de León!!!* And Amerigo Vespucci explored South America and founded a *religion*—not a system of *governances!!!*” Rikki Styles felt satisfied with her observations and critiques, and didn’t expect a reaction from Joseph.

“My *teacher* liked what I said about Pizarro, but he *did* wind up markin’ me down for it!!! Maybe you’re *right!!*” Joseph went to have coffee with Stewart Lane and Rikki Styles. He somehow thought he was breaking the code of letting nerds and geeks into his world. He was happy, but he could feel the disdain on his skin with the guys in uniform getting ready to play their *football* games.

* * *

“So that tramp *led* me to believe that I was the only thing *goin’!!*” Joseph Wilton said to Stewart Lane and Rikki Styles as they made their way to Santa Barbara. Traditionally, most of the students stayed in Westwood for the Thanksgiving break, but Joseph wanted his father to meet a couple of his new acquaintances. “And *Stewart*, here, is sayin’ that he’s going to *tap* that shit right in *front* of me!!”

Joseph was in the back seat of Stewart’s Chevy Sprint and leaned over to the front to tell the story. Rikki Styles was in the passenger’s seat, and she remembered watching cartoons from one of her cinema classes which chronicled America’s fascination with racism... but the one she had in mind was the one dealing with *size*. In it, Daffy Duck became irate with a motorist, started honking madly at him, then was surprised when a *giant* came out of a tiny car. Rikki Styles looked back at Joseph and marveled at that cartoon. She laughed at Joseph’s story.

“They say that *Mars* might be fully functional with *oxygen* by now!! By theory and speculation, Vikings one and two traveled to the Red Planet in seventeen seventy-six, our *bicentennial* year, and put *algae* on it!! Being that Mars was a carbon dioxide planet, algae could have produced enough *oxygen*, by now, that we could live there in a generation or *two!!*”

“It wouldn’t be so *red* then, would *it??* I mean *Venus* has a red sky *too*, and that’s because of the carbon dioxide concentration!! Couldn’t you see it with a common *telescope!!*” Rikki Styles asked. She speculated that the rumors were brought up because of her fascination with fabrications and conspiracies.

“Did you know that *Blink 182* named their band after a piece of *legislation!!*” Stewart asked. “California penal code one hundred and eighty-two prohibits conspiracies of the criminal *nature!!*” Stewart looked on to the Pacific Ocean as it made itself visible for the first time in the trip.

“And eight-six-seven-five-three-oh-nine, *Jenny*, by Tommy Tutone was a cry against teenage *prostitution!!*” Joseph Wilton said. “Penal code three-oh-nine prohibits young girls and guys from

prostituting themselves, and Tommy yells out at the end of the song, ‘*Fuck three-oh-nine!!*’ but it’s mixed in with *five-three-oh-nine* so you could hardly tell!!”

“That sounds like he’s *for* underaged prostitution!!” Rikki Styles said. She looked out at sea gulls along the coast. She wanted to *be* one of them. She wanted to know what they saw.

“And I was thinkin’ about all the *paranormal* stuff you brought up, *Rikki*, and your friends on the basketball team!!” Joseph Wilton admired the same flock of gulls that she was staring at. “Nikola Tesla had a dispute with Thomas Edison and... Long story short, I’m starting to think that the development of the *radio* was prompted with the belief of telepathy!! In other words, the camera coincided with the understanding of the *eyeball* as much as radio development coincided with the belief that we can talk to each other with mere *brain waves!!*”

“That sounds *stupid!!*” Rikki Styles said. She looked at the gulls. “I wonder which one’s *Jonathan!!*”

“Jonathan Cain from *Journey??*” Stewart Lane asked.

“*No!!* Jonathan Livingston Seagull from the Neil Diamond movie!!” Rikki said.

“You’re a *jackass*,” Joseph said. He felt like crying from being around nerds. More than this, he felt grateful to be away from Claire’s torture techniques. They sang “I Am, I Said” together, and made their way to Santa Barbara.

* * *

Jake Wilton pounded mashed potatoes onto his place, and his family was having Thanksgiving dinner, again, *this time* on Thanksgiving Day. The Cowboys played on the TV inside, but it was a family rule not to watch any of the games until they had dinner with one another. Marcus Blacksmith showed up, as did Holly Rydell. Joseph said, “*Rikki*, here, believes that *aliens* might exist and she believes that there are trolls underneath the *Earth!!*”

“I do *not!!*” Rikki said. She scooped some mayonnaise onto her plate, then licked some of it off her finger. She was sloppy in front of company, she came to find.

“And she thinks there are caverns—*mines*—of *marble shafting* in Greece and parts of *England!!*” Joseph served himself some corn.

“I don’t *think* so!!” She reached below the table cloth and wiped some mayonnaise onto her napkin which was situated on her lap.

“And she thinks that *trolls* are going to come *out* of there, some day, and take over the whole human *race!!*” Joseph laughed at his own joke, heard snickering from Rikki Styles, and thought it was going to be a good Thanksgiving.

“Is *this* what I send you to college for?!” Jake jokingly demanded. He put some crepes onto his plate.

“No! You send me there so I can be like *Marcus*!! But I can’t run a four-three *forty*, like him!!” Joseph reached for the cranberry sauce, because it was his favorite.

“I *hear* ya’!! There’s a lot of ‘Heisman talk’ in our family right now, Joseph, and I want you to go with me to *Canton* if I make it!!” Marcus buttered his roll.

“The Heisman Trophy is given by the Downtown Athletic Club in *New York City*, Marcus, so you need to do your homework if you’re goin’ to show up to the right *place*!!” Joseph flipped a pea at Rikki Styles, and hoped his father didn’t see.

“Yeah!! But I expect to make the *Hall of Fame*, so I was thinkin’ ahead, and...” Marcus noticed that Rikki was reaching underneath the table cloth and rubbing mashed potatoes onto her napkin.

“Don’t think too far *ahead*!!” Joseph said. “What are you rubbing onto the *table cloth*?” Joseph “*Squire*” Wilton asked Rikki Styles.

“I don’t like the *peas*!” Rikki said and blushed.

“I’m sorry I put the peas onto your potatoes!! I’ll let you serve your own plate!!” Joseph looked around the table and saw embarrassment. “I thought it was *polite* and courteous to serve her!! How would I have *known*!?!?”

Holly remained silent, and started to feel a tinge of jealousy of the new girl.

Marcus said, “So I was *tellin*’ my man, here, that *fish* evolved into apes... which evolved into *TROLLS*!!! A *long* time ago!!!” Marcus was mad that Rikki was blushing.

She said, “I *don’t* think trolls are down there, but I really think the primitive Saxons bred people like dogs, and I *believe* dwarves and elves really existed in some form or another the same way I believe toy *poodles* exist!!!” Rikki Styles served herself a plate which only had potatoes, cranberry sauce, and pumpkin pie. “I’m *vegan*, by the way... or I *try* to be... so I’ll skip out on the *turkey*!! If you wonder why I wasn’t eatin’ the peas, I just don’t *like* them!!!”

Nicki Wilton was bemused that Joseph, her *son*, brought home any form of vegetarian. She snobily said, “You don’t eat *eggs*, I presume, because they come from *chickens*... so I don’t need to pass you the *bread rolls*, DO I?!”

Rikki Styles ignored her. She gestured subtly toward Nicki with her head toward Joseph then said, “These *trolls*, I believe, if they *did* exist!!! I think they’d be eatin’ Thanksgiving dinner with us!!!”

Nicki started to think that Rikki Styles was talking about her. She refrained from asking out of fear that she’d be called paranoid.

Joseph Wilton said to Rikki Styles while subtly nodding his head in his mother’s direction, “The *trolls* live underground, and I think they were the first *miners*!!!”

“Of *what*??” Rikki Styles wanted to know. She picked at her potatoes and waited for a response.

“My name is ‘*Squire*,’ around here, and it’s because my *mom* named me that from having a medieval infatuation!!!” Joseph nodded toward his father when he said “*mom*,” then he scooped green beans onto his plate.

“Your *mom* seems like a kind lady, but I think she’s mistaken about the trolls... and some other *things!!!*” She nodded subtly to Joseph’s father to acknowledge the change in subject. She ate heartily from corn she decided to add to her mix.

“My *mom* doesn’t know that you’re in *theatre*, Rikki!!!” Joseph said. “Rikki’s in *theatre*, and she plays Lewis Carroll’s *Alice*, once per year for her *family!!!*”

“I do *not!!!*” She yelled at Joseph. “I played that role *twice*, and that was so they’d give me money to go to *school!!!*”

“Very *well!!!*” Jake said. He felt embarrassed that he had a vegan at the table, but more than that, he was glad that there was diversity, for once.

“I’m goin’ to eat me a big *hamburger* when I get home to San Diego!!!” Marcus said aloud. He hoped to make Jake happy, more than anything else. “Is meat *murder*, Rikki, because they say so on campus all the *time!!!* The *PeTA* people, I *mean!!!*”

“Meat is your *mom*,” Rikki Styles said. “Meat is your *mom*, and we at *PeTA* no longer try to make you feel *guilty!!* If you want to eat your *mom*, go ahead and *do so!!!*”

Joseph started to cry openly at the table, but for once in his life, there was *laughter* underneath it all. “I *love* you!!!” he said to Rikki Styles. He kissed her on her Revlon-free face. “Is that generally regarded as *safe*, people?!” he asked. They laughed. He was happy.

A half hour later, the bunch of them sat awkwardly around a television screen watching the Lions play on TV. Rikki said to the group, “See!! They still feed lions to the *people!!!*”

No one laughed, but everyone wanted to.

* * *

“So you were referring to my mom as the *troll!!!* That was *cute!!!*” Joseph was driving Stewart’s car back to Westwood along the Pacific Coast Highway. Stewart was trying to sleep in the passenger’s seat, and Rikki Styles was in the back trying to hear what Joseph was saying. She wished he would roll up his window, but knew the car had no air conditioner and the wind was the best thing going.

“Yeah!! But they *found* uranium in British *mines* this past century, and there was no reason to believe that trolls might not *exist!!!*” Rikki Styles ate from a mayonnaise rice cake. It had ketchup on it. She licked white stuff off her lips, and Joseph could see her eating from his rearview mirror.

“You were gesturing to my *mom*, though, and I thought it was *funny!!!*” Joseph said. He admired sea gulls in the distance, and wondered if they were the same ones he watched on the way to his father’s house.

“You have to talk in *double* talk, *sometimes!!* That means that you have to say things that *happen* to be true... and if your mom’s mean to you, you have to think of clever anecdotes to get *out* of it!!!” Rikki dipped her rice cake into more mayonnaise. She shoved the slender remaining rice cake into her mouth.

“Okay!! So the British discover uranium in their land, and before this there are legends of trolls, gnomes, goblins, and everything *else*!! And we have evidence through *Ripley’s Believe It Or Not...* that *dwarves* exist, although not very many of them!! And we have domesticated dogs to be toy-sized chihuahuas, and we have genetically engineered chickens to be so *huge* that their bone-structures no longer support them!!! You are saying that uranium in *mines* caused a rapid evolution—*much* like the evolution I told Stewart here about!!—and the British are keepin’ it a secret because of *what*!? *Vanity*??”

“*Yeah*, actually!! I happen to know that stars on the Hollywood Boulevard Strip are still promiscuous, but I wouldn’t tell *papers*!!! Stars would shoot me *down*!! And besides... I *don’t* think the British government necessarily knows about it!!! I think the feudal lords scared vassals and serfs into hiding, and much like Vietnamese survived for years underground during the *Conflict*, vassals and serfs took refuge in *caves*... and they *dug* in caves!!!! And when they were close enough to the uranium, they started to mutate suddenly, and the ones that had *beneficial* mutations were able to *survive*!!! I actually think beings *de-evolved* in there, and lost the ability to *see*!!”

“Like *Merlin*??” Joseph “*Squire*” Wilton asked.

“*Yeah*!! Like *Merlin*... because he saw with ‘is *MIND*!!!’ Rikki Styles flicked Joseph Wilton in the ear. She asked, “If you came across a million dollars, would you *tell* anyone??”

“*No*!! I wouldn’t tell the *cops*, if that’s what you *mean*!! I wouldn’t report it and hope for a petty *reward*!!” Joseph admired the breaking of the waves in the distance.

“Well, that’s what the *British* are doing!! They are fooling us, just the same as I fool *you*!!!” Rikki reached into her blouse and pulled out two bank statements. She handed them to Joseph Wilton. “The first one is what I show my friends in Westwood... and the second one is the one I show to people like your *mom*!!”

“*Nosey bitches*, huh?? Let me see!!!” Joseph was shocked to find that the first one reported a balance of roughly three million dollars, and the second one reported a balance of twenty-four dollars and fifty-three cents. “*God damn*!!!”

Rikki Styles grabbed the statements back, crumpled the larger-amount one up, and tossed it out of the rolled-down window. “If you *tell* anyone, I would deny having that amount of *money*... and then I would *destroy* you!!!”

Joseph Wilton believed there was a grain of truth to what she said. He remarked, “I’m not sure I want to *know* certain things, to tell you the *truth*!!! I’m used to looking up at a scoreboard and seeing the measurement of how far I shotputted a metal *ball*!!! I’m used to looking up into a wrestling scoreboard and knowing how much time I have to get another pin!!! I’m used to reading the *L.A. Times*, and if they say another Bigfoot hoax has been reported, I like to *laugh* at it and wonder who knows what about *cinematography* so I can pull my *own* pranks!!!” Joseph looked into the rearview mirror and said, “I don’t need to know your speculations if you’re going to be *mean* about it!!!”

“*Okay*!!” Rikki Styles said. She put the other bank statement into her blouse. “What *I* like to do

when I get too serious is to *over-exaggerate*!!! Say that the trolls are manning secret space flights to Venus and *Jupiter*!!! That will go over well with the crowds because they won't take *any* of it seriously!!! Never take anything *back*, in other words!!! Always subtraction by *addition*!!!! That means *attenuate* what you're sayin' by dissipating it!!! Never say what you mean... unless it's with someone like *me*!!! They'll *capture* you, otherwise!!!!"

Joseph "Squire" Wilton changed the direction of the conversation, but he did not change the subject. "Do you think it was *genocide*, back then?? Do you think British royals went after the mutants from the caves and *caverns*?!!"

"I think they *tried*, and when they got scared enough, I think the inhabitants of the caves worked in mines that make our modern *wood-framed* shafts look like *JOKES*!!!! I think the Minotaur was the guardian of a real *labyrinth*, but I think it was a strong man wearing the *head* of a bull... to scare away would-be *explorers*... no different than Viking head dresses... and I think that *Medusa* had a similar head dress of *snakes*, but I don't think she lived in the cave full *time*!!! This is speculation, of course, and we don't have all the *answers*, but in our group we have *imagination*... and it's pretty *nice*!!!"

"You guys are the ones that write the *scripts* for us, *huh*?! I have a *Chucky* doll at my dorm, and my exgirlfriend has a *LEPRECHAUN* doll... like from the *movies*!!!" Joseph felt stupid, but that was the magic of going to a university. If he up and ran every time he felt stupid, he would learn no more. He would reach a plateau, and he would be at bars talking about *EVERYTHING* as if it was pure *fibbery*... and then watch *Ripley's* on television and wonder how they did certain things.

"If the wrong people find out that you believe what I'm telling you, they *will* mess with you by threatening to put you in an *asylum*!!! Just know that, *okay*!?" Rikki Styles sat back and adjusted her bra because it was becoming uncomfortable.

"I think they're *out* there... and as long as I have *doubt* in my mind, I don't have to worry about it!!!" Joseph looked at the birds, and saw the Sun setting behind them. He asked, "Did you know that the Japanese Islands formed from the melting drops of giant *sword*?!! It's *SHINTO*!!!"

Rikki Styles didn't know. She was fascinated, and she kept her thoughts and secrets to herself as she felt a period coming on.

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Rikki's menstrual cramps were coming to an end, and Stewart Lane's car was heading in the direction of Beverly Hills on Sunset Boulevard. On the right, the group passed Guitar Center. On the left, they had just gone past the city library, and the *Seventh Veil*. Ahead, they were going to see UCLA within fifteen minutes, unless traffic kicked in. Rikki Styles spoke to Joseph Wilton from the passenger's seat. Stewart was asleep in the back. She said, "We talked about all the myths, but I want to ask you what you think about propaganda?? I want to ask you if it's right that we should have movies which glamorize

Hollywood instead of showing the reality of the people on the *street*?! Do you think the Russians, and everyone else would stop *investing* here??"

"Well, Baywatch was watched by more than a billion people per week, at a time, and I've been to the *beach* before!!! It's nowhere *like* that!!! There are good-lookin' *lifeguards*, but they're all *male*... and they're not *David Hasselhof*!!! I think we lie for our own *reasons*!!!" Joseph Wilton watched the traffic in front of him. He feared it would get thicker down the road. "I *think* you're sayin' that *Greece* lies to the Hebrews about what was goin' on in their *culture*, and it made headlines in their *literature*!!! I think you're sayin' that the *British*—the early *Saxons*—did the same thing, and it was to keep people *away*!!!"

"So imagine a culture," Rikki Styles said as she contemplated asking to pull over to put a tampon into her vagina, "in which the British wanted people to stay away!!! They would send word that gnomes, goblins, and *goons* don't exist!!! They would get *hunters*, otherwise!!!" Rikki Styles squirmed from her side of the car. "I have a '*Red Sea*' comin' on, if you don't mind pullin' over," she finally said.

Joseph pulled the car to the right. There was a small liquor store across the street from *Tower Records*. He figured Rikki Styles could take care of business there, or go into the closeby gas station. Joseph said, "But you said that the *MYTH*-so-called of the Minotaur was a *real* one!!! You're sayin' that in the *labyrinths* of Greece they didn't have *goblins*, but in Northern Europe and *England* they did?!"

Rikki Styles couldn't wait for the car to stop. She said, "*Yeah*!! Because the British had *uranium* in their mines—their *caverns*—and the Greeks *didn't*... or so I was led to believe by my *sorority*... and the Greeks were jealous, and they were *myth-makers* any way, so they said they had them... and a few *other* seemingly nonexistent forms of life!!!" Rikki Styles ran a full sprint to the bathroom when the car halted. Stewart Lane was woken up from the back, and asked where they were. When Rikki Styles came back a minute and a half after running into the restroom, Stewart Lane noticed a *kink* in her walk, and he *knew* why they stopped.

Joseph "*Squire*" Wilton said to Stewart Lane, "She almost had a '*Red Sea*'!!!" Stewart laughed, then Joseph ignored him then said, "I *know* what you're talkin' about with *myth*... because I'm prompted to tell *Stewart*, here, that we were talkin' about *food*... and not unicorns, or anything *else*!!!"

"*Mythology* class, *huh*??" Stewart asked.

"*Pretty* much!!!" Joseph said.

Rikki Styles stayed quiet for the rest of the ride to UCLA, then broke into laughter before being dropped off. She whispered into Joseph "*Squire*" Wilton's ear, "I *want* you to come to my house to see the miniature *setup* I have of a mock cavern in *England*!! I made it of styrofoam, and I know it's a sin of *vegans* to do so, but it was a '*greatest good*' sensation that prompted me to *do* it!!! I have pillar walls that are thirty feet high in proportion to a twelve-to-one scale—roughly *feet to inches*, as *Spinal Tap* fans would know about—and I have goblins, ghosts, and everything *else* you can imagine!! It's a little *mockery* because I don't want to be paranoid by the *neighbors*!!! I put in a salad bar, but if you're *stoned* at the right time, you could see that it's *real*!!! You can imagine what they really *went* through!!! You can see the

British troops wanting to come in, and you can see the *guard* posts at the entrances of the *caverns*!!! It occupies a space of roughly ten by fifteen in my house, and I put *dinosaurs* on the outside because I remember you sayin' that you didn't *trust* the geologists—that *dinosaurs* could have really been contemporary with the *humans*, as speculated—and *Job* knew about it long *ago*!!!” Rikki Styles rubbed her pants because the menstrual pains had not yet left. “Rapid evolution *caused* the gnomes to be able to live underground, but *genocide* was what prompted a war between the Cro-Magnon man... and the *Neanderthal* one!!! The same thing *happened*, with these guys, and the *dinosaurs* 're really dragons of *lore*!!!”

“They burned their bones so they wouldn't be detected by travelers from the *SOUTH*, huh???” Joseph Wilton asked. “I think I'm goin' *crazy*, but you can start callin' me '*Squire*,' okay???”

“*Yep*!!!” Rikki Styles said.

Rikki kissed Joseph on the cheek—it was wet and *sloppy*—and Joseph was mildly happy. He wiped off the mess from the side of his face, wondered if she was really just a “wigger in disguise,” then said to her, “I'll see you around with *STEWART*, here!!!”

Stewart pushed the passenger's side seat forward so he could get out and he re-entered his own car but to the front seat. He said to Joseph “*Squire*” Wilton as they sped away, “I think her sorority's a *trip*!!! And I heard what she said in some parts about the dragons on *accident*!!! I don't think they really breathed *fire*!!! I think that was the foot soldiers, and I think they did it as *ARSON* to avoid havin' to work for the *THROWN* any longer!!!”

“You're a *wigger*!!!” Joseph said to Stewart. Both of them felt good. At UCLA, people were *allowed* to be wiggers without being afraid for their lives. They had great English and drama departments. It was *welcome*, even.

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Joseph looked into the corner of his room when he returned. Chucky was on *Shrek's* face, and he was rubbing his asshole into his nose. There was a note attached to the green ogre's ear, and Joseph approached it to read. It said, *THANK YOU FOR THE YEAR! LU HSUN PAK!!!* “Thank you!!!” Joseph said into the air. He felt good. He felt really *good*.

He heard a voice: *I am Lu Hsun!! I am goin' to GEEET YOOOU!!!* He thought he was going insane, and he quit moving so he could hear the voice again... or confirm that there was no voice at all. After ten seconds, he heard, *I'M GOING TO GEEET YOU!!!* It was a little louder, and that time, he was *sure* that he heard it... but he was unsure where it was coming from. *APPROACH MY EYEBALLS!!!* he heard from *Lu Hsun*, this time louder. Joseph Wilton approached *Shrek's* eyeballs, and looked *into* them. *I LIKE THE SCARF YOU'RE WEARING ON YOUR FOREHEAD!!!* the voice said, and this time, Joseph was pretty sure that it was coming from Shrek's *mouth*. “*Lu Hsun!! Where the fuck are you!!?*” Joseph

demanded. “I’m goin’ to...” he started to say. *I’M IN THE CAFETERIA... AND WE’RE HAVIN’ A GREAT TIME WATCHIN’ YOU SQUIRM AROUND!!!!* Joseph heard laughter in the background, and gently smacked the green ogre on the side of the head. “*Fuckin’ Shrek!!!*” he said.

Within five minutes, Lu Hsun came into the room and opened Joseph’s desk drawer without asking. “*These* are what I want you to have!!!” he said. He pulled out some electronic devices, and said, “I want you to bug *Clarissa* if you are havin’ a *problem* with her!!!” He looked at Joseph, and the look on his face was stern. He said, “It’s the new *way*, man!!! There’s a ‘spy store’ on *Sunset*, and *everyone* is buggin’ everyone *else*, now!!! After Thanksgiving, one of the frats and one of the sororities came in and gave them to us *all!!!* It’s fair *game*, and it’s like smokin’ *pot*: Even though it’s *illegal* in the technical sense, nobody *cares!!!* They are preparing for the outside world, and they are gettin’ used to talking as if they are *bugged!!!* They are not assuming that they are *not* bugged, as they did in the past!!! We are learning languages, and we are learning *codes!!!*” Lu Hsun paused, then looked sternly into Joseph’s eyes again. “We want to be on the cutting *edge* of it all... *because this is not goin’ away!!!* We are not goin’ back to the *wheel!!!*”

Joseph “*Squire*” Wilton felt grateful. He said, “*Thank you*, Lu!! You did me a *service!!!*” Joseph thought about the implications of it all. He could be spied on without *knowing*. If he was going to be spied on, he wanted to be spied on for a *reason*... and he wanted to know. He asked, “Who else knows?? And how do we avoid the paranoia of the pre-test talk stipulation, presupposing, and *postulating* wrong-doing by our own *people!!!* In the past, we could consider that the president was in cahoots with the Arabs regarding the fall of the *Twin Towers*... but then we would see that the *New Yorker* alone... coupled with Michael Moore later was not *enough* evidence to *implicate* the man!!! How do we avoid seeming to be *prosecuting* of innocent people if we are bugged... and *listened* to by people who are going to splice our *fuckin’ shit!!!* They are going to *sound bite* selective passages based on free thought and brainstorming!!! I wouldn’t mind if someone spliced my final *paper*... because it would be thought-out... but to *sound bite* my oral notes...??? I’m *worried* about that!!!”

“I *know!!!*” Lu Hsun said. “We have *three* computers—it’s like the Jesuits, Franciscans, and Benedictines whom *separately* were given distinct parts of the Dead Sea Scrolls from *Qumran* to translate from their native tongues, neither knowing what the other was *doing*—and they *check* one another, our *computers*, so that if you say something... it’s *recorded* and discarded at the end of the year... and *Homeland Security* is not here, by theory, because they know you’re preparing for a research paper, speech, or *written test*... and they are screened!!! If one guy says you’re startin’ a revolution, they *know* that you’re not doin’ an ‘internet broadcast to the *world’!!!* They know that you’re studying in your dorm, and you are *not* at some park trying to rally the public to *overthrow* the government!!!”

“I had a conversation with *Clarissa*, last year!!!” Joseph thought about the talk, and walked over to the dolls in the corner of his room. “She told me that she thought they were really *perverts*—the web masters, the *FBI*, and the Homeland Security people!!! She said that they are fat, *old*, bald men perving off

to the public!!!" Joseph shoved the ass of Chucky deeper into Shrek's *nose*. "I thought it was peculiar, that observation!!!"

"You have to get used to bein' bugged in the modern *era*!!!" Lu Hsun said to Joseph. "If you are not bugged by *us*, you will be bugged by *them*!!!"

Joseph said, "I *hear* you!!!" He looked at Shrek and wondered who was picking up on his conversation. "I wonder what perverted fuck from our own school is listening to us right now as we *speak*, though!!!"

Lu Hsun felt a grain of embarrassment, but brushed it off. "You're going to have to worry about those fuckheads that you beat down on... back in Santa Barbara more than anything *else*!!! There are people that didn't get scholarships to *schools* like this because you beat them in *wrestling*!!! They are bitter, they are going to want to know who you are dating and what you are writing about... and they are going to 'cut you off at the pass' when you return *home*!!! They don't want *shame*, anymore!!!" Lu Hsun saw Joseph smile. "The guys in the other dorms have *mild* competition with you... but we are in the same *boat*, and if we take one another down, they are going to pay... by someone *else* at this school... so it's an *honor* system, I *hope*!!!"

"I worry about the fuckheads that *didn't* get into UCLA, *though*!!! I'm going to be proposing and suggesting theories to Stewart, my new roommate, and Rikki Styles, his classmate buddy!!! Those fuckheads on the *fringe* are what I worry about the most!!! I'm a fuckin' *meathead* when I start, but I get *goin'*!!! And I don't *stop*!!!"

"You think they're *jealous* of you!?" Lu Hsun asked.

"I don't think they're jealous of me, but I *plan* to be in a better place!!!" Joseph "Squire" Wilton greeted Stewart Lane with a wave when he came into the room with a sandwich and some juice. He continued to Lu Hsun, "I think they're going to try to get my education from me for *free*!!! Without havin' to sweat on wrestling mats, and without spending hours or work *readin'*!!! I think they're goin' to try to get the *free ride* because, in all honesty, I might have done the same if I blew a knee in my senior year instead of gettin' a partial *ride*!!!"

"I can feel the perverts strokin' off to you right *now* as we *SPEAK*!!!" Lu Hsun said. He hit Joseph on the shoulder lightly with his fist, then made his way out of the dorm.

"This is our new friend, *Shrek the BUG*!!!" Joseph said to Stewart. He told him all about what was going on, and how they ought to prepare.

Joseph got ready for his sail to the winter break when all was over. He started to read, but he was bothered by the *Shrek-thing* on occasion. He was almost compelled that he ought to *talk* to it... for the "*perverts' sake*"!!!

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Ninety-six percent of all of the UCLA student body had voluntary bugs within their dorms within a week from the Thanksgiving break. Twenty-five percent of them swore that it would be a temporary thing just for the semester. Another twenty-four percent reported that they would not allow voluntary bugs past the end of the school year. The others were undecided, or they were open to “indefiniteness.” Joseph Wilton put a bug in Clarissa’s room in the form of a spongy heart. He tried to make up with her, caught five minutes of reflection when he left, then by rule, he had to come to tell her what was going on... *just the same as he was told by Lu Hsun.*

Clarissa didn’t get mad, but she blushed mildly. She started to go off that she still *loved* Joseph after all the time they spent apart from one another. Joseph’s three-foot-high *Shrek* stared at him, and he found it quite conversational!! He would talk to Shrek, Shrek would talk back, and just like being in the internet chat rooms of old, he never knew who he was truly *talking* to. In a lot of ways, he thought it was like talking to *God*.

Joseph went through the year, and he worked out in his dorm when Stewart was gone. Christmas was three weeks away, and he looked at Shrek wondering who was behind the *eyes*—who was *watching* him instead of just listening?? He knew that radio station DJs had the same problem. *Arbitron* ratings were accurate, but they didn’t go into the whole detail about whom was listening to what... and what they were *thinking*. Joseph didn’t know if he was being watched by thirty people, a *hundred*, or a thousand. He didn’t know if boys were watching him in order to learn how to lift free weights correctly. He didn’t know if *older* men were watching him and admiring his pecks in an uncouth and tainted way. He didn’t know if Clarissa was watching him, and he didn’t know if Holly Rydell got feeds from the University of Santa Barbara. He worked out the same as he had *always* worked out, and hoped that it wouldn’t change his life significantly. For fleeting moments, he wondered about the “normal activities”—scratching his nuts, and sniffing his underwear to see if he had to do laundry—and he wondered if he was going to be judged by it. He *wondered*, but he didn’t let it consume him.

Joseph, for the most part, felt fine with everything, but there was an exception. As seven o’ clock rolled around every night, he would feel a tinge of awe and *dreariness*. He would look at his pecks... and he would *know* that he was above-average in the physical regard. He worried about showing off... even though he was alone while Stewart was in the dining hall (Joseph liked to bring his food back to his dorm, most the time). He worried, and he thought it might create *backlash*, even though it was unfathomable that it *ought* to create backlash. Something told him—an intuitive *voice*—that he ought to slow down on the workouts late at night and concentrate more on his studying. He felt *controlled* by then... by an invisible society. He thought he was going mad in his mind, but he thought of a solution he could work with: He would go into *character* when he would work out!!! He would pretend to be Hercules and talk to Aphrodite. He would say, “I’m going to *give* it to you, *bitch!!!*” He would do his pushups and to the *camera audience*, if there was one, it would look like he was fantasizing about *humping* Aphrodite. He hoped to appear funny, and he hoped he wouldn’t get yelled at by the women feminists on the campus.

Rikki was one of them, but he got along with her. He could imagine that another one would come in and yell about his sexist language. Deep inside, he knew that it wasn't *him*. He knew that if the bugs and the cameras were not there, he would be doing something different entirely. He thought about what he was told by Lu Hsun that there was no turning back—that the bugs were there to *stay*. He did his best to adapt, but he thought about removing *Shrek* when the winter break was over. At the very least, he thought about turning Shrek around so that Chucky was grabbing his ass, instead of rubbing his butt on his nose. That would be good because it would be an *oral* culture around him. He wouldn't have to worry about his pecks, and he wouldn't have to worry about showing off.

There were times that Joseph Wilton would talk aloud to Clarissa or Holly... “*just in case they were listening.*” As for Rikki Styles, he didn't care about her because it wasn't close enough of a relationship. She wigged him out with her *ogre* stories, and her tales of the underground *beings*. He liked her in a peculiar way in the same way that a person likes an orangutan at the *wildlife* park... or an armadillo on the side of the road... but to live with her was to invite *death* into his house.

He didn't want that.

“*Clarissa!! I'm bonin' down on your ass tonight!!*” he said to an empty room as he started his nightly pushups. “*I'm bonin' down on you, and I'll take your new wrestler boyfriend any day of the week!! And you can tell him that!!*” The wrestling squad, unbeknownst to Joseph, was watching the nightly broadcast and had a laugh. Clarissa's new boyfriend snapped the laptop computer shut from which they watched the feed. One of the wrestlers gave a fake mock kiss to Joseph “*Squire*” Wilton's face before the end of the diminutive broadcast. Joseph could *swear* that he felt a kiss, that night, and wondered about the talk on *voodoo* he had so long ago with Stewart Lane. He *wondered*, but he didn't take too much heed to it. He thought, before going to bed, that it would be a good idea to put “*barbs*” in his room as a form of *art work*—things that would discourage perverted men from watching him. The Virgin Mary? Jimi Hendrix? Jim Morrison? He thought of the posters or paintings he could get. He was pretty sure that *if* voodoo existed, it would not exist around him as strong with a “greater power” around the place.

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Joseph chose the *Bruin* mascot poster to put behind him when he was working out. It wasn't what he wanted in a million *years*, but he knew that if people were perving off to him with the Bruin mascot in the background, it wouldn't *look* so good. It was a week before finals in December, and Joseph noticed a strange trend going on. The Aztecs were not the only culture known to partake in *virgin sacrifice*. The Greeks, by legend, had a problem of their own. Iphigenia, daughter of King Agememnon, was to be sacrificed at the time of the Trojan War in order to appease Apollo. Joseph found that a “mob think” set into the campus when everybody took in their bugs. The most coveted women—the *virgins*—were sought out for after like gold. The men, on the other hand, were being worn down through strict competition. The

stronger the men, the more they would be worn down. Average-sized men ganged up on the *larger* men, and they did it by messing with peripheral vision, subtle banging of the walls, and gross innuendoes during lunchtime and dinner meals. It would make men sick, and the idea was that by taking out the larger men, it would make the game fairer for the rest of the competition. Joseph “*Squire*” Wilton was worked on, but he didn’t mind because he gave up athletics for his senior year. He had friends in the art circuits, and he *watched* his former buddies from the wrestling squad and the track squad get worn down. People would yell in their direction, and when they would turn, they would approach someone *near* the targeted person. It was a system, and it worked pretty well.

Joseph “*Squire*” Wilton could not tell if it was collusion or conspiracy which was taking place. *Collusion*, in his mind, was that it was subconscious across-the-board to eliminate the larger men from competition for the prettier girls. *Conspiracy* would seem to entail that it was a conscious effort of few selected individuals which wore down a handful of selected targets. There was talk on the campus, Joseph noticed, about who would “go down.” There were women that groups of nerds wanted to see *raped*... but they would not use that language. They would say, “Wouldn’t *Samantha* look good in one of those Pamela-Anderson-like videos?? I think I would want to see *her* naked!!!” Everyone’s life was on the internet, and the groups of nerds would inevitably go and *talk* to the women they wanted to see raped. They would ask about the football games when they saw them in cheerleading uniforms. They wouldn’t quit talking to them until they were physically worn down. They would send messages to their buddies that they were “susceptible.” In the past, *rape* was a severe problem on the campuses. At UCLA, and other fine schools, young girls had to worry about parking structures, dark ally corridors, and buildings with dim lighting. They had to worry about people *not* watching them. With technology came cameras, cell phones, and hi-tech mechanisms of defense such as the mobile *siren alarm*. The phenomenon that seemed to happen as Joseph ended his second-to-last semester was that there was *too* much technology. The cameras induced paranoia because no one knew who was on the other end. The cell phones created a “crying wolf” attitude and mentality. The *siren alarms* were good, but people were afraid to use them. *Rape* was a strong word for what was going on in a few isolated instances. *Rape* seemed to relate to a thug in an isolated instance mauling his way into a female’s presence and having his way with her. The collective collusion brought about by the many internet voyeurs and the *knowing* of who was where when and the *horde yearning* for something fantastic bordering on a ritualistic *experience* seemed to create a religious occurrence. A lady would have sex against her will with a jock whom she had wanted to have sex with... “if the *circumstances* were right”!! They were supposed to pretend that the cameras weren’t there, and the group watching was supposed to pretend that they had nothing to do with the *wearing down* of the people involved. On a large scale, it happened all the time on the adjoining Hollywood lots from the Westwood area. Alec Baldwin was yearned to have sex with Kim Bassinger in front of millions of separate people *through video*. The same thing was happening to the cheerleaders but on a smaller scale. People weren’t supposed to acknowledge the morose fascination when they went to class.

Joseph “Squire” Wilton was sickened by the whole thing. His most steady female companion had become Rikki Styles and even though she wasn’t very good looking, he couldn’t imagine her becoming *TRAMPLED*. He no longer called it *rape*. It was different than anything he had ever seen. He knew that he worked out to his *Shrek* doll in a different way than he worked out to himself *before* the doll came into his room. He knew that people were having *sex* different. They referred to their body parts in different ways. Once in a while, like in a cheap porn movie, the female would look uncomfortably toward the camera which wasn’t supposed to be there. Once in a while, the *jock* would say something like, “I wish they weren’t *looking!!!*” When asked *who?* by his cheap actress/ cheerleader/ girlfriend, the jock would stupidly say, “Those people on the *wallpaper!!!*” It was stupid.

Joseph called them “*trampled*”... and he didn’t like the rape reports when they *did* come out. The girl would always claim that she didn’t know she was being watched by an audience, and campus security was almost always tipped off by an obsessed father, or a broken up exboyfriend. It *looked* like rape to them... so they *reported* it (very seldom, *leaks* were known to exist by disgruntled students, and *parents* would get unsuspecting video feeds).

“You guys are a bunch of *sluts!!!*” Joseph found himself saying to a group of cheerleaders one day before he took off to Santa Barbara again. “You guys *suck!!!*” They didn’t look to be in distress. They looked *shocked* more than anything else. He felt sorry for them, but wondered how things would have been if he was a junior or *sophomore* when the whole thing started. Maybe *he* would have been planning to have sex with a worn-out girl through an internet society of nerds and outcasts. Maybe he would have done the whole same *thing*, and maybe he would have been having sex with *Clarissa* if it had been the year before. He would have been Rock Hudson, and she would have been Jane Wyman. He was pretty *sure* of it.

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Stewart Lane flew home to Virginia for the Christmas break. Rikki Styles drove up to Santa Barbara with Joseph Wilton—they used Stewart’s car on a *loan*—and they talked about mythology and the coming of the next era. Rikki was to drive up to San Francisco before Christmas, but she was welcomed at the Wiltons for a few days before then. Rikki said, “I have this new *lipstick* so that I can look like a *slut* instead of a *vegan* to your *parents!!!*” She shone her bright red lips to the direction of Joseph.

“I *like* that!! I’m going to finish what I was saying about the *underground dwellers*... and all!!” He looked out at the sea gulls as they flew in the evening sky. “For want of a nail, a *kingdom* was lost!!” He looked to Rikki while he steered and noticed that she was paying attention. “Squirmy and *Pigeon* are two knights or dukes, or somethin’... and they see a *troll!!!* Do they *report* it!?”

“*No!!* Because even back then, there is *paranoia*... and they’ll have their heads cut off if they don’t bring back *proof!!!*”

“But they see them, duck into a *cave*... an’ are afraid to go *after* them!!!”

“Then they’re not meant to be *knights!!!*” Rikki Styles looked at the gulls and wondered what the fowl of medieval England was like.

“But the entrance of the cave is so small that only small trolls and dwarves fit *into it!!!*”

“I see where you’re *goin’!!!*” She chewed gum—*pink* gum—and popped another stick in her mouth.

“And *Squirmy* is set to rule the land one day... but *Pigeon* is upset that he’s overlooked because the *dinosaur*—it’s known as a *dragon* to them—is slain, and wants the glory for *himself!!!*”

“*Yeah!!!* I have to interpret this and say *Pigeon* is your dad, the dragon slain represents the grades you got, and you’re overshadowed by me or *Marcus Blacksmith!!!*” She tossed out her gum after it felt too hard in her mouth.

“So I was readin’ *The Stand* last summer and *King* says that the influenza that we have today is not on *record* as of the eighteen hundreds!!! I don’t know if it’s true, but we have *AIDS*, today, and we have a host of other viruses that we didn’t have then!!! I think that the *dinosaurs* didn’t decay in the same way, and they sat *around!!!*”

“What does that have to do with *anything...?* Because I don’t know that it’s relevant to your *story!!!*”

“Well the dinosaurs of a thousand years ago, I’m hypothesizing, got *buried* in the sand dunes of Egypt and some of the other OPEC nations!!! I’m guessin’ that in medieval *England*, the knight didn’t have to *worry* about it decaying—the *dragons*—because he could come back and show the *Queen* if the magnificent trolls and gnomes didn’t start to *FUCK* with it!!!”

“You’re stupid, and I like where you’re *goin’!* You’re going to graduate with a degree in athletics, I’m guessin’ and it’s not going to do you any *good!!!*” Rikki Styles scratched at her vagina because she felt a mild rash coming on.

“So the gnomes and the *beasts*—mutants from the *radioactive* mines that decided to take refuge in from the former *cousins* and ancestors of the *Squirmy* and *Pigeon* *characters*—they take the slain dragons and they eat for *months!!!* Or until the shit *degenerates!!!*”

“I *get* it!!!” Rikki Styles said. She thought she could feel crabs around her clitoris, but didn’t say a word. “But I don’t *buy* it!!!”

“*Very well!!!* So I’m guessin’ that whatever *ASTEROID* plumaged into the Great Lakes section of our country—they *buried* an ancient society... and they didn’t have to *dig* as far as legend would suggest for the labyrinths and the *caves!!!*” Joseph all of a sudden thought that his story was going too far and being over-thought. He asked Rikki Styles if she wanted to stop for a walk on the beach.

“*No,*” Rikki said. She was feeling crabs around her pubic area... and she didn’t need to see *larger* crabs on the *beach*. “And the geologists whom say that things are blatantly *different!!!*”

“*Misinformed* or *CONSPIRACY!!!*” Joseph said. He was joking, but he meant part of it. Not too much longer, they both arrived at Joseph’s home.

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Joseph Wilton had just pulled up into the driveway of his father's house, and he reiterated the most recent part of his conversation with Rikki Styles. "In the *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, it is argued that what is done as the *greatest good* is what should happen in society. Now, *John Stuart Mill* deviates from this because he has a different system of understanding which relates to the *communist* problem as it arises in early Western culture as America is formed as a *nation*. His predecessor, though, says that it's *good* that people are boxing... and people are fighting in *UFC!!!* That's why I said I'd kick Ken Shamrock's *ass* as we pulled into this *driveway!!!* It's because my dad's goin' to be yelling at me within an hour of me being in that *house!!!*" Joseph pointed toward his house, and hoped no one inside heard him yelling from the car. "Tina Fey and Avril Lavigne make fun of corporate America all day!!! And I'm going to be *part* of it!!! And my dad's gettin' yelled at by someone, and he's goin' to *yell* at me!!! You just *watch!!!* And I'm goin' to threaten to kick Ken Shamrock's *ass* because that's my way of takin' it *out* on people!!!"

Rikki Styles nodded, and she looked toward the house. She couldn't wait to get the crabs out of her vaginal area.

"So we have people in *bars*, across the country, and they're watching Mike Tyson beatin' up *Evander Holyfield!!!* And some knucklehead invariably says, '*I'd get in the ring with 'im for a million bucks!! I'd take a fall after the first hit, and I'd be a MILLIONAIRE!!!*' So the knucklehead says it, someone sizes 'im up, and he's dismissed... because *he* couldn't beat up Mike Tyson, *either!!!* The story and *theory* goes that if you could get one man that could beat up *everyone*, it makes society that much more peaceful because there's one hundred and fifty million scared *men* in the world... at least in the *United States!!!* If you outlaw *boxing*, you're going to have a hundred and fifty million people... *FOR THE GREATEST GOOD*... tryin' to become the next 'king of the *hill'!!!!* So the *moral* is..."

"I *know*, already!!! Don't make a bad situation worse by picking on you when your *dad* is picking on you!!!" Rikki Styles scratched at her crotch area.

"*No!!!* Quite the *opposite!!!* Bring it *on*, because I'm the new '*KING OF THE HILL*' in this house, and it's an indication that my dad recognizes it as so when he *picks* on me!!!"

"I *got* it!!!" she said. She scratched at her crotch, then told Joseph "*Squire*" Wilton about her crabs. She added, "I bet *Tina Fey* has crabs when she does *Weekly Update!!!* She *squirms* a lot!!!" Joseph laughed, they went in together, then forgot all about what they had spoke about... and they watched music *television*. Rikki Styles couldn't get rid of her crabs and was afraid to mention that she needed medicine or another place to stay in order to not spread them to the rest of the family. Joseph, in a bold move, went to the store on his own and bought "anti-itching cream."

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Surprising to everyone in the house, Jake Wilton let his son sleep with Rikki Styles in Joseph's old bedroom. They hadn't so much as shared a real kiss before that night, but Jake figured that they were a couple when Joe came home with the anti-itching cream for the person he dubbed as "the new girlfriend." Rikki Styles took to Joseph "Squire" Wilton quick. He didn't want sexual relations from her because he believed she was a nerd done up in *goth* attire. He thought that if things became too serious, he was looking at another *head case*, like he believed he had with Clarissa Antonia Philips. She rubbed him in his belly, and they were kissing within fifteen minutes. Joseph believed that his father would come into the room unexpected at any given time. Thirty minutes gave way, and Joseph Wilton was putting Vaseline around Rikki's sphincter area. He thrust his fingers into her booty, and he thought about how the gel that he used got him by many nights during self-administered pleasure-like *heaven*. He thought that *KY Jelly* would be better around Rikki's poopie-shoot because it was known to be water-soluble, but his penis went into Rikki's large intestine outshoot easily. He had no problem with anal sex in the past as he thought about how it could be while he jerked off during high school, but studying *mythology* when he was dating Clarissa made him think different about the idea. He kept seeing Lot's wife turned into a pillar of salt every time that he thrust his member into Rikki's cavity. He tried to remember the *Greek* tale which coincided with the Hebrew one... and couldn't remember the name of the lady whom was banished to *Hades* for having looked back at the labyrinth which she was trying to escape from. For that matter, he couldn't remember the account at *all*—he was ejaculating into *Rikki Styles*, but he didn't see her gothic face: He saw *Tina Fey*, in his mind, and he saw Avril Lavigne as she smiled at him when it was all over. He felt dread in the pit of his stomach, and he didn't know why. As Rikki lifted herself from the bed, *whiteness* oozed out of her underside, and Joseph "Squire" Wilton felt tingly. She looked at him, almost as if in *LOOOVE!!!!* He had seen that look before, and he was scared.

Rikki made her way to the bathroom, and she carried the *Vaseline* and anti-itching cream with her. Joseph "Squire" Wilton believed she was going to "finish herself" in there, and it made him queasy to think about it. He didn't *want* to know her any longer, and he tried to conjure up what the small talk might be when she returned. He thought to tell her that *trolls* were real, but in the imaginary sense the same manner that there were *thugs* that will beat transients up at the ends of the *Brooklyn* and *Golden Gate* bridges. It was speculation to him, but he didn't want to talk about the *future*. Under any circumstance, he did not want Rikki Styles to return with thoughts of mansions and homes in the *Hollywood Hills*. He did not want to think about "real life" with that bitch. He was starting to see her as a *hooker*, but not in the prostitution sense. He was starting to see that she *hooked* him with the stories of the Underworld, and all the myths that went with it. He felt *damned*. He felt that there was a wall between himself, and his past. He didn't know if he could get back to Clarissa... or at the very least, girls *like* her. He didn't know if he could "shoot the shit" with his jock buddies still. Rikki Styles, no doubt, was going to be talking about *engagements*, and

things along those lines. Joseph “*Squire*” Wilton pushed all of the ugly thoughts out of his mind, and started to think about statistics. Kevin Mack and Ernest Byner were the only set of running backs to rush for a thousand yards in the same season for the same squad. It was the Cleveland Browns, and it happened during the nineteen eighties. Herschel Walker was the only back in United States history to *receive* for fifteen hundred yards and rush for fifteen hundred yards in his lifetime. He was pretty sure he heard that at one of the bars around the UCLA campus. Roger Craig was the only back in United States history to rush and *receive* for a thousand yards each... in the same *year*. He was thinking of all the stats. He wasn’t sure he had them right. He heard Rikki Styles coming from the distance. After he saw the hall light from the crack of the door opening he said, “I thought of *Tina Fey* when I was boning you in the *ASS!!!*”

Jake Wilton said, “You didn’t bone me in the *ass*, son!!!” He turned on Joseph’s light. “Good *night!!!*” He turned the light off, again. He said, “Rikki’s on her way to get more *crab* medicine, if you have to *know!!!*”

Joseph “*Squire*” Wilton laughed to himself when his father exited the room. He hoped he thought his father thought he was joking about the “boning” of Rikki Styles in the rear side.

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Rikki Styles returned to Joseph’s room not even twenty minutes after Jake informed his son that she left to get more medicine. She notice *In Utero* as part of Joseph’s CD collection, and played “Rape Me” for him. She said, “I *used* to think only of the Jews when I heard that song because I thought they were inverting the world... and *distorting* what happened during World War *II*... but I came to find that *rape* is a state of *mind!!!*”

“You think I’m raped by the *Hebrew culture*, and by the guilt I feel from thinkin’ of Lot in *Gomorrah*, huh!!!” Joseph sat up and hoped his father couldn’t hear from the room next door.

“I don’t think it’s only *that!!!* The Hebrews treat *our* myths... like they are *myths*... but we’re to expect that *Lot’s wife* turned to a pillar of *salt!!!*” She sat on the bed after turning off the room light.

Joseph Wilton turned on his nightstand light. He said to her, “You know that salt naturally *forms* out there!?! I think the Hebrews were good *story tellers*, and the salt pyramids that naturally form in their desert flats were to *remind* them of that anal sex can go too *far!!!* Jesus did it with the *olive tree* because there were olive branches all *around!!!* It was a mnemonic device, and it’s used even *today!!!*”

Rikki Styles tried to cuddle with Joseph Wilton, but found it hard to do so. After frustration she said, “If I make a story that the great *Rubber Pterodactyl* came and created radial tires out of stale, day-old donuts from it’s *poop*... do you think you’ll look at *police* the same when you go to *Krispy Kreme Dounuts??*”

“*No!!* Not unless you made it into a *movie!!!*” Joseph became unsettled with the conversation, and he was becoming agitated with Rikki Styles in *general*. A voice rose to his consciousness, and he

thought of the psychology class he was in which promoted that *guys* had a tendency to want to disassociate after physical intimacy, where as *women* had a tendency to want to embrace for hours on end. He tried to force himself to *want* to talk to Rikki, but found it hard if not impossible. He thought of UCLA, and speculated that *sports* statistics would be a good middle ground between the alternatives. He said, “Did you know that *Babe Ruth* is considered the best baseball player to ever live... but he never won a *TRIPLE CROWN!??*”

Rikki Styles thought that she was being lost. She faked her way through a half hour of dopey conversation, and Joseph Wilton started to think that they would never have the *fun* conversations of spoken sagas ever again.

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Jake Wilton went surfing with Joseph Wilton at a public beach not too far north of Santa Barbara. It was the first time they had done so since Joseph was seventeen (they had *boogie-boarded* many times when Joseph was younger, but those days were long in the forgotten past). Jake said to his son near the point break of the waves while they waited for a ride, “That *Rikki* girl is a real *looker*... but she’s a *fanatic*, I can tell!! Where is she?! Shoppin’?!”

“She thinks that the *vampires* are real of olden Romania, and it was a *cannibal* cult!!!” Joseph rested on his hot-pink *Hawaiian Island Creations* surfboard. “She thinks one started in the *Santa Clara* region... and they made a movie of it so the press didn’t get *down* on them!!!”

“I *know* it was real!!” Jake said. He could tell that his son couldn’t decipher whether he was kidding or not. He said, “You got to watch *out* for her!!!”

“She’s a *chickie*, dad... and we learned in psychology that a baby chicken’ll follow a *goose* its whole life if brought *up* by one!!! Even if they’re *chickens*... they will follow *geese*, humans, or... *dogs* their whole lives!!! Because it’s ALL they *know*!!!”

“You *gotta* get out because she’s startin’ to *attach* to you!!! I know you had the ‘*relations*’... and she thinks it was anything *serious*!!!” Jake admired a wave forming and thought he was going to catch it when it broke. “You gotta give her presents that don’t *matter*... so she doesn’t *like* you!!!”

“I *comprehend* what you’re *sayin*’!!! Otherwise, she’s goin’ to say I used her—I loved her and *left* her!!!” Joseph admired the same wave coming to them.

“She’s not goin’ to say it... because the people around her around are goin’ to be doin’ the *talkin*’ for ‘er!!!” Jake started to paddle away from the approaching wave.

Joseph started to paddle alongside his father. He yelled, “She doesn’t know when I’m makin’ *fun* of her... and that’s what *SCARES* me!!!”

“*Fuck* you, SON!!!!” Jake made his way to his feet on his scattered-fuchsia-designed *Local Motion* surfboard. “You’re trapped for no less than a *year*... if what you say is *TRUE*!!!!” He rode the

wave in, and hugged his son when he was on the beach.

Joseph hadn't felt better in more than a year. He forgot about Clarissa, and thought that "goin' out" with *Rikki Styles* might be good... *for a while*. It would shake her fervored apparitions, and he was going to experiment boulevards of the behavioral hue stipulating suggestions his pappy had encouraged. He told Rikki Styles that he *loved* her before she took off to San Francisco. He was talking about his *hand*, when he said it, but she didn't catch the direction of his speech. He was going to have a good experience leading her everywhere. He hoped she didn't find out that she was being channeled around.

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"*Donald Rumsfeld*, it turns out, is *gay*—very *gay*!!!" Rikki Styles said to Marcus Blacksmith from a cannery not far from *Pier Thirty-Nine* in San Francisco. "He is *gay*!!!" She looked at gulls eating bread from a broken piece of a *french* roll which she tossed on the ground. "I saw him gettin' his ass *pummeled* by a larger man on an internet *video*!!" She watched Marcus Blacksmith shake his head with mild disapproval. The noontime sky was overcast... *and there was a mist in the air*. "He was gettin' *plugged*, and I say to *Joseph* that it was a *look-alike*!!! I say that it was a *look-alike*, and he couldn't handle it because..."

Marcus cut her off. "He's in *conspiracy* mode!! He thinks that everything is a *conspiracy*!! Marshall Faulk, from *our* school, thought everything was a conspiracy at a time!! He thinks that if he's a great corporate executive that *they* are goin' to wear 'im down, and they are goin' to try to have homosexual *relations* with 'im!!!"

"But he started to talk about *love*... and the need for *commitment*!!! And 'e gave me a few trinkets that are *nice*, but they don't make me think of the *gold* I might have from him some day!!!" She smiled with glee. "I might be a gloomy hippie-like *person*, but I'm *not* ruling myself out for those kinds of *things*!!!" She looked into the sky, actually appreciated the *breeze* in the air, and started to cry because of the beauty of the nature around her.

"I'm glad I came up here, and I'm glad you took my number before we left for the *Thanksgiving* break!!! I never see my family anymore because they don't *care* about me, and in a lot of ways, *Joseph* and his family *are* my family!!!" He looked at the sea gulls. "I want to *be* around them when I'm selected in the *first round*!!! I want to be at the Wiltons' house, and I want to say, '*These are my family*!' I want to talk on *ESPN*, and I want to show them where I grew *up*!!!"

Rikki Styles changed the subject. "In a lot of ways, I *know* what he was wondering!!! There were a lot of *rapes* around our campus, this semester, but they didn't call them *rapes*!!! A lot of groups wore people down by working on their periphery vision, depriving them of sleep, and making fun of them for mundane *things*!!! They hoped to see '*action*' when all was said and done, and Joseph noticed that it was *nerds*, more than anyone else, that was doin' the *colluding*!! Joseph noticed that a few *men*—a few guys

whom he had wrestled with—were *victims* of the colluding, and one would speculate that it would only be *women!!!* Grant you, these were people that were not in *drama!!!* These were people studying and preparing to be accountants, architects, and *engineers!!!* If they had expected to be the next *Grant Snow*, everything could have been *okay!!!* He noticed that people were *worn*, and he *wondered* about it!!!!”

Marcus shook his head at what sounded like travesty.

“He called it *trampled!!!* He said that what he was experiencing and what he was watching around ‘im was akin to the feeling of bein’ on a football field... and havin’ three or four guys run over you after you charge the middle to stop a running back from *breakin’ one free!!!* He said he felt *trampled*, and even though all the athletics were gone from his *life* this semester, he felt *pounded!!!*” Rikki considered what she was saying because it was worse than the come-ons she experienced on a daily basis. “I felt *sorry* for him... but I can’t imagine and question the things he was *part* of!!! Did he pound someone too hard during a *wrestling* tryout?!! They call it ‘*karma*’ what this guy was goin’ through!!! I think he latched to *me...* and started to suggest we might be *married* after college... *because* he wanted to prove he wasn’t *gay!!!* Which brings me back to the *Rumsfeld* video!!!”

“You think they were wearin’ ‘im down to put a *skin flute* in ‘is *fuckin’ butt*, huh?? I’ve *seen* that Rumsfeld video before, and I’m pretty sure it’s ‘im gettin’ *jobbed!!!* I think Rummy’s *gay*, though, and I think ‘e *invited* it!!! The man was screamin’ in *pleasure*, and I think ‘e didn’t know ‘e was on hidden *video!!!* I tell you the truth about *Joseph*, though, because I’ve seen this before at *my* campus!!! They wear you down to not *pick* on them—the *nerds* do—and they let you go when they think you’re at the point of *madness!!!*” Marcus halted to toss some *french bread* on the ground. “It keeps them from believing that they’re goin’ to get *pounded*, as you said, but we are good *PEOPLE...* when they leave us alone!!!” Marcus blushed. “They are already asking for my *autograph*, and I can *SEE* some of these people with my scribble on their *walls* in frames for all their friends to *witness!!!*” He turned back toward the birds in the sky. “*They* know how to live, but I gotta take the bad with the good, and when it’s all over, I’m goin’ to be just like *them!!!*”

“I think they were going to put *gel* into his *ass!!!*” Rikki Styles said. “They were goin’ to wait ‘til ‘e was asleep, and then they were goin’ to put *gel* into his *butt!!!*”

Marcus laughed. “The funny thing is that it can’t be *stopped!!* Joseph is a big *man*, and if he found out who did it, he would know that there were a thousand nerds on the campus whom would *defend* the perpetrator!!! There would be a *million* nerds by the time Joseph *graduated!!!* He would be the laughing stock of all corporate meetings, and his *photo* would precede ‘im wherever ‘e *went!!!* ‘*JOSEPH GETS GEL IN THE ASS!!*’ I could already see the runners of the email *headings!!!*”

“I don’t think he wants to *graduate*, anymore!!!” Rikki ate from the last piece of bread in her hand. “I don’t think he wants to *graduate*, but he’s tough... and I think he’s goin’ to make it *through!!!*”

Marcus turned to Rikki, squeezed her jaw gently with the underside of his hand, then said, “You’re a *savior* because without you, he very well might drop *out!!!*”

“And wind up shooting up a *POST OFFICE* when it was all said and *done!!!*” Rikki laughed at her own joke, and felt good when Marcus joined in the cheerful expression.

Marcus thought about what was going on. He couldn’t do anything for Joseph to save his life. He had seen similar occurrences on his campus, but there was an internet code adopted by the student body which was unique to any of the schools in the area. It said that if a person was sexually harassed to hastily invite one of the members from the military naval service from the nearby *Coronado Island* base to come and swing by. Eventually, the collusion ended because people didn’t like military jarheads and squibs *around*—they felt less *free*. They would rather be in *Tijuana* collecting their good memories. Marcus said, “Let’s go back to my hotel and watch that *video* of Rumsfeld gettin’ it in the *butthole!!* I think you’re goin’ to *agree* with me that it wasn’t a *fake!!*” Marcus threw the rest of his bread into the air, and Rikki took off in excitement with him when it was all over.

Greenish waves pounded the balmy shore in the distance. It was a sight for them to see.

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Marcus Blacksmith and Rikki Styles got back to his hotel room and watched the attributed *Rumsfeld* video. Rikki didn’t believe it was him, and Marcus did... *after watching it three times*. They spoke about Blaine Starlight, and rumors about how she had *mind control* on Hollywood figures, and prominent members of the suburbs around them. Marcus said, “The *enemy of your enemy* becomes your *friend*, and Blaine learned this spectacular insight before she became a *celebrity!!* She talked to one of her colleagues at a *café* about being younger and playing this game at *Chuck E. Cheese’s* regarding the popping of puppets as they made their ways out of *holes*. You had to *pop* them!! If you were fast enough, you could score a lot of points, trade in tickets from the machine, and get *prizes*—big ones, if you *played* enough!! You had to be *quick*, and the puppets would pop up one at a *time!!* You had to *bop* them with a spongy apparatus which was connected to the *game!!*”

“Your *point?!?*” Rikki asked. She pulled out a couple of dark beers from a metal ice bucket. She gave one to Marcus.

“She saw *threats* in society!! She had been raped, and when she saw someone come to Hollywood which *reminded* her of her past back in the Midwest, she would clue in certain *members*—rumor had it that Warren Beatty was *one* of them—and they would call the cops... or they would call other thugs to scare them *off!!!*” Marcus popped his dark beer’s bottle cap with a keychain accessory.

“Isn’t there a lot of ‘would be’ rape artists... and *violent people* in the world?! How would she *know?!?*” Rikki drank from her beer after popping off its top with the kind of same gizmo.

“*Yeah!!* But there are certain *radicals*, and the way they figured that they had it set up was that had *speed* traps on the way from *Kellogg Hill* to the *LA Valley!!* They would tag *radicals*... because people that drove the *speed limit* weren’t likely to *rape!!*” Marcus downed his beer and reached for another one.

“That sounds *stupid!*” Rikki sipped her beer. She thought to turn on the TV but chose against it.

“Yeah... but they had *computers*... and I’ll deviate to say that it didn’t work for *Tony LaRussa* when he used the machine for the *A’s* in Oakland, many years *back!!!* He tried to gauge pitches to get statistical probabilities about who would hit what and *how!!!* It didn’t work for *him*, and I don’t think it worked for *LA* because she was tagging innocent *people!!* Stunt men were afraid to report to *work*, because she would call the *cops* on them!!! She had nothing better to do when she earned her first few million than to tag potential *rape artists* in her community!!! She set up a fanmail system, and she got their thoughts... and if they sounded *scary*, she would find out whom their *friends* were... and she would hire ‘em to *fuck* with the guys that sounded *far OUT!!!*” Marcus drank, then popped an ice cube in his mouth.

“*She sounds creepy!!*” Rikki sipped from her beer. “Is this an internet rumor, or is it something substantiated by someone at your *school!?!?*”

“*Internet rumor*, of course, but I heard of people that felt *eerie*... when they drove by her house... as if they were *watched!!!*” Marcus popped another ice cube into his mouth, then opened another beer after pounding the rest of the one he had just finished.

“You’re *telling* me this because I study *myth*, huh?? And you probably heard about the trolls and the *goblins* that I talked to *Joseph* about, *huh?!?*” Rikki sipped.

“*Yeah!!* It’s interesting conversation, to boot, but rumor had it that she was really *superstitious!!!* She would *spit* on her friends’ cars in the neighborhood, and she would write home to her family... ‘*You know whose car I spit on today?!?*’ That kind of thing!!! I tell you because *I’m* goin’ to be a celebrity, and I very well might live *next* to her!!!” Marcus slowed his drinking pace, and started to sip at comfortable intervals.

“You’re not far *off!!!* Rumor had it that *Hilary Swank* was from a trailer park, and she brought a lot of superstitions *with* her!!! Baseball players do the same, *even still!!!* Blaine Starlight was from a poor neighborhood, she *hated* everyone she ever grew up around, and she went to *Hollywood*... and was compared on *par* to Angelina *Jolie*, at least ‘til Angelina Jolie got together with Brad *Pitt!!!* And it was said in one of the links I saw that Hilary gave credit to *The Last Starfighter!!!* It might have been *Blaine Starlight* that said it, actually, but the quote was that if you believe you’re just from a trailer park, that’s all you’ll ever *be!!!*” Rikki sipped, tossed her empty bottle into a trash can when she was finished, and opened up another.

“Tell me *more!!!*” Marcus said.

“There was this guy named *Clyde Somethingrather* that was a stunt man or a *body* double on one of *Blaine Starlight’s* movies!!! Blaine fell in love with *him*, by rumor, *People Magazine* couldn’t handle it because *few* people are allowed to date outside of their Hollywood *caste*—*Tracy Gold* was an exception—and she had some corpulent *wigger* follow around Clyde like he was a piece of *shit!!!* It got a lot of people *mad*, in Hollywood, but they were allowed to *do* that!!! I told *Squire*, your buddy, that the people at the *Getty* hill were like that to us on campus, but the *Hollywood* crowd was very much like that to the people in

the *suburbs*... and it *didn't* take a whole lot to track them down when push came to *shove!!!*" Rikki spilt some of her beer on accident, then apologized. "*Party foul!!*" she said. She drank.

"*Corpulent!?* I prefer to use the word *ROTUND!!!* Any how, I heard about stuff like that, and I had fear for *Joseph*... because those people are not *nice!!!* And *Zeus* is not going to be fighting with *Aphrodite*, is he!?" Marcus drank, and continued to pop ice cubes into his mouth on occasion.

"*Zeus* would not be fighting with *Venus*... and *Apollo* would not be fighting with *Aphrodite* because it's *Roman* and *Greek*, respectively, but you're right because we're *mortals*, to them!!! We don't have the money, and *Clyde* is not immortalized in *BLAINE'S HEAD* as havin' been associated with some *NUMB FUCK* from a school bus 'e once rode!!! It's a fucked up system, and I'm not so sure those people should be makin' the *money* they do!!!" Rikki clicked the TV on. She sipped from her beer.

"You're *right!!* I'm glad I'm immortalized with *Joseph Wilton*, because he's always been a good *friend!!!* There was a kid named *Boogie* that I used to go to elementary school with!!! I got a letter from 'im three weeks ago after *twelve years* of not seein' 'im... askin' what I was *doin'!!!* And I know it's the *Heisman* money, and I know it's the success of bein' drafted in the first *round*—knock on wood—this *spring* in the *NFL draft!!!* I'm goin' to do *fine*, and I anticipate a *lot* of people that weren't there—*no shows!!*—to be comin' out of the *wood work!!* That's why I *ask* you!!!" Marcus Blacksmith got up to wash his hands from a sticky *beer* feel.

"You're going to get a *lot* of head cases!!!" Rikki yelled to Marcus when he reached the restroom.

"I *know!!!* I can *feel* it!!!" Marcus rinsed his hands, then came back into the room. He glared at the TV then went for another beer.

"Listen to a lot of *Joe Walsh!!!* That's what they *say!!!* You'll know what to expect because you're goin' to change a lot... *AFTER THE FACT* that you found out a lot of them were only after your *money!!!*" Rikki sipped her beer then put it on the nightstand.

"*Are you?!*" Marcus asked.

"*Maybe!?*" Rikki said. She laughed. She felt good for the first time in a long *time*.

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Marcus Blacksmith had a slight hangover on the next morning in which he speculated about the happenings of Hollywood, and the greater Los Angeles area. He went jogging, nonetheless, and didn't wake Rikki to tell her that he was up. He found a local high school, put on his football cleats for optimal traction on the brick red soaked path, and started to jog around a football field. He thought to say goodbye to Rikki, but was unable to do so. He had too much on his mind, and when he returned to the hotel, he turned in his key and paid for an extra day just in case Rikki decided to stay.

Rikki, when she woke up at around noontime, found a note which was left with the lobby attendant. It thanked her for a good time, and wished her the best when she returned to school.

Marcus Blacksmith thought a lot on the way home from San Francisco. The flight wasn't long—he had taken longer flights to campuses around the country when traveling subjecting away games—and he thought about how unfortunate it had been that San Diego State did not qualify for a bowl game in spite of having one of the better running backs in the country. He thought about the conversation he had with Rikki Styles. He was attracted to Blaine Starlight, and he hadn't told her that. With his millions upon signing with an NFL team, he could *meet* her—not just be her *neighbor*. They could get romantic. The possibilities were endless, and when he played in the *Blue/ Gray* game after the New Year, she could be there if she was a *fan*. The possibilities were *endless*.

Marcus thought about the unthinkable. What if he was drafted by *Tampa Bay*? He didn't want to *play* in Tampa Bay!! He was a Packers fan as a kid because of the Lombardi tradition, and he *hated* Tampa Bay!! What if he was drafted by the *Colts*? They had Johnny U. when they were in Baltimore, but he heard that *Payton Manning* was a jerk in real life. What if he was drafted by the New York Giants?? He was from the West Coast, and playing in New York would get him booed when he showed his bias!! What if *this*!? What if *that*!?? He couldn't stand it any longer, and ordered a couple of drinks a couple of times on the plane. He thought about the *Blaine Starlight* situation... and he started to think that psychotic whores really existed in the world. What if he held out of his New York/ New Jersey training camp... and *Campbell's* starting running soup adds featuring Blaine Starlight and *Boogie*!!! He started to get nightmares, and when he dozed on his airport pillow, he couldn't fathom the *worst* of them: A *blown knee* in the final game of the *season*!! It would be devastating to reach so far in his life, and to have it all end in a game that supposedly meant nothing to *everyone*... scouts included.

He brushed those thoughts aside, concentrated on the combines, and began to embrace the fact that he *could* showcase himself on national TV. Maybe a scout *was* going to get him the coveted first overall number one pick!!! The draft was laden with good running backs, and there were a few premier wide receivers that could go before him in spite of not having the *Heisman* as a credential. He thought he could go as far as number five.

He thought about a lot of ideas, and he wondered why the Heisman ceremony didn't mean a lot to him—it was like a dream. All that was in his head were differential functions, suppositions of variant macroeconomic theories, and stipulated explanations of global effects regarding the jet stream in an ever-rising *Tropic of Cancer*. The award seemed like a dream, and it was mumbled in his thoughts like lost lyrics from forgotten songs barely at the edge of his memory. He thought about *Blaine Starlight*, and felt dreary awe at the speculation that she might reject him in spite of *millions*!! Would she not need millions herself, being an *a-list* star?? Would she have hidden racial motives for *not* being with him, as he came to find so many people had without saying so?? Was it true that Hollywood celebrities were just high-priced hookers for ultrawealthy producers and studio lot owners?? Would she have another boyfriend—*love interest*—when he finally played and had a chance to *meet* her??

He didn't know. He speculated, and he drank. Most of all, he figured that by the time he was in

his first off-season from the *NFL*, he would be in a totally different world. Maybe he would be dating *Maya Rudolph* if he was signed by a New York club. Maybe he would be dating Gloria Estefan if he got signed by *Miami*. The possibilities were too endless, and he didn't like to think of them after a while.

Before touching down in *LAX*, Marcus Blacksmith dozed off onto his pillow again. He dreamt of *Blaine Starlight*, and she told him not to worry about anything—she *wouldn't* wait for him because it would cause too much stress. He thought it was a stupid reason, but he went with it. He *hated* her, but he went with it.

He shook his way out of a daze as he boarded a taxi cab, and then he caught a bus to *San Diego State University*.

* * *

Marcus Blacksmith was alone in his dorm drinking from the same kind of dark beer he had been drinking in San Francisco. It was late on a Saturday night, and he could feel in his bones that everyone was celebrating New Year's Eve early somewhere, maybe in *TJ* or the San Diego clubs. He watched *Saturday Night Live* and he had a near-epiphany when he heard his own name during *Weekend Update*. Amy Poehler had made yet another *Renée Zellweger* fat joke by poking fun at her expanding cheeks, Jimmy Fallon returned as a guest anchor and talked about *missile* defense of all things using sexual innuendo throughout the skit, and Amy Poehler came back and said that *Marcus Blacksmith* would be lucky to be drafted by the New York Jets with the first overall pick because they *LOOOOOVE* him so much in New Jersey. He almost choked on his beer. He had heard his name a couple of times before on *ESPN*, but that wasn't too thrilling because it was basic stats, and the normal hoopla. *SNL*, though, had him running through a rough neighborhood with an Aztecs uniform on... while trying to evade *bar thugs*. The picture was superimposed behind Amy, and it made Marcus Blacksmith laugh.

Marcus Blacksmith felt tortured by his growing fame. He couldn't go to the bars in clear consciousness because they expected him to be well and rested for the *Blue/ Gray* game. He thought that injuring his *finger* would bring him scorn for the rest of the year.

Holly Rydell was further up the California coast and she was watching the same *Saturday Night Live* with a host of her friends. She screamed and hooted when she saw Marcus on the screen... and she had a great *night*. She wanted to call him, but she didn't have the nerve. She was imagining that he was partying with the rest of his team, and inside, she scolded him for jeopardizing his draft status if that was true.

Joseph "Squire" Wilton took a liking to Rikki Styles and anally screwed her while Amy Poehler gave her weekend update. He barely heard *Marcus*' name, and didn't want to hear it if it *could* register in his conscious mind. He started playing tricks on himself from within. He didn't *know* if he was falling in love with Rikki Styles, and hoped he wasn't. She was an *ugly* girl, in his sight, and she had body odor that

reeked of the common vegetarian. Most of the cosmetic companies had stopped using animals for scientific experimentation, but she still wouldn't *use* Revlon or Avon. They used *GRAS*—generally regarded as safe—chemicals in their products, but it wasn't enough for most of her vegan friends to accept in their circles. Further, she felt objectified by the football team when she wore make-up, and it was a moot subject *anyway*. Regardless, when *Joseph* would pound her in the ass, she wished she at least used organic *deodorant*. She could tell that it bothered him and wondered about the extent of politics pertaining to *glamour*... while Joseph's brain drifted to *Coors*. He wondered why the Hispanics on campus no longer drank what was known as "*Colorado Kool-Aid*." He knew there had been a labor dispute in the past, but it was fogging his head... and then he fogged *Rikki's* butt with a wad of jizzum that only she could appreciate.

Marcus turned off the TV right before one o'clock in the morning. He wanted to be on the set of *Saturday Night Live*, and he wanted to host the show before being drafted. He thought it would be good *PR* for whatever team was taking him in.

Marcus Blacksmith thought about enrolling in a theatre class for his final semester at the school which brought him national glory.

* * *

The roommate of Marcus Blacksmith was a tight end by the name of Anfernee "Buck" Lester. He was a major in economics, and he wasn't going to be drafted into the NFL without a miracle. He came in late Saturday night after Marcus was already asleep. He woke Marcus up, and he had a couple of the members of the football team with him. They were mildly drunk, they were wearing their football uniforms, and they started to chant mild grunts which were reminiscent of the sounds of the practice field. Anfernee spoke to Marcus when he realized he was finally awake. "You're going to make me your *agent*, right?!" He had a look of consternation on his face which was hidden from the men behind him as they chanted.

"*Yeah!!*" Marcus said. He was rubbing his eyes, and was not serious about what he said.

"I got a *contract* right here that says that you're going to pay me ten percent of your *purse*—your first year's salary—at the end of your first *season!!*" Anfernee gave Marcus a contract which was written in blue pen ink on lined notebook paper.

"I don't *like* it!!" Marcus observed it... thought it was a joke then continue, "It says you get ten percent, your *buddies* behind you get twenty-five percent, and I... *get sixty-five percent!!!* I have an agent, and he's a *good* one!!!"

Anfernee "Buck" Lester's look changed to disappointment and hurt. He was genuinely expecting Marcus to sign the hand-written note. "We *protected* you!!! And we *bucked off* anyone that would come *close* to you!!!"

The men behind Anfernee said in unison, "We did not get *drafted* by you!!! We got drafted by

your *mom!!!*” It was scripted. If Marcus happened to sign, they were going to rip the notebook paper up in front of him. It was symbolic.

Anfernee “Buck” Lester laughed. “I might not be *drafted*, but I’m going to follow you *around!!!*” He looked at Marcus, and knew that he was mildly upset at being woken up. “You send us *tickets*, and you give us your word that you’re going to *give* us tickets!!!”

Marcus shook his head in agreement. “*Yeah!!!*” He rubbed his eyes. “You got my *word!!!*”

Anfernee swelled with envy for a couple of seconds, thought to hit Marcus in the face for leaving the rest of the team behind, then realized the error in his thinking. A gust of *gratitude* filled him. He approached Marcus Blacksmith, hugged him, then said, “I’m going to love you *forever!!* And you call me if you need a *REAL* agent!!!” He drew back. “I’ll look *out* for you!!!”

Marcus could already feel what it was going to be about. There were going to be people in town’s around America wanting a piece of the pie. He *knew* it. He didn’t blame Anfernee, but deep inside he knew he got the name “Buck” for a reason: He didn’t buck people off *enough*—he didn’t jam them off the *line*—and it was sarcastic. He was a *receiver’s* tight end, and not a *blocking* one. He said, “I hope you buck people off of *everyone* in your dreams... and in your *semi-pro* football career!!!” Marcus hugged Anfernee, then started to high five the other football brutes behind him.

“You’re really going to *LEAVE!!!*” Anfernee said. Deep inside, he wanted Marcus to stay at San Diego State as an alumni... but he could feel that he was getting too big for comfort. Marshall Faulk didn’t make it back too often, and San Diego was going to be lucky to see Marcus again outside of visits to *Charger* away games... unless he happened to wind *up* on the Chargers. “You’re going to *leave*, and I can already feel the appreciation for what you did to this *school!!!*”

Cheerleaders came from the hall around the football players, lured them back outside of the dorm, then Marcus tried to sleep again.

Anfernee took off after everyone else. He wanted to be alone. He realized he was losing a friend in the physical sense. In the spiritual and emotional sense, he knew he would never lose him.

From the hallway Marcus could hear a sarcastic “*I LOVE YOU, MARCUS!!!*” from one of his linemen. It made him happy then he slept well that night in spite of hall partying.

* * *

Rumor on the campus was that Anfernee “Buck” Lester had an intimate relationship with *Cameron Diaz* while in Tijuana. Anfernee had pictures of partying with Marcus, and they were good enough to spurn the rumors that he was going to be his agent. Marcus didn’t know if the rumors were true, and he didn’t care. Other rumors circulated that Anfernee was dating Francis O’ Connor, a lady whom costarred in the movie, *Bedazzled*. Marcus prepared for a lot of “associations” and a lot of rumors. He was told that when he was on the road, it would happen quite often. People would walk up to in bars and ask

for autographs or pictures. It would be innocent enough, and then the internet stories would circulate in the particular communities where the transactions originated. Marcus was expecting that he was going to be rumored to be having sex with no less than nine women per night, pushed or shoved fifteen men for the sake of lawsuit money, and kissed forty or so babies on the forehead. He wanted to find a woman that would *understand* the rumors. He was left thinking of Holly Rydell from the University of Santa Barbara but he knew it wouldn't work because it was too friendly of a relationship. "Gay rumors" followed Troy Aikman during the Cowboys' third Superbowl bid of the nineteen nineties. If a person didn't have a woman, *gay rumors* would follow... *he was pretty sure*. Ricky Martin, though not an athlete, had swirls of gay rumors around him as well... and chose a "personal friend from the past" to dispel them during a VH1 documentary interview. To Marcus, it didn't work.

Marcus had to think of a women that would be faithful enough to him to understand the guesswork of social gossip, yet not too "friendly" so that it would seem like a blatant front. Holly Rydell *had* to fade for that reason alone.

Marcus decided that *theatre* was the way, after all. He had enrolled in an economics class with his roommate... and teammate, Anfernee "Buck" Lester... and he decided to drop it in the spring semester in favor of something that would net him a good relationship—at the very least, the *semblance* of one.

Holly Rydell was getting ready to graduate from the University of Santa Barbara with *honors*. Her classes were going to be "cake" for her, in her own forecast of them. They weren't easy—*calculus* was one of them—but she mastered the art of studying and focus. She felt the come-ons of the people around her, but she blocked them out. She didn't have the same problem as Marcus. She was going to go to *graduate* school, and if she had a steady boyfriend when she left UCSB, it would not work. *Berkeley* was in her plans, and she was already accepted. She dreaded the dissertations and the scrutiny, but she was prepared as much as she *knew* how to be prepared. "*Fuck Santa Barbara!!!*" she said quite often in her last semester as she prepared to disassociate from it.

Joseph "Squire" Wilton became friends with Anfernee "Buck" Lester by *accident*. He called Marcus quite often, and Marcus was never there. Anfernee would get on the phone and start talking to him. Joseph was accepted to the University of Kansas and was going to go into their graduate program which emphasized economics. He got along with Anfernee well but not even for a second did he consider that he ought to be Marcus' agent.

Rikki, as she approached graduation, was sick of the harassment from men around her. She had planned to stay a vegan so long as she went to school but *alternative life styles* appealed to her more and more as her dreaded graduation neared. Her friend, *Stewart Lane*, became less nerd-like as the weeks waned on, and he started to be *mean* to people. He knew he would have a good career because he was *smart*. He got sick of being taken advantage of, and started to walk around with a chip on his shoulder. He didn't get *picked* on for being mean because everyone else saw their own ends, as well.

Lu Hsun Pak faded from Joseph's life with each passing day, and when he was spotted around

campus, it was almost as if they had never seen each before in life.

Marcus prepared for the NFL draft. He thought a lot of Joseph “*Squire*” Wilton, but he did not look forward to seeing his *family* as much as he had before. He was tiring of his old *hometown* and he was starting to envision being in Tampa, Florida and living in comfort. He changed his mind about being so *snobby* about living in some of the “less desirable” towns... and he started to warm to a different start.

Anfernee “Buck” Lester broke out of the closet after the *Blue/ Gray* game was played, and embraced the homosexual clicks around campus. He lost touch with his roommate Marcus Blacksmith even though he saw him on a regular basis. It gave Marcus the willies when they would see each other and talk but he had to get through it... and he was going to be *damned* if he was going to be known as a “homophobe” when he made his way into the spotlight.

Joseph cruised in his last semester. It was like a breeze. It was like riding a bike. When it was over, he planned to give Holly a call to find out if she’d be interested in dating... again. He prepared to have Marcus at his home for the *NFL* draft.

* * *

The NFL draft was a week away, and Anfernee “*Buck*” Lester became increasingly more homosexual in his behavior toward Marcus Blacksmith. Secretly and naïvely, he thought that Marcus might cut him in on some of his future reward as a professional running back. It bugged Marcus, and right before he was set to go to the Wiltons’ for the NFL draft in late April, Anfernee showed Marcus an internet video which he thought was rather interesting. They had debated the authenticity of the *Donald Rumsfeld Anal Probe* video, and Anfernee was able to get a video in which George Herbert Walker Bush appeared to be sucking the cock of good, ol’ Donald. Marcus didn’t want to see it. He had other things in his head. He took off to Santa Barbara without much thought, but he did consider that a *look-alike* cult was forming in the San Fernando Valley which would portray government figures as being gay—*openly* homosexual.

Marcus Blacksmith was a Roman Catholic by birth, and he wore a silver crucifix on the day of the draft. He thought it would bring him luck, and he thought it would shed off unwanted sponsors (he wanted a shoe contract, and he did *not* want to endorse the alcohol industry because he believed *kids* would be watching his games). Chris Mortensen was at Jake Wilton’s house, and the cameras were all around. Marcus was expected to be picked by the Tampa Bay Buccaneers with the first pick in the draft, according to most experts including Mel Kiper, but Chris Berman speculated he might go as far down as number five to the Kansas City Chiefs. The Bucs got their number one pick by trading with the Jets, and they swapped a premier wide receiver to do so.

Marcus Blacksmith waited patiently. There were moments of anxiety. He thought of George Herbert Walker Bush sucking the cock of what appeared to be Donald Rumsfeld, and he wondered if *he* would be next—he wondered if they would get a look-alike to disparage *him*.

Joseph Wilton skirted around the house, and he appeared lost. Rikki Styles didn't come with him—she was busy tending to *female* issues, as she put it—and he talked to his mom on occasion about odd things, such as *cooking*. Marcus Blacksmith said that if he made the Pro Bowl within five years, he was going to marry Nicole Kidman or Halle Berry. Everyone laughed. When the first pick in the draft was made, Marcus was surprised. He had been *sure* that he was going to be heading for New Jersey to play for the Jets. The second pick came up... and the *Chargers* picked Marcus Blacksmith.

He was happy.

Chris Mortensen interviewed him, and Marcus thanked God... his family, including the Wiltons, and... *MTV*. Everyone laughed at the final comment.

Marcus headed back to San Diego and he had a sickening feeling in his stomach. He didn't want to be there any longer. He had *enough* of San Diego. He had four *years* of it. He had visions of being in different parts of the country.

After a lot of thought, he reconsidered. He thought to move to *Escondido*, and he hoped he wouldn't be traded from the Chargers before training camp began.

Marcus Blacksmith watched the George Herbert Walk Bush video again, and was *almost* sure it was really him. He watched a couple of *other* videos, and noticed that Ronald Reagan was apparently still *alive*. He was giving orders to fry cooks in the Midwest, and he was doing standup comedy around the Kentucky area.

Life was strange. Marcus was wondering when he would see himself doing standup comedy at places where he had never been. He *hoped* he wouldn't end up like George Herbert Walker Bush and Donald Rumsfeld, *though*. He wanted to have sex with Nicole Kidman and Halle Berry. If he saw a look-alike of himself with *those* two ladies in a bootleg video, he was going to be *happy*.

Marcus Blacksmith became tired of his roommate before the school year ended and moved off campus. He had an advance from a *shoe* sponsor, and he started to feel bought—he started to feel like a used tire. He hoped he wouldn't end up like a *Disney* star promoting McDonald's and other places that he didn't believe in too much. He hoped he'd be banging Nicole Kidman and Halle Berry in real life—not just through internet bootleg video.

* * *

Holly Rydell did not make it to Jake Wilton's house for the NFL draft. She was busy with school projects, and she phoned in to wish Marcus Blacksmith luck after she found out he was drafted by the Chargers. Joseph "*Squire*" Wilton, when he returned to the UCLA campus after the draft, was inundated with reports, exams, and a senior thesis paper. Rikki Styles started to have an interest in Stewart Lane and Lu Hsun Pak. Anfernee "*Buck*" Lester made come-ons to Marcus Blacksmith whenever he would see him around the Aztec campus. It bugged Marcus, and he wondered why things had to fade in the friendship

fashion.

Marcus started to listen to a lot of *Van Halen* when he was ready for graduation. He was cruising in his classes, and he was correct that *drama* was the place to find the women. *He just didn't know how to approach them*, and he suspected they would be a lot more *flaky* than anyone else he had met. “*Fair Warning*” was his favorite of the Van Halen albums, but he listened to “Diver Down” and “*Women And Children First*” as well. The latest internet video that he had forwarded to his web address had the infamous *Rumsfeld* character—he still didn't know if he was the authentic *deal*—and he was boinking *Renée Zellweger*, or a good copycat of her. Nicole Kidman made an appearance in that video, and she was featured by kicking Rumsfeld in his buttohole and leaving her toes in to twiggle around his *sphincter*. Cameron Diaz came into the room, and started to whip him silly after he was tied up by his hands to a bedpost. Marcus didn't know if he was watching a simulation, or the real deal. He didn't know if it was computer animation, but the figures looked so lifelike that he couldn't tell the difference. Rumsfeld sucked the cock of George Herbert Walker Bush, and then *George* would turn around and do the favor for Rumsfeld while the three other women looked on and patted each other on naked breasts. Marcus thought to report it to Homeland Security, but he was advised by a *drama* major that that stuff happened all the time. He couldn't prove the authenticity, and he should just let it go.

It wasn't too long before he found out that Anfernee “*Buck*” Lester had all to do with it. He was starring in male porn within a week and a half of the dreary sight of seeing a former president give headway to an apparent defense department icon. It was too much, and Marcus forwarded the videos to Holly Rydell at her University of Santa Barbara campus. At first inspection, she thought that Marcus was becoming perverted. The actuality was that Marcus didn't want to get off the internet because one fuckhead dipshit wanted to gross him out beyond belief. He had more than a hundred and twenty connections that were legitimate, and he didn't want to waste them all. The videos came to Marcus usually under a false pretense, and the one with Anfernee “*Buck*” Lester came direct from the source. He asked for Holly's advice.

Holly forwarded the sickening videos to all of her friends—in all *eighty* people whom she regularly talked to through internet social groupings—and *they* forwarded the videos to people around the coastal California area. By the time that Homeland Security received the videos, they had no *concrete* idea of where the source came from... but they were perturbed that Donald Rumsfeld seemed to make such a *risky* side profession with his life. That was the rumor that Holly Rydell sent back to Marcus Blacksmith, and she took it as a joke.

Marcus blocked out the instances, and he finished his term papers early. He thought it was *possible* that the real Donald Rumsfeld was a cock-sucking *weirdo*, but it didn't matter to him... as he could *smell* training camp in the air. He wasn't going to be far from San Diego State University, and he was happy.

By the end of May, Marcus bought a home in Escondido. Joseph “*Squire*” Wilton graduated with

minimum requirements in economics, and Holly Rydell shined with summa cum laude honors in marketing. They were in for a ride, and they didn't know it.

* * *

By June, school had ended for Marcus, Joseph, and Holly. They celebrated by going to Yosemite and hiking at *Half Dome*. It had appeared to people outside of their group that it was a bad decision—*quarterbacks*, in particular, typically had stipulations in their contracts which prevented them from certain activities such as motorcycle riding, sky diving, and speed boating because they had meant so much financially to their respective franchises—but Marcus thought that he'd conquer a fear. He wasn't much for avoiding obstacles, and he told Holly and Joseph that he would be running between the tackles up the middle for a long *time*, and that was a greater danger than mountain climbing. It was agreed upon within the group, and Marcus tragically learned that fate should not be tempted too much when peril was around the corner at all ends. He got halfway up *Half Dome*, and due to inexperience and anxiety, he did not fasten his spikes correctly. He was sent plummeting two hundred and fifty feet to a gravelly floor. He broke his neck and ruptured fifteen vertebrae. He provided a will for Holly and Joseph, and they received one hundred thousand dollars *each* pursuant to Marcus' early shoe contract earnings. They were happy that they didn't have to start life at graduate schools with a blank slate—*completely broke*, in other words—but there was a tinge of bitterness in both of them when they cashed their checks. They didn't want life to be like that. They wanted Marcus running on their big screen televisions in the coming years. They wanted to go to his games. Holly speculated that Marcus did it on purpose to avoid years of physical pain and public scrutiny. Joseph discounted it as hogwash.

Rikki kept in touch with *Squire* throughout the summer. She was becoming less gothlike in looks, but she was becoming more gothic in *beliefs*. Joseph didn't care, though. He needed the company, and in a strange twist of irony, Stewart Lane began to date Holly Rydell before they all had to separate again for graduate school.

* * *

Joseph "*Squire*" Wilton arrived in Kansas in August, and prepared for a new year. From the onset, he committed himself to friendship which would help him forget his departed comrade from California. He joined *Omega Gamma Upsilon* and began a hazing program. It wasn't altogether common that they let in graduate students, but they made an exception for him because of his circumstance. Admitted at the same time was a guy by the name of Joseph "Barrel" Philipson, and the thought that they had the same first name didn't matter to either. They watched *Bedazzled* featuring Raquel Welch, Peter Cook, and Dudley Moore.

Joseph “*Barrel*” Philipson commented that he thought Francis O’ Connor was a whore, and he was glad that they weren’t watching the *modern* version of it. They watched *Blythe Spirit* afterward with Rex Harrison and Margaret Rutherford. It was based off a Noël Coward screenplay, and Joseph “*Squire*” Wilton thought it was done quite nice. After, they were set for a séance, and then the final part of the initiation was to take place. All that Joseph “*Squire*” Wilton knew was that it involved *blindfolds* and feathers, or so he was told. He thought it was silly.

During the séance, Joseph “*Squire*” Wilton contacted Marcus Blacksmith. All knees were touched, and he was told information that no one else should ever know. He thought to himself that they must have gotten the information off of the internet. After contacting Marcus Blacksmith, the group attempted to contact Nicole Kidman—she was one of the other of Joseph’s favorite stars—and they were successful. Neither of the Josephs knew if it was fake, or some kind of scare technique to believe in the supernatural. Candles flickered, but that could have been done with clever *fan* devices which may have been hidden and queued. Finally, the group contacted *Donald Rumsfeld* and asked him about his internet homosexual sex videos. Rumsfeld, through a lady channelor said that yes, indeed it was *him* in the videos and not a fake. Joseph “*Squire*” Wilton laughed openly, and the other Joseph sat in quiet anger as if being insulted by an artificial setting. Nicole Kidman had said, through the medium, that Joseph “*Squire*” Wilton would be raped in his asshole if he said anything outside of the group. He became scared at that—not in fear of being raped, but rather in the fact that he thought he was around *weirdos*. Nicole Kidman said to never talk to her again during evening hours because she was busy with a new love interest. Everyone laughed at that one except for the medium herself.

The last of the hazing involved a squeezing of one another’s noses. Feathers were ceremoniously put on the ground, and the two inductees had handkerchiefs put around their eyes. They were to pinch each other’s noses simultaneously in order to find out which one would have more initial status. They were not told the criteria of the judging, and they were told to start on the count of three.

After an unseen person yelled “three!!” Joseph “*Squire*” Wilton started to reach for the partner in front of him. He had been standing present for more than five minutes, and he was told that Joseph “*Barrel*” Philipson would be a couple of feet from him in arms’ length. When Joseph “*Squire*” Wilton started to grab for his recently-met acquaintance’s face, he was surprised to feel a *woman*. He tore off his handkerchief and saw that it was *Francis O’ Connor* in front of him. There had been chants from already-inducted members of *Omega Gamma Upsilon* and they ceased. Joseph “*Barrel*” Philipson had been escorted out of the room three minutes prior, and everyone was told that he would have a *different* hazing program, probably involving cows, sheep, or other livestock. Francis laughed when it was all over, and she wanted to kiss Joseph “*Squire*” Wilton as a matter of orientation... but she refrained and told him that he did well during the trance, and during the watching of the movie. She had a glimpse of him, at times, from a sheer black nylon blanket which hung from the distance.

Joseph “*Squire*” Wilton fainted.

The next day, *Omega Gamma Upsilon* informed Joseph “Squire” Wilton that a mix-up had been made and he was not admitted, after *all*. It was the *other* Joseph that the hidden panel secretly wanted into their group.

Joseph “Squire” Wilton was disappointed, but he determined himself to stay at the school. He thought he would drop out after a semester if he didn’t like it.

* * *

Holly Rydell began Berkeley and she was glad that she was there. She had an Asian roommate, as Joseph “Squire” Wilton recommended she get. Her name was Stacey “Tram” Tan, and Holly thought it was funny because the name rhymed. “Tram” was not named after the Vietnamese village not far from the Mekong River, but rather after a kind of *silk* which resembled her hair. Tram pled with her to have the bed near the window, and she won her argument. She said it would trample delirious nights of studying and drinking *saki* well into the year. She would be a lot less stressed, in other words.

Holly had a hard time adjusting. She enrolled in a calculus class, and sat next to a drabble whom resembled *Harrison Ford*. Behind her, sat a square from the UK, and he was always bugging her about dates. Secretly, she thought the guy fostered homosexual desires toward the *Harrison Ford* wannabe.

Tram was a good a roommate as a person could ask for. She was quiet, she studied during the hours she *said* she would study, and she brought back extra food whenever she went out to eat.

Joseph “Squire” Wilton called quite often from Kansas. He said that he couldn’t handle it any longer, but Holly believed it was a gross diversion. She thought that he would commit *murder* before dropping out of college. It was just his way, as of late.

Tram had an idea that *Fleetwood Mac* could be brought out of a semi-retirement, and record once again at the Berkeley Studios... *where* they recorded *Rumours*. Holly didn’t like graduate school as much as she liked *undergraduate* school. She thought that it was useless and repetitive. For fleeting moments, she thought of dropping out, and asking Joseph to take her across the country on a far away vacation... and to never come *back* from it.

Harrison Ford—the guy whom *resembled* him, but smaller in stature—started to date the British guy a few weeks into Holly’s first semester at Berkeley. They openly held hands, and they openly mouth-kissed. It was new to Holly—they didn’t have so many open homosexuals at the *Santa Barbara* campus—but she accepted it over time. On the far end of campus from her calculus class was a man whom never wore clothes. By tradition, Holly was told that at least *one* man—usually a woman as well—went nude for a few weeks in the spirit of *liberalism*. The British guy openly mouth-kissed the *Harrison Ford* guy, and it was strange to see... but it was welcome in a revitalizing way.

It was Holly’s goal to work at *Rockefeller Center* some day for Conan O’ Brien, or someone along those lines. She didn’t want to be in California when all was said and done, and *Craig Kilborne* was out of

the question. Holly started to date a man whom resembled a *guru*, but bathed as if there was no tomorrow. She thought it was weird, and in a peculiar way, she felt she was in a time warp.

When the British guy and the Harrison Ford genetic clone broke up midway through the semester, Holly was surprised to see that they stayed friends—they even smoked pot openly in front of their classes to assure that they still had a bond.

Much of what went on in Southern California was being lost to Holly. She had remembered *MTV* during countless nights of studying. People in her Berkeley dorm did not *watch* MTV. She remembered seeing freak videos of Donald Rumsfeld, and *other* abnormal sights. Nothing like that surfaced through her emails. She remembered Joseph telling her how there was a “coercion cult” at the UCLA campus. Holly couldn’t detect such a thing at Berkeley. She was glad to be a Golden Bear by the time that Thanksgiving rolled around, yet she was saddened that she wouldn’t be spending the turkey holiday at the Wiltons.

Holly regretted not going to Joseph’s when Marcus was drafted by the Chargers. She thought of him often, but she didn’t say a whole lot to any person.

Late autumn of that year, Jake Wilton became severely depressed. He missed his son being around, and he missed his son’s friends. Holly began receiving letters from him. She didn’t know what to make of it. She suspected that Joseph was getting the same letters, but she didn’t ask. She thought of Santa Barbara, and she began to lose reverence for the home where she grew up.

* * *

In early December, Joseph spoke to Holly on the phone—he couldn’t hold back from speaking to her for so long. “That *Rumsfeld* video, it turns out, is easy to *duplicate*!! We did our own mock simulations with *Renée Zellweger* look-alikes just for show!! We had real video, and when the time came that *sex* was required, we had a body double with a similar wig as her perform acts that were speculative, to say the least!! It wasn’t a perfect video, but it can be *done* quite easily!! A sociologist did a survey, and ninety out of a hundred people believed it was really *her*... after we embellished and said that it was strongly rumored to be her from an internet source!!! It was *interesting*... so I wonder if it was Rumsfeld sucking cock, *after all*!!! I wonder if someone did a video like *us*!!”

“I’m dating a *hippy*,” Holly said from the other side of the line.

“Sarah Drew did a movie called *Radio*, not too long ago, and there’s a girl that looks like her in the dorm next to us!!! We’re going to see if we can fool the public with speculative actions and clever camera angles!!!” Joseph laughed.

“I think I might be *pregnant*!!!” Holly said.

“And there’s a drugged out wigger lady who runs a school in Southern California whom has classes that teach about the occult, magic, studying photography, and a whole *load* of things!!! We’re going to try to get her to come out here and talk to our *students*!!!” Joseph laughed, again. “I think they

can use it!!! They say she's from Harvard!!!"

"I think I might drop out of *school*," Holly said.

"And there's a *black* lady that's in one of my classes—she's a little fat but her *face* looks like Halle Berry... We're going to have *her* be in the video in which Sarah Drew, the *clone*, is trying to figure people out!!!" Joseph shuffled through some papers.

"I might *marry* that hippy whom I feel emotions of *love* with on occasion!!!" Holly said.

"And *Touchtone* is out here trying to cast for a new *movie*!!!" Joseph stopped looking through his papers because he found what he was looking for.

"It was good *talking* to you!!!" Holly said. She hung up.

"That was a great *CONVERSATION*!!!" Joseph said. He felt better than he had felt in a while. He looked at the paper in his hand. It was the picture of a slender German lady with a bowled hair cut. It looked *good* to Joseph. He pinned it on his wall. Next to it, there had been a ripped poster of Danny Manning. He guessed it was probably damaged during a recent party. He tore it down and threw it in the waste basket. He whistled around his dorm, and he thought of the classes he would enroll in for the next semester.

* * *

Joseph Wilton graduated from the University of Kansas, and knew he couldn't go back to California for a while. The last conversation he had with Holly Rydell was not becoming of what he wanted in life. Marcus Blacksmith was still in his head as a *ghost*, and he knew he couldn't go back home or else he would think of him more. New York seemed like a nice place to be. He didn't want to be there. He wanted to go to a place where *his* mind had been while at UCLA. He wanted to go to the mines of Britain. He wanted to go to the Parthenon of Greece. He wanted to go to the pyramids of Egypt. He wanted to go to a place of excavating, but he didn't know the best place to start.

Joseph checked in with a travel agent in Topeka. He reflected on his graduation ceremony, and wasn't ashamed that no one from his family came to see him. His father was ill with hepatitis and his mother had severe menstrual cramps. They didn't want to take the flight out and "be a drag"... *as they put it*. They wanted him to be with his friends, but unlike his undergraduate school, Joseph found that he didn't *have* many friends in Kansas. He didn't mind. He thought he was *maturing*.

Joseph decided on *Britain* to go to. He wanted to study coal mining companies, and he wanted to research more mythological literature. He thought that if he could be there long enough, he could call Rikki Styles from California, and she could come and comfort him. His mind was in a zone. He *liked* it. He thought he could be a *career student*, if that's what it took. He envisioned himself on archeological digs throughout the worlds, most notably the *Sahara* desert, and he thought he could use his marketing degree to further promote goals and aims of whatever "Society" he decided to join.

Holly Rydell did not get pregnant at Berkeley. She *thought* she did. It was a false reading from a cheap home pregnancy test. She moved in with the Wilton family a couple of months after *her* graduation because she thought it would save her money as she made her way in her new *world* (her own family wanted her pushed out, as they started aging and began to enjoy the *retired life*).

Marcus Blacksmith was still featured on *ESPN*, and other sports dailies. He was talked about quite often. A momento was made to him in San Diego, and the world moved on. The NFL suffered a great loss when he was not a featured star in their rookie class during the year Marcus should have been making his *break through*.

* * *

Joseph “*Squire*” Wilton hung out at the tea houses not far from the Oxford campus. He did not wish to enroll in that school, but rather, he wanted question the locals about the differences between the University of Berkeley’s Kirchner’s non-*Gaia* idea... and Britain’s Lovelock’s *Gaia Hypothesis*. Joseph worked in an antique store, and he befriended a young gentleman by the name of Wallace Bentsen. They would have lunch together, and they would discuss the world’s events. Joseph told Wallace one day, “I think Jim Kirchner from Berkeley was an *atheist!!!* The more I travel away from my exgirlfriend’s school in time and space, I’m starting to believe that *Lovelock* had the right ideas about what was *really* goin’ on in the world!!”

Wallace tipped his hat, looked around to make sure that no one else was listening, then said, “The *Gaia Hypothesis* is just yet another British instrument to take over the *world!!!* They *want* us to function as one entity, and they want the Prime Meridian to be the center of the map for all *time!!!*”

“I don’t believe it!!” Joseph said. He felt embarrassed, then tried to change the subject. “Your gold *ore*... mixed with uranium... Just because the radioactive chemicals weren’t *discovered* until the twentieth century doesn’t mean they weren’t *there*, right!?!”

Wallace became astute about the direction of the conversation’s turn. “*Yes!!* And Nussy is *hidden* in the Scottish Lake, and when you’re aerial satellites *photograph* her, the Skull And Bones *SOCIETY* that your presidents are *part* of hide it from the rest of the planet so we don’t have *BOUNTY HUNTERS* over here tryin’ to get Nussy’s arm back into your *MUSEUMS!!!*”

Joseph became more embarrassed. He sensed sarcasm. He directed his thoughts back to the gnomes and other monstrosities he had talked about with Rikki Styles. “I *think* they were minin’ in those *coal caves* for many centuries; I *think* they were around radioactive *uranium!!!* And I think they *evolved* to be smaller than the regular human *person!!!*”

Wallace lightened up. His scone remained in front of him with only one bite out of it. “Dogs have only been domesticate for a few hundred *years!!!* We bred them to be small and *large!!!* Yes!!! We *BRED* humans to work in the mines... and when they couldn’t survive, they died *OUT!!!* They evolved into a

subhuman species!!! Yes!!! And we are known for our *FEUDAL* system which is blatantly *CLASSIST*!!! Yes!!! And we let sub-serfs work their ways into *MIDDLE EARTH* hopin' that they would bring out gold nuggets of the larges' *sizes*... and some of them got comfortable *livin'* down there!!! And they never came *UP!!!*"

Joseph didn't know if he was listening to more sarcasm because he wasn't yet fully accustomed to British dialects and humor. "So the *Vietnamese* which burrowed into the land were known to live underground for *decades*!!! How long do you suppose these 'gnomes' were there *underground*!??"

"*Twenty-five years*!!! At a time, I mean!!! They came up long enough to fight wars, steal British possessions, and launch their ways to present-day Iceland and *Greenland*... the latter which, ironically... *is full of ICE*!!!!"

Joseph laughed. He ate from his croissant. He continued, "So the *OGRES*—the large men of incredible size... Not a farce *either*!??" He wiped off crumbs from his mouth.

"*No*!! Not a farce!!! And when you told me that the largest man *ever* was eight feet tall and was *Anglo*, I *knew* it was one of *OURS*!!! We bred Cyclops-like men to fight *battles*!!! It couldn't be *had*, after a while, because the longbow cut them *off*!!! They fought with clubs and hammers, and it was a spectacle to see... if you read the descriptions from hidden limericks in the *Mason Society's* buildings!!! And they were chopped off, just like the wars between the Cro Magnon and Neanderthals so many years *back* had an eventual *loser*!!! So I think you get the point that in *Britain*, we don't mind talkin' about *transcribed elucidation* as if it actually has happened... because we have *experienced* fanatic events *first hand*!!!"

"I think you're *right*!!" Joseph said to Wallace. He thought Wallace was a bit *crazy* for saying anything, and he doubted the authenticity of a lot of the stories... but he believed there was a *grain* of truth to it.

* * *

"Okay, honey!!" Joseph Wilton said. "You don't understand how it *is* any longer, Annie!!" Annie was a girl who was brought along by Wallace Bentsen. She was from the Oxford campus and was astutely familiar with Cornwall, a county of England in its southwestern region, popular for tin mines which had dated back two thousand years.

All conversation was cordial with Wallace from Joseph's perspective until the point when they were to actually travel to some of the smaller towns which were sparsely scattered throughout the area. Annie came along mostly because of her spunk. She didn't have as much traditional knowledge as Wallace Bentsen yet she offered unparalleled enthusiasm. Joseph "*Squire*" Wilton looked at Annie and admired her body. She must have been about nineteen years old, a freshman or sophomore from Oxford, no doubt, and he wanted to have sex with her if he could convince Wallace Bentsen to stay behind during the travels. In his wildest dreams, as he traveled, in an autocar from central England along A30, a main thoroughfare, he

thought about how it would be and he was ashamed to not be able process out *Lady Chatterly's Lover*, a video he had rented during his freshman year at UCLA.

Annie looked to Joseph “*Squire*” Wilton and she knew that he was there for a reason and suspected he wanted money. Naïvely, she thought he must have believed all that mines were full of silver and gold. She was incorrect. Joseph thought about Marcus Blacksmith when wasn’t looking downward at Annie’s demur body. Annie started to get feelings which were tingly from head to toe and she had to fight them off. She yelled to Wallace Bentsen, “Can you stay on the *road*, please?!” Perhaps Wallace had noticed the chemistry developing between Joseph and Annie. There had been an informal introduction between the two as they met up initially in Sheffield.

Wallace began to speak, “The town where we picked Annie up... That’s where the pop group, *Def Leppard*, formed!! What you’re going to have to do, Joseph, is take into account all of the British propaganda you’ve seen over the years. *The Who*, just as well as Def Leppard, is popular for use of the British flag. Hong Kong, Australia, New Zealand, and even *Hawaii*—one of the states in your *UNION*—use our British flag in the upper lefthand corner. If you can get past the *symbolism*, you can understand some of what I’m about to say!!”

“What are you tryin’ to *say*, Wallace?! Are you goin’ to show me a *dragon*?!”

“No, *sir*!! I’m not goin’ to show you a *dragon*... an’ I’ll show you *NOTHIN*’ at all if you offer me that same sarcasm when we reach our final destinations!!”

“Destinations, *huh*?! You’re goin’ to show me a *few* caves!! I’m startin’ to think you want me to do *work* for you!!” Joseph “*Squire*” Wilton became somewhat *haughty* in his mannerisms because of the gazing eyes of the young girl next to him. Fifteen minutes later they reached the first of three caves which would be explored that day. It was just to give ground.

Wallace Bentsen said, “You cannot pay attention to the *signs* which proclaim the places to be this or that!! There are *many* towns scattered here seemingly *sporadically* and you have to try to imagine yourself two thousand years ago before the Visigoths invaded *Rome*... Before the Anglos and Saxons took over Great Britain... and St. Agnes was not here yet, but rather... the *mines*... where we are about to go!! Malpas!! Creed!! Mawla!! Camborne!! Hayle!! Helford!! All of these were not around two thousand years ago... in their present *forms*... when the tin mining started!!”

“Was this at the dawning of the *Copper Age*?!” Joseph “*Squire*” Wilton asked.

“No sir!! It was not at the dawnin’ of the *Copper Age*!! This was the age of *TRUE MAGIC*!!”

Wallace Bentsen reached into his heavy, brown coat and produced a few budded mushrooms.

“*More*?! Portabella?!” Joseph “*Squire*” Wilton asked.

Wallace Bentsen looked at him slyly and replied, “You’ll find out in a couple of hours what these mushrooms can do!!”

Annie looked at Joseph with a gleam in her eye, then said, “I did not tell you my *name*!! I am ‘Annie of *Sussex*’!!”

* * *

Wallace Bentsex spoke for twenty minutes outside of a cave which could not be entered without prying off two-by-fours, plywood, and barbed wire. He spoke of what was inside those caves centuries prior. “The caves looked nothin’ like this, *Joseph!*!”

Joseph sensed that Wallace was going to let him in on more than just encyclopædia history of what was going on inside of those caverns and he couldn’t believe anything to save his life outside of the human world in spite of some of the coffee house conversations. Instead of asking Wallace about the fleeting ideas in his head, he turned to Annie and asked her, “What’s your legal last name, *Annie?*!”

Annie replied, “I am ‘*ANNIE of SUSSEX!*!’” There was laughter, Annie, bashful from the two men, asked Joseph “*Squire*” Wilton coldly, “Are you in the *CIA*, sir?!”

“I’m not so sure I’m an American *citizen* right now, let alone a *CIA agent*!! You have to take into consideration my *mental* state!! I lost one of my better friends in the not-too-distant past in a tragic hiking accident at Yosemite National Park!!”

“You speak like a *CIA* operative, *sir!*!” Annie replied.

Wallace Bentsen became infuriated and demanded that both of them to enter their traveling vehicle which was a *1924 Roadster*.

* * *

It was six in the evening when they finally reached the third of the three caves to be visited. Joseph was becoming weary and in his mind, he could picture flying dragons. Once in a while, he would reach into the air because he could imagine spectres of people as they had lived in the past—*tin miners*, or whoever else had been in Great Britain so long ago. Many of these mines were noted to be exhausted of their resources, but Joseph suspected that if they had just kept digging, they truly could have a find.

Wallace Bentsen said, “I brought Annie for a reason!! She is more agile than me!! She knows these *caves* well!! She will take you on a journey!! You are to be back here in no more than a half hour’s time!! I *will* call authorities if you are more than an hour throughout your journey!! Please be responsible!!”

“*Yes... sir!*!” Joseph “*Squire*” Wilton said.

A half hour passed, nearly to the minute, and Joseph “*Squire*” Wilton came out with “*Annie of Sussex*”... and both were giddy like *high school kids*. Annie yelled to Wallace Bentsen, “They will never believe what happened at *OXFORD!*!”

A look of dismay was noticed from Wallace when Joseph “*Squire*” Wilton gazed upon him.

Wallace asked Joseph, “*DID YOU?!?*” He inferred sexual relations.

Joseph “*Squire*” Wilton dropped his eyes in shame and shook his head vehemently “no.” What actually happened was that “Annie of Sussex,” right at the end of their journey, reached towards Joseph’s crotch and touched him gently and said that it was time to go back. Joseph did not register it as sexual activity. He thought about Holly Rydell at Berkeley. He thought about the liberals on the California coast. He thought about the nudists that Holly had told him about on campus. He thought to himself that it was sexual activity, but rather... the way *Britons* cued one another in such situations.

It was dark as Wallace Bentsen drove the two young *children* back to the Oxford area... *centrally located* in the mainland. Annie remained giddy, yet she was growing tired. Joseph “*Squire*” Wilton began to ask Wallace Bentsen questions as if he was a second-grader inquiring a teacher—a *substitute* teacher—who was new on the job... yet ready to explore mental boudaries. “Wallace!! I saw *dragons* in there, sir!!”

Wallace considered the thought then shook it off. He shrugged briskly, then replied to Joseph “*Squire*” Wilton, “It’s the *mushrooms*, sir!! I did not give you psychedelic mushrooms...”

Joseph interrupted him, “I would beg to *differ!!*”

Wallace continued, “They are more like a *placebo* what I gave you, sir!!” Annie of Sussex laughed. Wallace went on, “You went on a journey in there that was *mental!!* I’m sure you could see everything that young *Annie* had to say—the gnomes and the trolls... and everything that you wanted to *see!!* It’s no different than if I went to the *Wax Museum* in Hollywood as you told me about many days ago... and I could see the directors, even though they are not in *wax form!!* I could see them!! I am sure of that *sir*—YOUNG *SIR!!* If I went to Universal Studios, I could see the directors there, as well, but they are not there!! The blue screnes are there... but I could visualize the camera crews and everything else that your world is *part of!!* The dragons you saw, sir, are in your mind—you *have to know that!!*”

Joseph “*Squire*” Wilton took offense to Wallace’s attitude and even suspected that Wallace was coming on to young *Annie* because he was speaking like a college kid himself. He challenged Wallace, “I think you’re holding *back*, sir!! I think you *know* somethin’!! I think there’s a place here in *Britain* that I can see the *bones* of these people and *beings!!* What does it take for me to get to that *level*, sir?! I want clearance!! That’s a term we use in the United States... when we need to see somethin’ beyond...” Joseph “*Squire*” Wilton trailed off. Annie poked him in the side. The three of them sat comfortably across the front seat of the *1924 Roadster* and drove along.

Wallace, becoming mindful of the London nightlife and how it affected the Oxford campus, changed his tone and demeanor, “Joseph... We are full of centuries of *folklore*, here!! I *will* tell you, for the sake of publicity, what it is like to fight a dragon... because our better thesbeans do it on a regular basis... and our playwrights send you some of the stories which become motion pictures!! I will tell you everything you need to know!!”

Once again, Joseph “*Squire*” Wilton sensed that Wallace Bentsen was holding back. Annie of Sussex hugged Wallace Bentsen from the middle of the front carriage. She kissed him on the cheek, then

said, "I love you, *sir!!* Thank you for tellin' 'im everythin' 'e needs to know!!"

Joseph "Squire" Wilton detected slight sarcasm. "Listen, *lady!!*" Joseph "Squire" Wilton was mildly angry, then said, "I came more than three thousand miles across that ocean... and I'm not goin' to leave 'til I have *SOMETHIN'!!*"

Annie of Sussex, *oh-so-attractive*, unbuttoned her top to the point that Joseph "Squire" Wilton could almost see the tip of her right breast, and witness the flowery design of the brassiere underneath her blouse. He had to hide his emotions, and his train of thought was truly changed. They arrived to Oxford less than a half hour later and Annie got out and ran to the campus. Joseph "Squire" Wilton admired her.

* * *

"George Herbert Walker Bush was a *spy...* for the British government as far back as the *seventies!!*" Wallace Bentsen said to Joseph "Squire" Wilton as they cruised into the Labrador Sea. Davis Strait would be next between Greenland and Baffin Island. There were fourteen crew members aboard the vessel which employed the similar lapstrake construction as the Vikings had used.

"You're sayin' that because he was *Methodist* that he had a natural link to the Isles?!" Joseph admired the outside air. At a couple of degrees above freezing temperature, he was surprisingly comfortable.

"The Methodist *did* start as an English offshoot of a Protestant denomination, and..." Wallace Bentsen trailed off. "It's not *important* to know what your government was up to during Vietnam and Watergate!! They were planning to leave the country—a good deal of the guys in *charge* of things—if the government indeed *fell!!*"

"Well, Nixon resigned and all turned out *right!!*" Joseph waited for an affirmative. Instead, he got a cold rustle of wind through his hair.

"You don't understand that they lied to you from the very beginning!! It was always set *up* that way!!" Wallace Bentsen noticed that Joseph was becoming uncomfortable with the conversation and calmed his tone as he continued, "Henry Hudson set out to find the great Northwest Passage!! It was the early sixteen hundreds, and though things didn't work out with the Muscovy Company of England, he settled with the Dutch East India Company and continued!!"

"We're not goin' into the Hudson Bay 'cause there *was* no Northwest Passage, *right?!!*" Joseph mused and his eyes found themselves drawn to collecting dark gray clouds forming overhead.

"Well, he was *imprisoned* in England when he returned!! His crew had mutinied... *Listen!!* The passage is there and it has been there all along!! You Americans are always selective at what you want to see and believe!! Past the Davis Strait is the Baffin Bay... and south of Ellesmere Island is a channel that leads to Victoria Island!! The M'Clure Strait is not far off, then Beaufort Sea lies right below the area of permanent ice!! By the time you get to the Chukchi Sea, the Bering Strit is right below your *NOSE!!* The

Inuits have lived there for *centuries!*!”

“And you think the Inuits are really just far-off traveled Japanese sailors?! Why would it not be so obvious to someone who looks at a *map?!?*” Joseph looked at fish frying on a skillet and looked forward to having them in his tummy within minutes.

“I’m not going to go into the *lineages* of the people... because the Native Americans—the *Indians*—really did come from India, at a time, when the Bering Strait was closed... or so many anthropologists have *said!!* But the fact is that people don’t want to labor for *nothing!!* They don’t want to do it for a *tyrant!!* Henry Hudson, when he was released from prison in England... *took sail again* and was never seen!! I think he *found* the *PASSAGE!!*”

“I think it’s nonsense and speculation!!” Joseph went into the cabin to retrieve forks and knives. He thought about Holly Rydell, and he looked forward to a good meal.

* * *

Holly Rydell dropped out of Berkeley before finishing her masters program. She took to smoking marijuana, on occasion, and traveled much of the north part of California by hitching rides from town to town. She felt lost. She was in a daze half the time. She thought of Marcus Blacksmith at times... and she considered cleaning herself up enough to find Joseph “*Squire*” Wilton again. It had been a long time... and she *missed* him.

* * *

Insanity seemed to creep into Joseph “*Squire*” Wilton before Wallace’s fishing ship, *The Broadstroke*, reached Alaska. As they skirted the Arctic Circle, Joseph kept waiting for night to set in... but it only did for minutes on end... and the Sun danced wearily along the horizon. Fish came and went, and so did the stories. Wallace had said that the Serengeti National Park in Africa started his stint with trying to understand nature in a different way than he previously did, and it started when he was in his early twenties. He explained that wands and rods of magical England were real enough. There was usually a radioactive amulet of emerald or any number of other stones within a good make-up, and they changed things in towns gradually. A sage with a belt of these amulets would procure offspring of the most hideous kind. The stories were real of “twenty foot men” as well, but it had to keep in mind that the original measurement of a foot... was a literal *foot*. Villages of dwarves and midget-sized people measured people who were in reality only two and a half meters tall... and when the legends were passed down, it came to be that people were as tall as oak trees.

“But you said it was *possible* for a man to be as large as fifteen feet, at a time!!” Joseph called to

Wallace.

“Yes!! But I have to tell you that the missing link is impossible to *find*!! Archeologists dismiss any *BONES* as those of dinosaurs or elephants!! I don’t think they’re doing their jobs!! Bones are burnt... but you need to keep in mind that six-fingered people exist!! It’s a mishap!! It’s a fluke of the biological kind!! And if that someone happens to be the king who in turn creates a village of six-fingered people, there will be a new norm... *especially if the trait is a dominant one*!! So you have a fifteen foot high guy born to the lady of the man who holds the staff in the town... and the reality is that his *stones*—the very rocks brought from the caves of the dwarves and the other ‘*misfits*’—caused mutations that were *instant*!! Sometimes, he produced a three-armed man!! Sometimes, he produced a guy with no *eyes* under his forehead!! Sometimes, the freaks stood so tall... that they called them *monsters*!!”

“You said they fought in *armies*!!” Joseph exclaimed.

“Yes!! But it’s no different than *Frankenstein’s monster* who, ironically, made his way in the form of *fiction* to these very snow caps and polar glaciers!!” Wallace Bentsen started to feel nutty, just the same as Joseph, but he tried to make sense of it all. “The implications are that we have to watch what we see and be guarding of who we listen to!! There is an agenda in America to sell *products* to people!! Television programmers have a ‘lowest common denominator’ mentality and they will only pass off as reality what everyone will believe!! There are obscure programs like *Unsolved Mysteries* but most of them are not like that!! We could start a race of people, Joseph, and it would be no different than genetically manufacturing fruit to be tastier, or chickens to be more plump!! I am not saying we *should* do it, but if you know it has happened before with...”

Joseph cut in, “*Listen*!! It’s starting to sound like *Fourth Reich* stuff on some level, but...”

“You came to me ‘cause you had a strong *mind*!! And you said you wanted to know why *MARCUS BLACKSMITH* felt like he was being bred to take athletics to a stronger level!! I am telling you that, when we’re done with our trip, we are going to *SEE* if the YETI are out there!! Russia is now *G8*... and they have programs like our own!! We might not *see* the Yeti ourselves for the same reason that *our country* won’t allow NESSY to be seen... but we might get close enough to hear good *stories*!! And we might see pictures!!”

“The Yeti are in northern Russia around Siberia?!” Joseph “*Squire*” Wilton asked. He was starting to feel tired but dreaded a “day sleep” again.

“I am not sure... and the Japanese think they can lead us to real dragon monuments... and *elders* who could assure you of your mental yearnings!!” Wallace Bentsen watched Joseph start to nod off a bit.

“*I hope so*!!” Within fifteen seconds, Joseph was fast snoring under the northern sky.

* * *

Holly Rydell settle in Davis, California and started to work in a coffee house. She thought to give

tutoring lessons to kids at the local college but found it impossible to muster the will or focus to do so. She bunked with a lady who had seen her wander aimlessly around campus. She was elderly and wanted the company. Holly was lonely and running short of money. When the lady found out that Holly had attended Berkeley, all was fine and set for an indefinite stay.

* * *

Wallace Bentsen and Joseph “*Squire*” Wilton arrived on Iturup Island in the Okhotsk Sea on a Tuesday late in the afternoon. Joseph was happy to see a “regular sunset” after having traveled so far around the Arctic Circle for so long. There were a handful of islands northeast of Sapporo and southwest of Kamchatka that fell under the governance of the Union of Socialist Republics World War II. After Mikhail Gorbachev ceded power to Boris Yeltsin, these islands went into disputer regarding sovereignty. Iturup Island was one of them, but it held the traditions of centuries. Elders cared not about who Rand Atlas proclaimed to be in charge of their land. They did not take heed to the United Nations and the notion that power lasted forever. They held secrets. They held hope. They held magic in a lot of regards, or so Joseph “*Squire*” Wilton would believe.

“These *gremlins*...” Joseph said when he walked with a sage toward a Shinto sanctorum.

“*Do not* call them ‘gremlins’... Call them baby *dragons*!.” Yukio Morihiro said. He looked like a caricaturized kung fu master in the eyes of Joseph. His beard was white and dipped well into his chest. It pointed at the open V of his white robe with black trim. “These do not grow to be more than three feet tall—a *komodo* of Australia is much *larger*—but they can stand *UPRIGHT*... like the running frogs of the Amazon rainforest!.” He looked into the sky. “You Americans took over my land... and I stopped believing you *WOULD* trust dragons that dragons really exist!.” He looked into Joseph’s deep blue eyes and said, “You are so centered around television and computers, now!! I think you stopped believing in *ghosts*, too!.”

Joseph became somewhat offended. He was surprised that *anger* surfaced into his belly for a brief moment. He pushed it away. “These are nothing *special*!! When you take into account that the komodo is *large* an’ that frog o’ the Amazon *skips* across the water...”

The “gremlin” started to speak. Though it sounded like Japanese language, the “gremlin” even started to *sing* a beautiful song.

“This is like the *movies*!!! I can’t believe...” Joseph started to fume.

The sage was amazingly calm. “That is what I am *talking* about!! Steven Spielberg hears the REALITY of what we have here, and by the time it gets from a storyteller to the director to the general audience, you dismiss it as *farce*!.”

The “gremlin” continued to sing.

The sage continued, “But you see it before your *face*!.”

Joseph felt as though he saw a ghost. Flaps which had draped the bizaar reptiles neck flung out like wings. The creature did not become irate, but seemed to be agitated.

Joseph walked off toward where Wallace Bentsen was. He stood about thirty meters away—Joseph’s head became *clouded* with metric terminology as their voyage continued—and he was admiring flowers in a bed below.

Wallace said, “These *banzai* trees that’re nearby!! They shrunk *dragons*, don’t you understand!!”

Joseph didn’t want any more part of it. He ran to the sage to ask a final question. “Are our bones—the ones at *La Brea*... Are they dragons?!”

“*Yes sir!*” Yukio Morihiro was solemn as he turned away and headed toward the sanctuary.

Wallace Bentsen and Joseph “*Squire*” Wilton boarded their ship the following morning and headed toward Primorye in mainland Asia. While traveling, Wallace said to Joseph “*Squire*” Wilton near the ship’s bow, “We have a lot to get *through*, young chap!! You *will* have to use your head!! Chitin in ants enable them to carry large objects... and to fall great distances relative to their *size*!! The movies you grew up with are full of scientific misnomers!! If a ship takes off at *light speed*, all the crew is smashed to the backs of walls everywhere within!! If an ant grows to be many stories high, as has been *portrayed* in cinema... it will crumble under its own *weight*!! Even if the chitin was silicon-based instead of *carbon* rooted!!” Wallace looked far into the distance and admired the Moon near the horizon. “There is only one way a dragon could grow to be *MONTHRA’S* size and still fly!!”

“What is that?!” Joseph asked.

“*Magic!!* So you don’t have to worry about nuclear-powered monsters coming your *way*!! They only mutate to the boundaries of what science will allow!!”

“So the theory *goes*!!” Joseph “*Squire*” Wilton took off below the deck and into the hull to prepare himself a sandwich.

* * *

Holly Rydell worked in Davis and got used to the atmosphere. She investigated internet websites and found herself feeling more and more like a zombie as the days slipped into the distance. Joseph “*Squire*” Wilton faded from her regular recollections and she gave away everything that reminded her of Marcus Blacksmith. She looked for new companionship but found it difficult to be satisfied.

* * *

Wallace’s ship, *The Broadstroke*, reached the shore at Dukhovo early in the morning. The plan was the trek through the Sikhote-Alin’ mountain range. Wallace had many years attached to him, yet he

was stout enough for climbing. He believed that the best places to obtain folklore was upfront, personal... and in areas where government was feeble or nonsensical. The dispute between the USSR and China in the early seventies meant that no one in that area had a “program” to adhere to. There was no standard belief. There was no reason to keep loyalty to a flag or capitol. When survival was on the line, people did what they *needed* to do. Wallace knew that from growing up during the second World War.

“Before Vietnam, I used to travel to this area to make peace with the locals. India had already gained her independence, and Hong Kong would be gone in another generation due to treaty!! We had to make sure we had great ties with Asia to maintain good trading status!! GAT and the G8 have come our way—the *GAT* is a NATION, you know?!—and we really don’t know what to do in Britain any longer!! While in this region, I came to believe that *snowmen* exist!! I had seen tall characters... and I noticed that the *panda* is like a man evolved to be like a California bear!! You don’t have to believe me!! But I know the physics of it all!! I know a man *can* grow to be twelve feet high... if he *had* to!! Giraffes grow to be more than sixteen feet tall but they are quadrupeds and equipped to endure bouts of time away from the ground!! A man, however, would need to lean!! We *fall*!! We can’t be that tall and maintain a culture!! Horses are shot when they break legs!! A man *taller* than twelve feet could not stand the excruciating pain of broken bones!! They would become docile!!”

“Why haven’t men evolved to be this tall *everywhere*?!” Joseph “*Squire*” Wilton chewed on some of his mule’s hay as they rode along a trail.

“Listen, child!! I discussed this with you in *England*!! The longbow cut down *our* giants... and long before Roy Chapman Andrews was exploring ‘dinosaur bones’ in the Gobi Desert... and long before Genghis Kahn handed over his empire to four of his sons, the Chinese were cut down if they exceeded two meters!! That was the plan, and it was the precedent!! In turn, ‘the tallest of the tall’ took refuge in the hills but they couldn’t remain there for long—definitely not *forever*!! The American Museum of Natural History in *New York* holds many fossils from this region... but archeologists were not permitted into Mongolia from nineteen twenty-five until nineteen ninety!! You could only *SPECULATE* what was over here!! The US Army thought it would be quick and easy to catch Osama bin Laden in the hills Sulaimān Range but their mission became wrought with blunders!! If you cannot catch a man well over two meters requiring dialysis with satellites which take pictures like poloroid cameras, you *cannon* tell me that the *Yeti* are not *there*!!”

“Yeah!! But provin’ somethin’ *could* be true doesn’t make it true!!” Joseph “*Squire*” Wilton bit into an apple. The mule he rode traveled undaunted along the rode which curved with a twisting steep ravine.

“You are not understanding the science and *common sense* here!! The science is that we cannot prove the existence of black holes!! They were postulated by theory and they were searched for with powerful telescopes!! By definition, one cannot *see* a black hole!! What you look for is a PROPENSITY of stars to not be somewhere!!”

“And they have found this?!” Joseph tossed his apple core to the ground.

“Yes!! And the common sense part of the argument regarding the *mountain men*—the tall ones—relates to lawyers!! The United States has only five percent of the world’s population but seventy-five percent of it’s lawyers!! I’m surprised you don’t know this!?”

“Corroborating evidence!! I know what you’re sayin’!! I just don’t believe it!?” Joseph reached into his leather belt sack and pulled out a banana. His hunger pains were strong.

“Okay!! To convict someone of a crime, you need hard evidence and... *or* multiple eyewitnesses!! Orenthal James Simpson had no eyewitnesses testifying as onlookers or bystanders during the murders of Ron Goldman and Nicole Brown!! That meant that *hard evidence was crucial!*!” Wallace noticed that his left leg was starting to fall asleep. He shook it off and continued riding.

“But the lead detective lied on the stand *blatantly* regardin’ the ‘n-word’!! All of his testimony was supposed to be thrown out by *law*!! All the evidence!! One of my professors at UCLA said that it should have been an ‘open an’ shut’ case... but ‘*domestic tranquility*’ was taken into account ‘cause o’ the previous Rodney King verdict!?” Joseph “*Squire*” Wilton began to become tired. He thought to ask if they should set up camp but shook the idea off. “That was the *nineties!*!”

“Yes!! The nineties!?” Wallace proposed that camp be set up. When the livestock were disboarded, Wallace told Joseph soberly, “Where we are going, they do not *use* the Christian calendar!! They are in a time of their *own!*!”

“You mean the ‘*Gregorian*’ one!! You need to get your *facts* straight, ol’ man!?” Joseph felt delirious. He couldn’t believe he was finally talking down to the person whom became his mentor.

* * *

Holly Rydell continued to remain in Davis without knowing why. She felt as though all of her ideas were disjointed. Santa Barbara would creep into her mind on occasion but she would push the images out. She put a *Shrek* doll in the corner of her side of the apartment where she lived. She put a Chucky doll rubbing its nose into the Shrek doll’s face. She remembered that Joseph had told her that he had done that in his dorm room. It was to conquer myths, she recalled.

Holly wanted to conquer the myths of her life. It had been since she was seven or eight years old since she regularly attended church. She thought of the Christmas holidays she was part of, vaguely she remembered the doctrine of the “resurrection of the dead”... and when she felt *most* disjointed, she thought about Marcus Blacksmith coming back.

She slept at night and cried.

* * *

Wallace and Joseph settled in Utaza along the Marevka River. Joseph “*Squire*” Wilton was curious about an idea. It was the first time that he drank anything alcoholic with Wallace. “*Spontaneous combustion is accepted as medical fact by the scientific community!! If dragons could breath fire, how woul’ it be!?*”

Wallace Bentsen liked the idea of the conversation. He toasted Joseph. “Well!! You put butane in your hand... and you *light* it!! The flame is not ON YOUR *HAND*!! Cows have four stomachs and you have been blowing the midnight wind all *night*!! The methane is abundant, I should say!! A dragon, if he has special powers, woul’ be usin’ one o’ the stomachs for *THAT*!! For the gas!!”

Joseph toasted Wallace.

Wallace continued, “It would take a high-pressure system, much like the chambers o’ a motorized sports engine, an’ they coul’ breath *fifteen meters* into the air I am guessin’!”

“But the *spark*?!” Joseph wanted to know. He laughed. He had never laughed with Wallace before. His liquor was starting to hit the bottom of his belly. He could feel it.

“*Dry leaves*!! If you leave a compost pile alone long enough, it *WILL* ignite!!” Wallace became a *bit* serious and asked the host in their hut for another shots of whatever mystery drink they were swallowing.

“They stand up their like *giraffes*... but they belch onto *decrepit* fauna?! That doesn’t sound so romantic!!” Joseph thought about how Wallace was starting to take to an American sound.

“An’ there is always *magic*... keep in mind!!” Wallace pointed at Joseph as if he should have known. “There is also the possibilty that grittin’ their teeth... o’ *chewin’* rocks coul’ do it!!” Wallace started to feel nauseous but it passed.

“*Yeah*!! I’m startin’ to *LIKE* this place!!” Joseph yelled.

“*Hey*!!” a slew of people yelled. They were mostly from Wallace’s crew, but he could have sworn that the locals joined in with convincing Western sounds.

* * *

Holly Rydell lost all practical meaning in her life. It went through her head continually that nothing was *pragmatic* about the way things turned out or seemed to be heading. Finally, she abruptly decided to use her college degree to become a travel agent. She moved to San Francisco at around the same time that Joseph and Wallace’s expedition reached the border of China.

* * *

It had been weeks since Joseph and Wallace left the United Kingdom on a boat. They literally traveled by plane, car, and train as they made their way to Nepal. China didn't take a long time to digest, but it wasn't destined to be their final destination. Nepal held secrets that few people knew about. They neither sought the Panchen Lama nor the Dalai Lama. They wanted to find a man who was close enough to the Himalayas that he could tell them where *many* enormous mountain men could be found. Joseph "Squire" Wilton feared having to hike into Everest or K2... but he felt primed if that's what it took. They settled into Banepa off the Sun Kosi River. On their first night, they met a giant. He stood at roughly seven and a half feet tall—*APPROXIMATELY two and a half meters*, Wallace proclaimed—and he spoke a fair amount of broken English. Joseph "Squire" Wilton was surprised when he heard Wallace speak to the man in *Nepali* for a few minutes.

The air was tense at times. Joseph didn't know if they were going to be mugged or if they were going to be let in on magical secrets. After five minutes by his estimation— *he was reluctant to check his chrome pocket watch in fear that it would come across as offensive*—he cut in and asked, "I know it's sacred... and I know I'm a naïve American... but we came here to see *mammoth men*!! We believe the *Yeti* are in your hills... and your government hides them better than you hid the Dalai Lama from the *Chinese* so long ago!/"

The giant seemed shocked. He reminded Joseph of Andre the Giant from a *Rob Reiner* movie he had watched in his dorm long ago while still a freshman. He turned to Joseph and said, "The Dalai Lama did not *HIDE*!! We hid him from you... *AMERICANS*... because you hate everything that is *GOOD*!! The *Yeti* are in those hills!! I am a midget compared to them!! You are offensive..." The giant looked around the room. There were dancing women in the distance. "But I *like* you!/"

The giant lied to Wallace and Joseph. The giants were *not* in the hills of the Himalayas. As he heard, they were in the Uttar Pradesh valley toward the Ganges River in India. It took him three shots of imported *Southern Comfort* to let go of his beliefs. "You have to understand that what you are doing is worse than hunting a bear who is becoming extinct!/" Joseph didn't know if it was the whiskey that was hitting him or an illusion of his mind, but he believed that the giant was speaking better and better English with time. The giant continued, "I could take you into that area... *but it would be in vane*!! The 'real' giants are long *GONE*!! Or they are high in the Russian area of *TAYMYR*!! We have some guys that stand at a shade past eight feet tall... *but that is nothing special*!/" Joseph was feeling truly taken by the giants initial exchange of broken English. "The guys south of the Barents Sea... *THEY ARE NINE FEET TALL*... an' they have the hides as thick as *cows*!/"

Joseph turned to Wallace. "What are we doin' *here*?!/" he asked.

Wallace hesitated. He faced the giant, then said, "Show *him*!/" The giant waited for a moment. Wallace produced three gold coins from his trousers and put them on their wooden dinner table. "Show *him*!/"

The giant clapped toward the dancing ladies. They stopped what they were doing. The sitar

player ceased to play. The ladies left the room. Within seconds, a Nepali elder came into the room. Behind him were two assistants. The brought bones which spread across a red velvet cloth along a lengthy board. Joseph realized he was looking at a skeleton of a human, not quite complete, but extensive enough to not be mistaken as a fraud. The body must have been nine feet or more. The giant settled down on his back next to it on the floor to give perspective. It was surely more than nine feet in length. Joseph “Squire” Wilton wondered if he was looking at an imitation... or something constructed of caribou and elephant bones. He looked at the head and noticed that it resembled that of a large jackle—*oblong* in growth—but it was human!! It was indeed human because of the recessed jaw.

“How long ago did you find this?! Is this recent... *or...*?” Joseph “Squire” Wilton waited for an answer to his unfinished question.

“It is fifty years ago!! The British!! Your friend, *WALLACE Bentsen*!! He climbed Everest when he was a young soldier!! He did not reach the top—*no!*!—but he found artifacts that he did not return to his home country!!”

“*Shit!*!” Joseph said. He hadn’t cussed much since his graduation from UCLA.

“‘SHIT’ is *right!*!” Wallace said. “I can’t believe you kept these things all these *years!*!”

Wallace had phoned ahead and was told that he would meet a giant. He was told that they would hike to see the “real *YETP*”... but he was informed that the bones he had brought back from his hiking adventure had been given to royalty somewhere. He knew he would see something private. He knew it would be secretive... but he did not expect to see the results of all his work: The bones put together in a comprehensible form.

* * *

Holly Rydell was getting used to San Francisco. Though she made enough money to purchase a car, she opted for walking. The “City By The Bay” was known for it’s mass transit system and ranked well with New York and London. She prepared for a vacation of her own after sending so many people abroad as a travel agent. She missed Santa Barbara as a city, but she did not miss the people in particular. She found that Frisco has a *personality*. It was like meeting a person. She was glad she went there. She was glad she felt as if she was on her *way*.

* * *

Wallace and Joseph arrived in Cambridge, England six and a half months after they departed. They left *The Broadstroke* in Asia—Wallace had had a lot of money in life, and he left it as a gift with the first group of tour guides they were with—and it was a true “trip around the world”... except that *Squire*

kept longing to stay abroad. By the end of their journey, Wallace started calling Joseph by his nickname. Their monumental escapade did not lead them to *flying dragons*... nor did they find the *MINOTAUR*. They did not come across minuscule pixies... but Joseph's mind was somehow *changed*. He believed as *WALLACE* believed. He thought not only was it *possible* that dwarves existed in certain parts of the world, at a time... he thought it was *likely*. Contrarily, Wallace started to believe that the American system was a good one. He thought that Joseph had *sturdy* knowledge—just not significant for English adventures on his *own*. When the duo arrived home, they found Annie of Sussex with Holly Rydell. She tracked Joseph's footsteps, came across Annie on the internet after hard searches, then decided to give Britain a try. They roomed for nearly a couple of months before startling Joseph and Wallace with the surprise. In spite of grandé fatigue, the four of them went to a pub not far from King's College Chapel to unwind and reacquaint themselves with anything and everything going on.

"I know why they keep *SECRETS!*!" Joseph "*Squire*" Wilton said to Holly. He kissed her healthily on the cheek. It was wet.

"Why do they keep secrets, *SQUIRE?!*!" Holly poured lager onto her white blouse from a silver stein and admired Annie of Sussex having a great time with Wallace Bentsen across the room at the dart board. "*WHY?!*" She poured the rest of the beer onto her head and yelled for another round.

"I *LIE* NOW!! I made love to a nine-foot high lady in a twistin' maze in *Greece*... an' it was the best *SEX* I have ever had!!!"

Holly splashed whatever suds were left at the bottom of her stein onto Joseph's face. "I am *PREGNANT!!* Remember that?! I was lyin'!! I was tryin' to get you to come back to *CALI!*!"

"You're a *whore!*!" Joseph said. He was having a good time. He loved Holly, but he knew something changed. In seriousness, he asked, "Was that guy *good* to you?! The one from Berkeley!?"

"He was abusive and in the *CIA!!* He looked like a hippie... but wasn't peaceful at *ALL!*!"

Joseph kissed her on the lips after leaning over the table. He was glad to see her again.

Wallace approached the Santa Barbara natives after being shooed by Annie of Sussex. She wanted him to extend gratitude for their patience and willingness to try to understand peculiar ideas. "You are welcome to sleep at *my* house, Joseph—you and your *bride-to-be*, I presume she is—or you can stay with *Annie!!* Either way, I am glad to be *HOME!*!"

Wallace partied like a twenty-one year old that night. Joseph had sexual relations with Holly for the first time ever when they returned to Annie's and slept on her couch. Annie did not mind that they became romantic. She had liked *Squire* before he left, but he was not the same person upon return. He was jubilant. He was forward-thinking... with *confidence*. She had a nursing quality about her that he no longer needed. She missed the times they had around the mineshafts... but she looked forward to better things.

Holly and Joseph were falling in love. Wallace Bentsen was winded from the worldwide trip. Annie of Sussex visited students she had known from Oxford and developed plans for a retrace of Vasco de Gama's travel to India. Annie was asked one time why it was that she didn't go to college in Cambridge. She said that it was dating a brother. Holly laughed. She observed the plans to get to Madagascar—it was *only partially the way to Calicut from around Africa*—and she thought it indeed would help with closure of the memory of her departed companion, *Marcus Blacksmith*. Some of his family had come from Lesotho, a landlocked country within South Africa, yet that had been generations prior. Holly fell in love with Joseph and was surprised. It was like Annie said—*falling in love with a brother*.

Wallace retired to a more easy-going occupation of sorting books in a library. He told that kids that if they *needed* him, to give a call and he would “fly over like *SUPERMAN*”... then Joseph let Wallace know that he was more of an Incredible Hulk kind of guy. They had laughs. They had drinks. They set off without much worry. There was always tension from moment to moment. It started when Holly would think about Marcus but refuse to talk about what was on her mind. Aside from those apprehensive thoughts, she was open about all other topics. She spoke of San Francisco kindly, and she said that Davis was worth the vacation. Annie jibed that it must have been a nice *extended* vacation if she let her childhood boyfriend travel around the world without her. She told Annie that it had never been like that—they were always *platonic*.

The first stop of the reenactment was in the Azore Islands. On the way there, Annie explained how she had lived in Sussex, Cambridge, and Oxford... but she was somehow afraid to stay in London. She wanted to move to the United States before her life was over, and she would settle near the Great Lakes if all went as hoped. She referred to the Atlantic as “*THE POND*”... but feigned to reinsert that the USA was still “*THE COLONIES*” in traditional Europe. Holly was fond of Joseph and admired his tenacity as he traveled around the world. She thought of him as a nerd in high school even though he was involved in athletics. She confessed that she always wanted an older man to sweep her off her feet but was glad that Joseph was around because he shared her history in similar ways.

By the time the group reached Cape Verde Island by a merchant ship west of the African continent, Holly began to sleep in the same cabin as Joseph. Before that time, she made company with Annie... making sure that the hospitality lasted from a host whom was more welcoming than hoped. Within a week's time from their departure from England, they were on their way to South Africa. When they arrived in Durban, they were surprised to see a fifteen-foot-high statue of Marcus Blacksmith. His grandparents had grown up two hundred miles west of the town and they paid tribute to a Heisman Trophy winner fallen before his time. Legends circulated that Marcus' girlfriend was coming in... and the children seemed shocked when Holly arrived with Joseph. They cheered them. In a surrealistic moment, a poor villager male of possibly five years of age showed the incoming group pictures from a laptop computer which featured Marcus posed with Holly and Joseph in high school photos taken in Santa Barbara. Holly laughed.

The next stop was to be Madagascar. Holly felt great about things by then. Joseph was shaken by the idea of severe wildlife. Annie wanted to be back in England. She was growing jealous of Joseph together with the girl she bunked with for a couple of months.

* * *

Jake Wilton spent a lot of time at the beach. He surfed. He thought he was neglecting his wife. He wasn't. She gardened at home. She thought about Joseph on occasion, but she thought it was the natural thing that he should leave home and never come back except for holidays. She believed that if Marcus lived, it would have been different. They would have been around the house more often, and Jake would not be gone to the coast so much. She forgave her husband.

Jake believed that he needed to know his son as a man before passing away. His body felt solid and he believed he no less than another thirty years left on the planet. Nonetheless, he knew things could slip into oblivion. He had always been the paternal figure when Joseph was around. He wanted to a friend, or at least something close to it.

Mister Jake Wilton lost track of Joseph after he left Kansas. When he was young, it was the same way. His father, Caleb, wanted his son to be strong so he had him enlist in the army and earn his way through college through an ROTC program. It made Jake dependable socially, but it did not allow him to be flexible in regards to certain community outlooks. He was apprehensive of Marcus Blacksmith as one of Joseph's regular associates, but he knew that he lived through equal times in the military after desegregation became the practiced guideline. Jake wanted to know how his son thought as an *adult*. He never allowed expressive behavior when "the kids" came home to Santa Barbara for the holidays. He wanted to take risks that he hadn't done before.

Jake enrolled in a sculpting class. He remembered that Rikki Styles, one of Joseph's buddies from UCLA, was fond of mythological explorations of sorts. He wanted to carve bears that were large—*he had seen this at a place not far from the fisherman's warf in Monterey while on vacation, once*—and he wanted to be able to scult into marble if possible.

Joseph "*Squire*" Wilton was on his way to Madagascar when Jake enrolled in a "multiple arts" class. It encompassed sculting, painting, and general training in other areas. It was to last a season. Jake planned to see his son within a year.

* * *

Annie, Holly, and Joseph arrived in Toleara, Madagascar late one night which was particularly hot and humid. Holly had told Annie that things were always platonic between her and Joseph way back when

they were in England. She confessed that it had gotten “hot and heavy” at a time... and she apologized for the slant in portraying their history with one another. Annie of Sussex had liked Joseph “Squire” Wilton, she knew it... and she thought it would be best to give a tame account of who they had been.

The land of this particular island east of the southern portion of Africa was rich with species diversity. Holly became comfortable enough with Annie that she started to tell her about secrets she had gone through while at the University of Santa Barbara... and while at Berkeley... but she found that none of it mattered—the history did not *matter*. She believed for the first time in her life that her *future* is where the promise was. Joseph was mixed when asked his opinion on the subject. He said they should be *equal*—the past and the present—and that’s how to balance oneself physically and spiritually. Annie said that the future always mattered to her more than anything else. Britain had been in bloody wars... and the only hope for psychological progress was in devising plans which would benefit all of humanity. It was partly a farce, and partly something she had remembered saying in class during a speech... but it *sufficed*.

The talk of possibility was not necessary when the group began a safari. The animals were so bizarre that Joseph no longer needed to contemplate evolutionary prospects regarding natural selection or anything else he had been trained to observe while in a UCLA biology lab. Joseph thought that “they could be out there”—the legends which founded the writings of Herbert George Wells, Edgar Rice Burroughs, or Jules Verne. He remembered *The Land That Time Forgot*... and he thought that it was probably a precursor to modern exploration of Madagascar for ecological research. He remembered *The Island Of Doctor Moreau* and he thought that he could be part of an experience like the characters of that narrative if he wasn’t careful. He thought about *20,000 Leagues Under The Sea* while they were still traveling on the ship... but he thought that the *Swiss Family Robinson* was better to consider while on land. He felt like a moron for the first time in a long time. When he was around Wallace skirting through Asia, he had no nervousness about asking questions... and there was no fear of owing to an incorrect hypothesis throughout the time. However, there was *great* trepidation around Holly. She was beautiful. She was from his past. She saw him when he was still watching *He-Man* on TV. He did not know how far to go without losing her. Gaining new knowledge was *not* as important as losing Holly as a friend... and now as a *lover*.

The group made their way through tropical forests. They had great times... and none of them contracted malaria. That seemed to be their greatest *collective* dread aside from being eaten by a lion. It was Annie that informed Holly that lions were “kings of the jungle” in name only—they were actually partial to the African savanna. She had watched it on a BBC documentary one time.

* * *

Rikki Styles joined Jake Wilton in what was supposed to be a search for his son. There was no paranoia in it. Jake believed the best years of his life could be slipping away. He left his wife with Rikki to go to Kansas to ask around. Jake was weary of the internet and he believed it could lead him onto a “wild

goose chase” if he trusted it too much. Rikki was surprised that Joseph’s mother didn’t raise a fit about letting her husband go with a young lady. She had computer skills which could spin Jake’s head but she agreed that “foot travel” was the best way to start a search. She noted to Jake that Homeland Security presented red flags when sudden decisions were made to scout for potentially lost people. Rikki had money to spend... and she had warm memories of Joseph enough to merit application of it. Her life had been great—*she became the curator of a few museums in the Los Angeles area*—and she was looking for something new and invigorating.

Jake believed he was contracting testicular cancer and that’s why he was confident that a younger traveling mate would not become a problem. He wanted to keep his belief from his wife until he was finished looking for *Squire*. He planned to have a full exam and he was going to deal with it when it came. He packed his bags, gave his wife a loving kiss and hug before he left, then felt a *rage* inside. He felt betrayed by his son. He thought Joseph should have been writing to him. He thought he should have been getting post cards every now and then. He thought his son was a jerk... or he was *maimed* or *dead*. None of the ideas were appealing to him. He shook them, then joined Rikki at LAX for a flight.

It took a week and half before Rikki and Jake realized that Joseph traveled to England to possibly live. Campus security at the University of Kansas detected Jake’s confused bewilderment and referred him to social groups whom might have answers. One of them was the fraternity he was rejected by. Another one dealt with dispensing hard-to-get books that their library did not carry. Finally, a tavern hosted locals to drunken nights and fine lunches. Joseph and Rikki received their information there.

The two flew to New York then London. Three days later, they met with Wallace Bentsen for pastries and coffee.

“Are you in the *FBI*, sir?!” Wallace asked Jake.

Mister Wilton looked at his croissant and thought to order another coffee before going into conversation. He had been waiting with Rikki for fifteen minutes at the deli before Mister Bentsen arrived. Jake said, “It’s the *mustache*... an’ the glasses, huh?!”

Rikki smirked. She sat at a table behind them. The place was small and all the outside tables had only two chairs situated under each black iron umbrella. Rikki thought it was a *great* place for couples from the nearby college to come.

“I *know* your son... *WELL!*!” Wallace produced two photos. One was taken in England and featured Annie of Sussex at the very deli where they presently talked and ate. The other was taken not long before they departed Nepal for Europe. Joseph appeared ragged and tired. Wallace added, “Your son is a *fine* archeologist... and the colleges here—*there are two I’m speaking of*—are considering him for a doctorates program!?”

Jake Wilton sighed. “So he’s not in *trouble!*!”

Wallace retorted, “Quite the contrary!! He is respected for his work and he has *fine* theories about Greece regarding to early Mesopotamia!?” He felt offended by Jake... but it was not his *words*—it was the

way he carried himself. He inserted, “We could have you cleaned up and in one of our theatre lines if you are privy to acting and *dance!*!”

Rikki smiled, but her back was turned to the conversing guys.

Jake said, “My son went to *UCLA*... This lady is the one who one his heart at a time!!”

Wallace Bentsen had tried to quiet Jake while he spoke. He wanted to inform Jake that Joseph had already fallen in love with an English native... then took off with an exgirlfriend of his. When Rikki turned around, he decided not to say anything.

Rikki said, “You are the reason I’m *here*, sir!! I have beliefs that you are holding a sprite hostage in one of your dungeons!!” She smiled because she knew she successfully pulled off a joke.

Wallace grinned. “I have *many* dungeons, *mi-lady*, and when the princes don’t behave, we put them *in* there!!”

Rikki yelled to Jake, “See!! This is what I’m talkin’ ‘bout!! We just joked with each other... now someone’s goin’ to tattle about it on *internet!!* They are not goin’ to detect the sarcasm, an’ they are not goin’ to detect the *humor!*!”

“Fair enough!!” Jake said. “I apologize to your *whole generation!!* I was pushed out o’ *CHAT ROOMS* ‘cause o’ stuff like this!! People sayin’ that they have my *DAUGHTER*... an’ I don’t *have* a daughter!! Drunken kids jus’ makin’ jokes to the ‘ol’ man’!!”

“You’re right!!” Rikki said. She turned to Wallace, gave him a kiss on the cheek, then ran down the street. She was anxious to get to the college and talk online about the things she was going through. Before she was three stores away from them she yelled without turning around to Jake, “Go home *without* me!! I love this place!!”

“That was odd!!” Jake said. He wiped his brow, shook his head then said, “We have our travel package paid for!! I wonder if she’s goin’ to use it!!”

Wallace nodded slightly. “*She* knows where to go!!”

Not five minutes later, Jake was given information about where he believed he could find his son if he *needed* to. He was told that he went to Africa... but only if it was an emergency, he could contact Scotland Yard. Even then, it had to be dire.

Jake Wilton decided to fly to South Africa. He did not plan to look for his son. He wanted to vacation. He had been with his wife for many years... and he was *faithful*. He wanted to get away and understand a *fraction* of what he thought his son was going through.

* * *

Rikki managed to stay away from Jake Wilton long enough to know that he boarded a flight. Finding friends on the Oxford campus was not difficult. She got to the computers, screamed, “We have them under *control!*!”... then proceeded to explain that she believed America was a farce.

Andrew Galsworthy was near her with gay lads. The fag boys looked to Rikki in unison. They wore fine black suits, red ties, and dress shorts which could've been stolen as knickers from an Angus Young closet. "America is a farce, it always *has* been a farce, and we have never deviated from that *STANCE!*!"

"*Of course, sir!*" one of his buddies chortled.

"They control us from Washington but I write to Sacramento but never get a response!! Most of us can't *SEE* our congressmen!! I know now that you have a spell over our *AGENTS!* That man was supposed to give us information... but he wasn't supposed to make Joseph's dad look like a *CHILD!*!"

"Slow down, ma'am!" Andrew said. He introduced himself and some of his mates. "We do not want to harm you... but you have been deluded by years of *trauma!* America could not come here and *LIVE!* I know you have a different trek, otherwise you would not be wild in the eyes!! Your pupils are *HUGE!*!"

"*I know!*" Rikki managed to get away. She walked around the campus briskly for an hour and a half. She was surprised that no security arrived to check for identification. By nightfall, she sought Wallace Bentsen.

Wallace greeted Rikki and allowed her to stay in his humble cobblestone home. "We *know* that you can tell who you are!! We know you can see past the propaganda of your history books!! We know you can meet strangers in the middle of the forest without caring or knowing who they are!"

Rikki hesitated. "I never liked my home!! I grew up in a track house!! Everything looks the same!! That is not *FREEDOM!* That is not what I was raised to believe I would be part of!"

"So you expressed your freedom by running away from Squire's father!" Wallace poured hot tea for Rikki.

"That's the only thing I could do!! I know that once or twice in your lifetime, you have to make a run for it!! You have to know in your heart that you have everything that is promised!! You have to know that it is not constructed artificially!! This is *REAL!*" Rikki looked around. Three Candles flickered from the wall held by an elegant silver receptacle. A kerosene lamp sat on a coarse faded red tablecloth from table where they sat. A few paintings on the wall were oil-based and Rikki guessed that Wallace had painted them himself. They reflected medieval motifs of knights and dragons deuling one another.

"*Medieval Times* in Buena Park was not *good* enough?! Joseph—*Squire*—said that it was one of your favorite places!" Wallace felt disgraced that he did not love his own home as much as the stranger he took in.

"*WALLACE!* These are real things... and this is not a *MUSEUM!*"

"You are starting to insult me, young lady!" Wallace drank from his tea.

"*I know!*" Without asking, Rikki ventured to the bathroom. A tub without a shower sat rested above rusted pipes. She returned. "I can stay here for two weeks without complaint!! Will you have me?!"

“*Very WELL!!*”

* * *

Annie of Sussex refused to leave when their jungle spree was over. They were to return along the same route that they came by merchant boat... but she decided to buy an airline ticket to travel to the Congo. Holly and Joseph were in love throughout the trip—*it was romantic in feel*—but as they prepared to board ship again, they started to wander differently in mentality. Joseph wanted to go back to Britain... and maybe enroll in one of the colleges. Holly wanted to go back to the United States. Joseph chatted fondly of Kansas. She suggested they could move there to own a farm.

Annie of Sussex spoke German, French, and some Spanish... *besides* her native tongue. She gave orders to the captain of the seafaring vessel to not bother Joseph and Holly too much—*they were in love*. The captain could see for himself. He was conversational in English but not fluent. His primary lingo transpired in French. He left the couple alone and wished Annie the best.

Annie was on an airplane, the following day. Holly and Joseph felt like honeymooners as they headed around Port Elizabeth in Africa’s southern tip. Joseph started to feel that they were supposed to make the “full journey”—they were supposed to make it all the way to India. Holly believed it was the best vacation she had gone on during her life.

As the love birds reached Praia in the Cape Verde Islands, they started to feel that choices had to be made. They had to decide whether or not they would remain together upon porting in Brighton. They had until the Azores to make their decision, but Joseph was starting to feel that they would not part at all. They would not be *lovers*, but if they could agree to scrap the Oxford *and* Kansas idea, they could travel to what had been Asia Minor again. He could show her all the things he had seen.

Holly did not want to decide a final fate until they were settled in Britain. She would give it a few days after unwinding. Joseph started to feel like a high school kid again. He felt like he had no control over her. While in Madagascar, he felt like she owed him the world.

* * *

Holly and Joseph arrived in England, stayed at an Inn in Chichester for two days... *then Joseph managed to get a hold of Lu Hsun Pak from California*. Rikki knew when they were coming in. While in the Azores, Joseph “*Squire*” Wilton called California looking for graduated Bruins. Holly and Joseph had talked about marriage but that was shaken when they learned that Rikki Styles came with Jake Wilton to find out about any news going on. One thing led to another, and Rikki found herself conversing with the Santa Barbara couple about a conversation with Annie of Sussex. Andrew Galsworthy investigated with

his chums and came to find out that Annie believed there was a museum exhibit in Burundi near Lake Tanganyika in Africa's central region.

Joseph Wilton, Holly Rydell, Louis Pak, Rikki Styles, Andrew Galsworth, Annie of Sussex, and Jaylin Blacksmith found themselves together in a tribal hut within a full week. They were in the town of Karunda and getting used to a temperate climate. A museum was walking distance away. It had a steep roof of straw, bamboo, acacia and palm weaves and weave and twines.

"Bujumbura's Living Museum and the National Museum are in Gitega," Annie of Sussex said to Jaylin Blacksmith. "What we will be seeing are 'throwaways' that they will not display!! The place is rich with hippopotamuses, lemurs, and leopards!! There is an *artist* 'ere—he is *native*—that has constructed a piece or two that I *know* will satisfy Joseph... *over there!*" Joseph turned around and waved when he heard his name. He was out toward the lake admiring the partridges, geese, and ducks near the lake. "He has put together a *centaur*—mix of a man and a horse of course, *by legend*—and your cousin, *Marcus*... used to wonder and marvel at all that was possible!!"

"This is *closure!*" Jaylin said to Annie.

"My name is Annie *Smith*, by the way!!" Annie blushed. "I did not tell Joseph my 'real' name when I first met him because 'e was *arrogant!*!! He looked down on anything that wasn't *him!*!"

"My family are blacksmiths!! I know it!! We are a clan!! I used to work with you!! My ancestors and yours!!" Jaylin chewed on straw.

Annie blushed.

Rikki approached them. "Joseph thinks it's a *farce!*!! He has not *seen* the thing yet... and he thinks it's a farce!!"

Joseph remained with the birds at the water.

Annie said, "I did not come here to *prove* that centaurs exist!! I came here to show imagination!! You treat these people like they're *stupid!*!! You make fun of their customs!! You make fun of their *myths!*!" Two elephants were in viewing distance, but Annie did not reference them. "You have *DUMBO* in Disneyland... but you pretend that you're the only ones that can distinguish reality from fantasy!!"

Joseph finally made his way to the group. Andrew was laying on the tall grass beneath them... but he said nothing at all. Joseph stated, "I *know!*!! I know!! I finally get it!! And the *CYCLOPS* that he constructed was of antelope, boar, and rhinoceros bones!!"

"There are not too many rhinos in this particular area... *but...*" Annie start to say.

"Okay!! I'll go to that museum and see what *I* am!! A bumblin' fool who'll take in everything archeologists bring *our* way... but ignore the nature in front of me *now!*!" Holly put her hand on Joseph's shoulder to calm him down but he flinched away a bit.

"You *WILL* be surprised!!" Annie said. She walked away.

* * *

Jake Wilton got home to Santa Barbara and settled into his relationship with his wife, Nicki. Something had felt incomplete. They had dinner at the *Rainforest Cafe* after trying to understand what was going on. Jake informed Nicki that Rikki Styles was good to travel with... *except that she was too much of a child*. He told his wife that he wished they didn't have obligations regarding bills and house upkeep. She said that it was okay. While he was gone, she partook in an encounter at the local hair salon and had her hair cut to her shoulders. Jake said he thought it looked pretty good. They talked, rummaged around Southern California, then caught a minor league baseball game in Cucamonga after deciding not to travel all the way up to Big Bear.

* * *

"I have some *shit* to tell ya', man!/" Jaylin said to Joseph as they made their way to the museum hut. "I know some *things* about why Marcus died... and I know what's goin' to happen to Mike Vick!/"

"Go on!/" Joseph said. They stopped outside of the entrance while everyone else made their ways in.

"I have done a lot of drugs in the park before—*my cousin probably told you about that!*—and I know how to make people scared!! When the drug lord comes to the pond at MacArthur, you have to make *room!* You say, '*The cops are coming*'... but casually!! The drug lord is a cop of sorts, you see... so you're not lying and you say it in *conscious!* The man that comes to buy marijuana when the cops aren't around—the *dealers*—you call them 'customers'!! It's easy!! And the ladies come!! Oh, the *ladies* come!! They are wearin' blue suits an' they have badges... but everyone knows what we mean when we *say* it!! An' the women at the lake!? They are 'ducks'!! So everything's turned around'!/"

"You have a point about *Marcus?*/" Joseph asked. He was anxious to get inside to see the constructed cyclops, centaur, and griffin.

"*Yes!* I know it was suicide!/" He watched a tear form in Joseph's eye. "There is a pressure system from Africa!! They call you 'sellouts' if you play the game o' football!! They curse you if you bring no money back to the *HOMELAND!* There is hardly a middle ground left, anymore, and Marcus could not escape his *fame!* Now that we have internet, we *know* where he's at!! There is no duckin' into bars!! Now that we have cell phones, we can tell people towns away where he is goin'!/"

"Your point about *VICK?*/" Joseph asked.

"Mike was smarter... an' he made it through the system *sooner!* It's like a portal gettin' ready to close... an' you barely made it out yourself 'cause you're not as famous as *Marcus!* Mike paid people, but things somehow went *wrong!*/"

"You think 'e was set up!! The NSA somehow sent spies to mess with 'is mind!! They called

football ‘dogfighting’... an’ they called Africa ‘prison’... an’ that somehow, he coul’ get back to his *motherland* if he participated in contrived events?!” Joseph looked at Jaylin coldly. “I don’t buy it!! Something’s *amiss*!!”

“You don’t have to be *sarcastic*... but it’s a matter o’ time before ‘e’s let off on a technocality!! That’s the way the ‘super gurus work’!! You will *bet* he is here in a matter o’ years instead o’ dodgin’ large men on football fields listenin’ to the howl o’ creatures in the stands hopin’ he’d break ‘is leg ‘cause ‘e doesn’t play for their city’s team!!”

“You are far off!!” Joseph stated. Instant coolness swept him. “I think like you!! I shouldn’t be mad!!”

Jaylin patted Joseph on the shoulder. “Let’s go in!!” They went

* * *

By coincidence, by intuition, or by subtle pyschic phenomenon... Nicki found herself in a museum in Redlands, California on the day after she had dinner with her husband at the *Rainforest Cafe*. It featured natural history. Her son was looking for the bones of ogres, goblins and gnomes far away—*she knew that deep inside*—and she wanted to remember him in good ways. There was a girl that was rude to her during a Thanksgiving break from school many years back—*she remembered that much*—and maybe that’s why Joseph never called home any longer ... or *wrote*, for that matter. Marcus Blacksmith was a sore subject to talk about with Jake since his return from his search for his son. The young man—*Joseph’s friend*—could be the reason he was trying to forget his home. It was possible that because she still called him “*Squire*” and he didn’t want to be treated as a child any longer.

The ideas went through Nicki’s head and she beat herself up over it.

Jake and Nicki took to the road. Nicki put classical music on the CD player and forgot about her son for a while... until the couple stopped at Baker’s in Beaumont, California for a bite to eat before heading out to the Colorado River for a pleasant extended break. While there, a colossus kid stood behind her and her husband in line. It sent chills down her spine and gave her the willies. She watched *Access Hollywood* on occasion. *Tony Barretto* was reported to be a bodyguard of Britney Spears, disenchanted and squeeling that he felt mistreated. Jake Wilton even recognized the character... but wasn’t sure that it could be the same television figure. The girl near the gargantuan was petite but donned a *huge* ass. She smiled at Jake and brushed her straight hair through with fingers. Nicki Wilton did something out of character for who she usually was. She reached into her purse, pulled out a disposable camera, took a snapshot of the stranger... then yelled to the patrons around, “TONY BARRETTO!! We have Britney Spears’ *BODYGUARD*!! TONY BARRETTO!!!! People!! TONY BARRETTO!!”

Jake took his wife by the hand. “We will eat somewhere *else*!!” He led her to the door then to their awaiting car.

Once on the road, Nicki said to Jake, “You have to take that in *faith*, sometimes!! You have to *know* that you have seen a TV personality... an’ you have to take your literal *shots*!!”

“Nonsense, ma’am!!” Jake said. He sped along the highway.

* * *

“The griffin of Hellenistic legends are described to have the body of a lion and everything else of an eagle... *with the exception of a tail which is like a serpent*!!” Joseph mused at the ten assemblies of bones. He was truly taken.

“The early Greeks did not have the language you have, *Joseph*!! They had to describe what they saw on their adventures through words that locals would understand around Athens and Sparta!!”

“Call me ‘*Squire*’ when you become comfortable enough with me,” Joseph said to Jaylin.

“Marcus called me that most the time when we were away from school... and at the *beach*!!”

Jaylin took offense. “I am not *Marcus*!! I loved my cousin!! I am not him!!”

“Hey *Squire*!! Check this one out!!” Holly yelled to him.

Jaylin felt embarrassed and remained with the griffin while Joseph headed toward the enormous humanoid.

Holly said, “I think the bones are *probably* of a rhinoceros!! And the head probably comes from a dead *gorilla*!! But it LOOKS real!!”

The bones were held up with wire. Beams of eucalyptus trees crossed over a quadrant matted with thick, musty carpet. It was professional in look. It was aboriginal in mood.

“Rikki told me that Annie let her know that uranium is one of this country’s available minerals!! I think there was something to what Wallace Bentsen was saying!! He said that scribes of olde had orbs and septres which were radioactive in nature!! Of course, they had no way of knowing that their emeralds had plutonium with them... but it didn’t matter to the mutated offspring of anything around!! I think these could have been real... if humans did not mow them down with guns and violence!!” Joseph admired the work. He did not look to Holly while he spoke. “There is also bastnasite, petroleum, and nickel in this region as well!! Even gold, Joseph!!”

“You are *not* for miners’ rights, are you?!” Holly scolded him. “You said in high school that you would not wear *gold* because of the damage done by cyanide extraction!!” She poked him in the midsection.

“I *told* you that I thought the cyanide could wind up on my skin!! I was naïve ‘bout the way things worked!! It became a habit after that to wear *silver*!!” Joseph laughed. He knew what Holly was going to say. He patted her on the lower back.

“So you are not lookin’ for *warewolves* now?!” Holly laughed. She knew she walked into a verbal trap.

“No!!” Joseph submitted strongly.

The couple stayed with one another as they scanned the authenticity of the humeruses, mandibles, fibulas, sacrums, and femurs. The others roamed seemingly in random patterns. There were wires which kept people from intruding onto the mats below the displays. Joseph felt too much like he was in La Brea. He pinched Holly on the back when he decided to leave after fifteen minutes.

* * *

Nicki and Jake Wilton were less than a half hour from the Colorado River along the Ten Freeway when Nicki pondered what was going on. “Joseph said during Thansgiving—*the one that Rikki Styles came to*—that there was a kid in Rialto who worked at a Sunshine gas station... and his boss let him wear a *blue wig!* One of those joke ones that look like an *AFRO!*”

“It was San Bernardino where the kid worked, his eyebrows were *painted* blue... and he got fired for showing up with a joke *hat* that was turquoise!!” Jake became distracted by a billboard sign advertising Laughlin’s nightlife.

“You’re missin’ the *point!* Joseph—*when he was still writing to us*—sent a picture that his roommate *Lu Hsun Pak* had drawn!! It featured Joseph as a knight in shiny armor... and he was ready to pierce a humongous *troll!* The troll was three times the size of little Joe... an’ it had a large blue *head!* I think it was symbolic of that *crazy ass* with that fluffed-out blue wig... or *hat*... or whatever!!”

“*Yeah!*” Jake changed the conversation. “I think we ought to get to the Grand Canyon before we die!!”

Nicki grabbed her husband’s leg. She felt good about life. She added, “I *think* Joe might be married by now!!” She hadn’t referred to her son as “Joe” too much since before he entered kindergarten.

* * *

“I can tell you how we can *lie* about what we just saw!!” Lu Hsun Pak exclaimed. The rest of the group was filing out of the museum together. “I can *draw* what was in there... and I can give texture to the bones in other illustrations... but this museum—*this very museum*—is hidden from the internet somehow!! I will draw Minute Bol next to one of the statues!! He is a tall man!! He gave to Nigeria!!”

“Those weren’t *statues*, Lou!!” Joseph said to his friend from UCLA. He was glad to have him around.

“You don’t understand what a visual artist *goes* through!! They are statues!! They have meat!! They have character!!” Lou Pak swatted flies at his face.

“I see!!” Joseph sighed. Holly joined him from behind. She put her arms around his waist. He

never felt better.

“Your parents are in a *prison*!!” Lu Hsun said. “They don’t realize they’re captives!!”

“You don’t need to say a thing!!” Joseph said.

“They *are* prisons!! I know it now!!” Jaylin contributed. “It took decades to formulate, but they have no *freedom* in that area at this point!!” A stern look grew onto his face. Consternation subsided in favor of bewilderment. Joseph punched Jaylin lightly in the arm.

“Your country was formed by refugees from Britain; Europe, in general; and Russia going across the *Berring Strait*!! Our guys are over there making sure you don’t massacre the *Indians* like what used to happen in the *past*!!” Louis Pak declared.

“*Native Americans*, you mean?!” Holly asked.

“*No*!! This is exactly what I’m talkin’ ‘bout!! Indians from *India* came across that thing—that great land *divide*—and you ignore it!! The Native Americans were the *saber-toothed tigers*... and the mastodons!! The very fact that you *feel* you have to call Indians in America by contemporary lingo is indicative of the fact that you are in a prison *mentally*!! The eagles!! The bears!! They are native moreso that any human on that *continent*!!”

Holly was taken back. “You’re sayin’ that because we *slaughtered* ‘em—the bison and the people already living in North America—that the world judged us, conspired against us... and didn’t let us live regular lives any longer!?”

“You are not welcome in France!! You are not welcome in Russia!! You are not welcome in China!! It is a miracle that a chain of events allowed you to meet a *Brit* sociable enough to allow you here as an intermediary!!” Lu Hsun was not angry, but he was excited and feared that confrontation could be next.

Joseph held Holly. “He is sayin’ that we are in *denial*!!” He looked into her eyes. “I have *professors* that told me what he is tellin’ us!!”

“The evidence is in the pornography!! It is in the documentaries!! You are huddled around *gore* all the time!! You do not *like* us!!” Louis Pak begged inwardly for Jaylin Blacksmith to corroborate with him.

After silence, Holly contested softly, “We are a nation on the run—I *do not deny that*—but we have gone to the *MOON*!! Our pioneerin’ spirit put us in places where other people would not *go*!!”

“You *shot* each other on the way!!” Jaylin said. He felt embarrassed.

Rikki wanted to speak, but refused. Holly continued, “We are growin’ as a nation!! We are maturin’!!”

“*Yes*!!” Andrew Galsworthy said. He had come from the lake and heard enough to join in the conversation. “*YES*!! And that is why Annie of Sussex welcomed you *IN*!!”

Holly reconsidered her thought process. She muttered, “Do I have to tell my parents that they are in *prisons* when I go back home?!”

Joseph poked her side, “They are not prisons!! They are constructions!! No different than the

skeletons in that wall!!” Joseph pointed back to the grassy siding. “Tomorrow they will be palaces!! The day after, *humdrum* refugees!!” He looked at her. Tears had gone down her eyes and he had been unaware that she shed any while she faced Lu Hsun Pak. “I have gone through this before, *honey*!! You are hypnotized by logic... and when we return to Britain, you will not see them as the same!!”

Holly accepted his belief. She broke the momentary still by suggesting that everyone camp together along the lake. The plan had been to spend time apart in separate lodges. That no longer seemed entirely appealing.

* * *

The seven youngsters were on a cargo plane back to Europe. Lu Hsun Pak quipped that it felt like being on MTV’s *Real World*. Joseph told him to put a sock in it. Holly was restless and didn’t know what would become of her future. Rikki Styles yearned to get back to California and made it known for hours on end. Annie *Smith* started to like Jaylin Blacksmith but held back her feelings. Andrew Galsworthy experienced boredom out of his head and started to whine about it openly. It was a great time.

Joseph disclosed to the group, “Wallace Bentsen unveiled to me that Britain is not a nation!! I mean—I *have that wrong*—it is not the land... where England is... and Wales... and *Scotland*!!”

“Nor *Northern Ireland*!! My mate!!” Andrew proclaimed.

“Britain is the *sea*!! You used to be great pirates—*beautiful* pirates—even!! But the history books mistook you to be a NAVY!! Wherever the Union Jack was, *Britainia* was!!”

Andrew wanted to amend Joseph’s statement by calling the flag a “piece of cloth”... but refrained. He wanted to tell Mister Wilton not to refer to the Union Jack... *as his own*. The tone of the conversation was such that Joseph wanted to defect to Europe somewhere.

Joseph spoke on. “Britain *is* the sea!! I know that now!! You are everywhere where *love* is!! But you are not *home*!! I notice that no one loves you at *home*!!”

“You are a kind man!!” Adrew stated. “The Americans never lost faith in us, but we have *rascals* whom we can’t control!! You have an Indian problem, even *now*, and we can’t get you out o’ our continent when you have problems!!”

“*Fair enough*,” Joseph proclaimed.

Holly rubbed Joseph’s leg. He wanted to marry her.

* * *

Nicki and Jake Wilton slept at the bed of the Grand Canyon in Arizona. They loved the outdoors. Growing up near Santa Barbara, Jake always loved nature... but equated it to the ocean. Nicole Elizabeth

Lark grew up in Cresco, Iowa and felt like a hick when she met Jake in high school. Her family moved west to avoid cold weather. She never visited the Grand Canyon, and it felt good for her to be there.

“Do you think our neighborhood is getting crazy with all the zoning ordinances and city-wide codes?!” Nicki snuggled next to her husband in a sleeping bag.

“You’re asking because of the loud music next door... and our neighbor who was fined?!” He leaned up, zipped their tent close, then laid back down.

“The *population*, too!!” She admired her husband. “Santa Barbara might be the only city in the *country* with a ‘zero population immigration’ law!!”

“It doesn’t always *work* that way!! There were some illegals up in the San Joaquin Valley!! Sometimes, people come into *our* town... and they stay there as ‘visitors’... but we know they’re really trying to *remain*!!” He rubbed his wife on the back.

“The ‘bracero program’ didn’t quite *work*, did it?!” Nicki esteemed the crickets in the background.

“That was finished after *World War II*... but you know that they never stopped!!” Jake felt uneasy. Much like a movie, a wolf howled in the far distances.

“They’re takin’ their country back, you know?!” Nicki felt Jake’s unease.

“The broken treaties!! I ‘ear ‘bout ‘em all the time!!” Jake rubbed his wife some more to get over his own tension.

“They believe Propositions one eighty-seven and two-oh-nine revoked the *Treaty* of Guadalupe *Hidalgo* signed with Mexico after the war in the nineteenth century!!” She waited for Jake to respond, but he didn’t. “They were supposed to keep their customs and language Joseph told me on the phone once!!”

“They *have* their customs and language!!” He turned to his wife so that she could see his eyes. “You can’t let the *news*... or *college*... tell you what’s in your head!!”

“They’re still out there, hun!! We never got rid o’ ‘em!!” She was scared.

Jake laughed on the inside. “There’s a song by Simon and Garfunkle that we used to listen to when dating became the cool thing!! ‘Me and Julio down by the schoolyard’!! I don’t know what it meant, but I learned to get along with them!!” He felt the poke of his wife’s finger. “My *friends* left to Utah and Idaho when we stayed here *PUT*!!”

“You think we were courageous for standing up to the Spanish government when everyone said they were taking over?!” She was concerned.

“The *Spanish*!!” He looked at his wife deeply, then away. “They are still *pawning* us, the Europeans are!! If you take England’s or Spain’s side, you *will* lose!! I have grown up here!! I will not leave!!” He felt a dose of pride. “I am an *AMERICAN*!!”

His wife held back tears. She was proud that her husband was gaining ground in his mind. She didn’t know if it was the trip he took to Britain or if it was the vacation to the desert. The “Jake in Santa Barbara” was not the same man laying next to her in the tent at the time.

The moon was full outside. They cuddled.

* * *

Wallace Bentsen took in the nomadic group whom had been in the belly of Africa. Strudels were prepared and so was coffee. Corn, beef and cabbage was offered for the three non-vegetarians in the group. Wallace had a proposal and was candid about his inquiry, “I have a *demon* to conquer before my life passes from this *EARTH!!* It is in one of the places *Squire* was not prepared to go yet during our travels!! Will you join me now!?”

Holly poked Joseph in the side. “I want to marry Holly... *when we return!!*” He looked toward Wallace’s grim face. “Can you be my best *man?!?*”

Wallace hesitated. “I *CAN!!*”

The group cheered.

Except for Joseph and Holly, nobody else could afford the time, energy, nor money to trek with Wallace to Nepal for any other adventure. His tormentor was not there. He told Joseph that it was nearby. He did not say where it was.

“We are in *Nepal*, again!!” Joseph yelled to Wallace. A blizzard interrupted conversation. The wind was cold and brisk outside of the same roadhouse where they had previously met the gargantuan man whom had told them of the *Yeti* in Russia.

“*Yeah!!* I have two weeks to find a man who said I would *never* find anyone... *from America...* who could please the Asians, British... or *Africans!!*”

The wind rustled. Holly shivered... but stayed quiet.

“You think I am *READY!!*” Joseph was proud. He did not *feel* American.

Holly turned to her romantic partner. “I *love* you, Joseph!! I want you to be a *man!!*”

Wallace felt primed. “You said somethin’ *cooky* on the way over here!! You said that Mike Vick—an *NFL quarterback*—was goin’ to be busted out of prison by some secret society, probably consistin’ o’ CIA agents or ATF guys... an’ they were goin’ to take ‘im to Tibet to find *PEACE!!* I can tell ya’ ‘bout *peace!!* The Beatles couldn’t do it!! Jackson Browne didn’t do it with his *NO NUKES* concert!! And there are still people over there whom want to steal the *DALAI LAMA!!*”

“Before you die, you want to settle a *score!!*” Joseph yelled. He was freezing in his bones.

“I want to get even with the Chinese government for *jacking* your country into oblivion!! They have plastics sent to you as an *INSULT!!* They are littering your country, and you hardly know about it!!”

“I’m on!!” Holly said. She didn’t know what the two men were talking about. It sounded like a lot of “macho issues” to her.

* * *

Nicki and Jake Wilton woke to a cold Sun. It was misty outside, and Nicki was surprised that the desert could be so *chilly*. The Sun looked like a silver nickel through clouds so high in the sky. Navajo, Pima, Tohono O’Odham, Yuma, and Apache tribes were to be reported to be living in Arizona. A few children skirted around modest running water in the center of the Canyon. Nicki observed these children and their dark skin. She wondered what grouping they belonged to.

Jake prepared fried eggs on a portable skillet. Nicki was hungry and started to pop trail mix into her mouth as she waited for the *hot meal* to be finished. Jake began to speak to her about what he believed was going on. “Those *cars* out there!! The ones *up* the canyon!?” He pointed to a place that seemed miles above. “They are Tercels and they are Altimas!! Where are the *HUMMERS*, hun?!” He looked at her for a response. “They should *BE* here!! That is why people buy four-by-fours!”

“They have environmental laws against that, *babe*!!” She reached around her husband’s waist as he continued to tend to the searing eggs.

“I *KNOW*!!” He looked back at her. “But *why* didn’t they travel ‘ere to *backpack* with us!! Why didn’t they *come* HERE!!”

His wife had no answer.

“I think they’re gettin’ ready to go to *CANADA*!! If the economy collapses, they are goin’ to go up *THERE*!!” He waited for his wife to calm. She started to become excited without saying a word. “They did it in Vietnam... *an’ they’re goin’ to camp up there if the government completely falls*!!”

“You are paranoid and exaggerating!! The people in Arizona can’t *afford* Humvees!! You’re used to seein’ your stuck-up, fucked up, prissy friends drivin’ ‘em ‘round Santa Barbara where they really don’t need ‘em... *an’ you’re mad that they don’t use them offroad as much as they ought to... ‘cause o’ insurance*!!” She socked her husband lightly in the gut from behind as he turned to finish the eggs.

“The air outside is *sharp*!!” Jake changed the subject, served the eggs, then granted, “I believe you’re *right*!!” He kissed his wife on the cheek. “*Paranoia* is what it IS!!”

* * *

Wallace, Holly, and Joseph made it to the ridge of Ngamringxoi in Tibet without much of a problem. Wallace knew where he had to go, and he knew who he had to see. “Peacetime vetarans” played an important role in China’s recent history, and they did it through covert actions. After Korea was divided between north and south governances, Americans stationed in Okinawa, Japan ventured out of their obscure stations to prep the opening of trade with the West. The worst resistance came from China’s southwest region because they were torn between Dalai Lama instruction, Mao Tse Tung’s rule, and NATO influence.

British officials would come into the area unexpectedly to procure stability and foster strength at the borders. World War II was tough. The British did *not* want World War III to happen if at all possible. Wallace Bentsen had been a commander in the British army. He hid it from everyone in his hometown with magical reflections. He pretended to be a scribe. He pretended to be a mystic. He pretended that people didn't *exist*, sometimes... and only dragons and knights skirted around.

Joseph Wilton understood what was going on. It was a showdown.

The man's name was Chou Xiang Yu. He was partly responsible for opening China up to Richard Nixon in the seventies. It could have been done *correctly*, in Bentsen's estimation, if the British were consulted with more reverence. It had been *G7* then, and America had good ties with British and French governments. It could have easily been *G9* with the addition of Russia and China... if *diplomacy* was strong enough. Talks were secretive, but the Soviet Union was prepared to dissolve a generation before they actually disbanded publicly. Wallace felt betrayed by Chinese officials. Tenzin Gyatso, the fourteenth Dalai Lama, had to flee for refuge in *India* because of Wallace's adversary. He believed it with all his heart.

Wallace, Holly, and Joseph rode on horses through Ngamringxoi and they sported swords at their sides. Wallace told Joseph that he would need *courage* to make it through. Holly was nervous.

Chou Xiang Yu approached from far away. He was sided by three riders to his right and three to his left. He was dressed in what seemed to be mariachi clothes. Wallace reached into his dark beige canvas backpack and pulled out a wizard's hat. It looked to Joseph like he was in a cartoon. It felt to Holly like she was in a Western.

Wallace got off his horse—it made a “*grrrrrrrr*” sound. He commanded Joseph to stay on his pony, and to ride away if things got too heated.

Chou lowered himself from his exuberant trotter. The six men he rode with remained saddled.

Wallace looked like a Disneyland reject to Joseph. His hat was tall, coned, and pointed. It was powder blue and matched his draping robe.

Chou Xiang Yu approached Wallace. They were thirty meters from one another. He pulled out his sword.

Wallace yelled, “You betrayed the British government!!”

Chou retorted, “You are a suicidal old *man*!!”

Wallace proclaimed, “I have come here for *VENGEANCE*!!”

Joseph noticed that it might be a play of sorts. He did not expect them to start fighting.

Holly was nervous and threw dirt at Joseph's face. She wanted to wake him up from a dream. Joseph was in a *dream*. He was caught mesmerized by two old men in theatrics. That was her take on the aloof situation.

Chou rushed Wallace. Bentsen responded by defending himself with the sword. Both men had gray hair. Both were old. Both had peppered darkness from their scalps and it could be mistaken for a

copious live dramaturgical production if it was in the middle of Las Vegas' *EXCALIBUR*.

Wallace charged Chou after the initial onslaught of swings. "You were supposed to *kill* them!!"

"I did not know Americans could *win*!!" Chou said. He looked toward the young couple on their muscular steeds. He pushed Wallace off of him.

"You were supposed to take *nukes* to the United States if that's what it *TOOK*!! What happened, *OLD MAN*!? Why did they seek me?!"

The two swung their swords at one another. They batted at each other like dueling fencers rejected by an Olympic team. They yelled and grunted once in a while.

"You were supposed to give me *money*!!" Chou said to Wallace.

It hit Mister Bentsen like a hard brick. "I *KNOW*!!" He looked into the sky past the six riders and behind Chou Xiang Yu. Gloomy clouds were starting to form. It looked like *GOD* was in the cirrus heaps and stacks. They could *not* form that quickly!! It was an illusion... *or*...

Chou pierced Wallace in the side. He looked to the kids on the horses. "This old *MAN* was supposed to destroy Britainia... and I was supposed to destroy the *KINGDOM* 'ere if Chaing Kai Shek did not do his *JOB*... in Taiwan!!"

A strange wind blew through Joseph's hair. It was warm in spite of the frosty weather around the region the night before. He yelled to Chou Xiang Yu, "My name is *SQUIRE*, you son-o'-a-bitch!!! I will see you in the *FUTURE*!!"

The six riders behind Chou waited for a command.

"I will *see* you!!" Joseph said again. He waited to see if they would attack him or Holly. They did nothing except to watch Wallace die on the ground. "You will have *VENGEANCE*!!"

Holly and Joseph rode off.

In Nepal, they spoke. "Wallace went there to *die*, Holly!!"

She grabbed him by the chin. "You are my lover and hero!!"

"He was a scared, old man when I met him... and he was waiting for *MEANING*!! He did not want to croak around the college kids saying how good he *used* to be!! He did not want to tell me how good Britain *USED TO BE*!!"

Holly pinched him by the chin tighter. "I *love* you!!"

"He wanted to *SHOW* us that he is a man!!" Joseph waited for someone to shut him up. Barmaids were around in that mysteriously twisted roadhouse and they said nothing. His tone changed to assurance. "The *British* ARE lofty on *LEGACY*!!"

Holly leaned over and whispered in Joseph's ear, "So are *AMERICANS*!!"

Joseph kissed Holly. They headed for Britain and they didn't know how they were going to tell the news to anyone.

* * *

Nicki and Jake Wilton made their way back home. They packed up their material, gathered any wrappings that were on the ground, and headed up a winding path all the way to their vehicle. They started toward California's inland valley. Nicki had the idea that they should have *continued* their vacation out to the Midwest. Jake had enough, though. Nicki could read it on his face and didn't say a thing. Finally, after an hour's drive of just music and occasional crackling of wind through a partially gaped window opening, Nicki mentioned Joseph.

"I don't think he's havin' a good *time* out there!/" Jake let her know.

"I think he *wanted* to be in California his whole life... before the *disaster*!/" She referred to Joseph's fallen comrade without addressing his name.

"It was not a *disaster*!! Those things happen, *NICKI*!/" Jake felt unsympathetic. "A disaster is that we can't get out of a war we didn't want to be in to begin with!/"

"You're talkin' about our troops being abroad... an' the promise the more'll be shipped out as soon as others come *home*!/" Nicki felt a cool shiver in her skin.

"Thank *GOODNESS* Joseph went to college!/" He looked at her before changing the radio station. "Many of his buddies and neighbors went into the army as reserves during the beginning of the *whole thing*!/"

"Don't be *condescending*!/" Nicki said. "You *always* said that the ARMY was the right way to go... for *most of them*!/"

"I think I was *joking*... and I think I was tryin' to light a fire under most o' their butts to get off their fannies and go to do some *homework*!/"

"You're *funny*!/" Nicki rubbed Jake's hand on top of the stick shift. They laughed.

* * *

Holly and Joseph moved to Haverhill, England which was not far from the University of Cambridge where Joseph decided to work on a doctorates degree. Wallace Bentsen had entrusted the couple with *gold* before they had left to Asia. He said it would be a wedding gift. If all didn't go as hoped, it was theirs to keep. If it *did* go as hoped—if *he was victorious against his foe*—they would use the money for a great feast and a small wedding ceremony. Wallace was not around to tell them how to spend money. Annie of Sussex became weary of what happened... and Adrew Galsworthy cheerfully conjoined associations with Scotland Yard. Word was that the Asians were trying to kill Holly and Joseph if they returned to the United States—they *did not trust the press there and feared backlash from what was a hotheaded government in appearance*—but they were not going to bother the couple if they settled in England... or certain parts of Europe scattered throughout the wide land. Chou Xiang Yu did not hold a

grudge against Wallace's people, nor did he hold a grudge against Wallace when he was in Asia. He felt his *honor* was threatened, and he defended himself the best he knew how. He let the Europeans know through a network of connections that it was not a *WAR* from his vantage point. He articulated that he was sorrowful that anything bad had happened. He appended that he believed Wallace was a fine man, a *great* warrior... but it was a "kill or be killed" situation.

Joseph "Squire" Wilton enrolled in fencing courses. He believed it was the best way to deal with his pain. Annie of Sussex passed on her news, left the couple... and she was seen on occasion at the Cambridge campus. Regardless, it was like a player traded from a team. David Beckham would *not* be treated the same from the Manchester United after traveling to the States to play for the LA Galaxy!! Emmitt Smith would *not* be welcome in Cowboy training camps in spite of becoming the most prolific rusher of all time due to his retirement with the Arizona Cardinals... *unless he was hired as a coach*. Joseph believed it was the same with Annie. She saw him on campus... but they did not speak. Holly saw her when she visited Joseph during lunches... but they merely waved to one another.

Rikki Styles went back to the United States. Joseph found increasing placid consonance in regards to Marcus Blacksmith with each passing day. Jaylin, his cousin, took off to California. Holly and Joseph wished the best for him. Lu Hsun Pak was nowhere to be heard from. Joseph tried to get a hold of him through computer email but was unsuccessful.

Holly and Joseph married. They did not know if would last. They did not have plans for children. Thomas Malthus was an English mathematician and he understood population growth better than the majority of people of the modern era in spite of attending Cambridge two centuries prior. The postulate set forth regarded a *J-shaped curve* and human expansion... and he proposed in *An Essay On The Principle Of Population* that *food growth* was linear in nature. The implication was that people fought *fiercely* for resources when exponential growth was inevitable. Wars and famines were the only solutions as compensation for lack of dietary supplemental nutrition. While in the United States, Holly and Joseph believed *technology* could curb food availability through mechanized ploughing, mass seeding, and clever deterrance of insect manifestations. What they saw—what they *experienced*—was hunger all around. They saw it at the grocery stores where the checkout stands displayed "feed the hungry" programs. They saw it in *celebrity homes*... with strangely purported eating disorders. They saw it on the streets of *Los Angeles*. They contended that soy could feed the world's hungry by *theory*... but logistics always played as a preposterous unsuspecting variable. Holly and Joseph decided to marry because they *loved* each other. They knew that college kids from campuses where they attended classes preached that the globe's carrying capacity for humans was on the figurative horizon. They knew that their parents pressured them to have children. They knew that marriage was about *love*—on some level, it was about *LOVE*.

The couple experienced marital bliss for a few of months.

They agreed one night, when all the "gooey" feelings were done, that *if* they hated each other... they should seek *advocacy* from an external foundation... or they would go to Asia and try to finish

Wallace's job. The latter thought was a joke and they belted hysterics many nights about it.

* * *

On the way back from the Grand Canyon, Nicki and Jake had stopped at the same Baker's where they had a brush with someone whom Nicki claimed resembled a pop singer's insinuatingly disenchanted bodyguard. It had been months since that time, and they spoke about it at dinner.

"That guy—the one who I showed you on the news the other day—he looked like the one from the fastfood joint near where *Crossroads* used to be, right?!" Nicki ate linguini from her plate.

"I don't want to *talk* about it!! I want to talk about how it was when we came *back* from the Canyon!! There was a union guy yellin' that he didn't have enough *ketchup*, o' all things!! You insisted that we had to go *back* to that place to have finality in your mind... but the guy was *screamin'* that no one was doin' their jobs!! An' a lanky guy next to '*im*—'e said everythin' the *union* guy did!! As if cued!!"

"You think it's a *cult*!!" Nicki said.

"I think they are trained to *act* the same!!" Jake Wilton did not want to talk about it.

"I think you're in *love* with me again!!" Nicki smiled.

"The tattoo on the little kid's arm looked like one o' those *ghouls* that Squire used to talk so much about!! An' I *PRAYED* that that fat weirdo who you *thought* was a *bodyguard* wouldn't show up there again!! I hoped 'e was a transient an' nothin' *MORE*!!" Jake scooped mashed potatoes onto his plate. It was an odd combination, but nothing had been the same in the kitchen since Joseph left for Kansas.

"I think that lanky kid looked *cool*!! They're all white trash out there, *you know*?!" Nicki looked at her husband dryly then flung a pea into his direction.

"I *KNOW* you like to say that term to get on my nerves!! I grew up in California!! I'm sorry I don't know what your *IOWA* farm was all about!!" Jake pushed his plate to the center of the table.

"I think I *will* make love to you tonight!!" Nicki kissed her husband on the cheek after setting her plate aside. Usually, when she said she would make love, it was because she had a headache—a *real headache*—and she didn't want to make it worse by talking about normal things. Jake was okay with it. *Reverse psychology*. They slept deeply that night.

* * *

While at Cambridge, Squire learned of a plan by the Russians and some of their associates to attack North America. The plan was not all that secretive. It had been discussed on the internet, and it had been discussed in *books* during the Cold War. The Russians would take off from from Taymyr, where the *Yeti* allegedly lived in clans, and they would travel underneath the ice. Underground nuclear testing

allowed the Russians to *break* a lot of the frozen substances with dynamite and other explosives as a *diversion* for decades. “The tip of the ice berg” did not cover an undaunting obstacle as much as believed. Global warming aided to clear a shot to Canada.

The residents of the Northwest Territories almost *waited* for the Russians to come. They loved their televised hockey and they felt shunned by inhabitants of the sunshine region. Divergent greatly from the many beliefs declaring that the Russians would *nuke* America from a sub or *many* subs north of the Canadian vicinity, they reportedly actually planned a *ground* attack. They believed that if they could get into the Yukon Territory, they could sneak into Alaska, torture Americans in Kaktovik, Prudhoe Bay, and Barrow and cause a chain reaction. The United States government forewent articles apropos the Geneva Convention while in Iraq and Afghanistan. The compounding result was a “behind the scenes” disregard for the United Nations and an “every man for himself” attitude within recognized authority. The Russians, in conjunction with some Nordic people, believed they could divert acute awareness to whatever ultimate source may want to ruin American social mechanisms. They would blame “terrorists” within Canada, presumably behaving on behalf of the al-Qaeda network, for strikes in Finland, Estonia, and areas around St. Petersburg. The theory was that *California* would receive the first distress calls being the most economically dominant state around the Pacific perimeter. They would gnaw on the District of Columbia until they were secure in mood and thought. The domino-effect would ensue. Mass paranoia. Blaming of phantoms. Chasing of wild geese. Finger pointing at one another to the degree of madness.

Holly Rydell Wilton and Joseph “*Squire*” Wilton were commissioned by Scotland Yard one year after Joseph had enrolled in Cambridge... *to find out if there was any merit to the claims and beliefs of everything being inferred through government channels, and everything leaked by insiders of the organizations attempting to accomplish mass and widespread social modifications*. Andrew Galsworthy was to lead a team of ten people. Most of them were Brits, however... one of them was from Iceland, yet he spoke enough Gaelic to get along together well enough with two Scottish swashbucklers tagging for the momentous outing.

Joseph “*Squire*” Wilton felt great and he wanted to make America proud. The ten people arrived in St. Petersburg where they told a military official that they were there to conduct *G8* talks. The military official referred them to a special forces unit in Vorkuta just north of the Arctic Circle. Former *Komitet Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti* administrators provided glacial tractor coaches for part of the team’s distinguished expedition. They aimed to please the Americans in particular. They knew that a chain of events could spring an atmosphere of brutally sour ambiance. The Scotts, on the other hand, could be worked with because of centuries of diplomacy in Scandinavian regions.

The group became sidetracked. In Makarova, Alexi Gorbechev, a cousin of the former Soviet prime minister, met with the ten voyagers deep in the Taymyrian district. All was not dandy and roses. Alexi wanted to greet the squad with bottles of vodka... but found *rage* in the pit of his stomach. He pulled out a Colt revolver when Joseph looked him in the eye. The guide director from Iceland was the only one

who could communicate in Russian fluently. Joseph put up his hands as if he had done something wrong. The Gaelic man tried to stop what happened next.

Alexi Grobechev put the gun in his mouth and shot.

The team continued on with their preliminary program. Eight of the people interviewed residents of a cold place called Dikson not far away. Holly and Joseph remained based in Makarova with a friendly elderly family. They spoke of the “*abominable snowmen*” after Joseph asked them about immense atrocious *hooligans* in casual conversation. One of the youngsters tendered that he could take them there. “They stand TALLER than our *polar bears*!.”

Holly was surprised that the kid spoke fluent English. When asked where he had learned, he replied that it came from television and the internet. He said he could take Joseph out for a journey and they would be able to return before the rest of the gang came back.

In Dikson, Andrew Galsworthy became convinced that the general terror was real. He suspected that the lower Asian regions knew when, where, why, and *how* Westerners would travel. “Outsourcing” was a grossly misleading idiom. Indians in Delhi and other cities were *spying* for a price. Money came from Afghanistan and Pakistan to process the utmost important information. Islamic connections of OPEC filtered funds to these areas which had become friendly to the West. When *spies* were sent to Russia... *all leaders knew about it*. When documents were sent to Greenland... *everyone was alerted*. When Chinese diplomatic businessmen traveled to Japan... *California* knew about it. The network was exceptionally maddening and it became a misnomer that they were stealing jobs from Midwesterners in the United States. Quite the opposite. They provided work for them by *diverting* terror where employment was possible. No one *trusted* the plains area of the United States any longer... and only the GAT and NAFTA people seemed trustworthy along the oceans and ports.

Andrew believed it was futile to pin a source—*no main person could be found who would destroy the United States or western Europe*—but he believed he could pin a condition. Poverty along the Indian Ocean induced cries to neighboring countries. When the cries fell upon deaf ears, the *armed men*—the ones able to gain American ammunition—fought for freedom, pride, and security.

Joseph traveled alone with Feodor Ivanovich—a *seventeen-year-old male trying to prove himself to the great global society*—by use of snowmobile. They reached a plateau northeast of Makarova. Thirty miles away was the settlement of Mys Vkhodnoy. They would not need to travel so far. Half the way there, polar bears could be seen foraging for trout, herring, and salmon below the ice. Joseph suspected that’s what they were doing. He had seen the same thing in Alaska. He was in bewilderment as he watched. He brought the same sword he had holstered in Nepal and Tibet. He thought about being attacked by any of the bears. *Could he win?* Could he cut them before they gnawed at him? He believed Feodor Ivanovich was messing with his head... or *heinously exaggerating* the presence of ice monsters. Then he heard a loud howl in the distance. He thought it came from one of the bears... but they *scampered*. He heard it again.

“*See!?*” Over an ice dune, it made itself known. “We can get close to *them*... but you have to hide your sword!?”

HRRRRRRUHUR!!

Two more appeared behind the first!!

HRRRRURHR!! HURUHURUHUR!

Caribou flanked the creatures.

Insanity slammed Joseph’s mind.

You are a pussy, Joseph!!

It was his mom in his head.

You are a wuss!! Grow up and play tackle football like Marcus, your friend!!

“I AM *SQUIRE!!* I AM NOT A *PUSSY!!*” Joseph jumped off the snowmobile.

The creatures were fifteen feet tall—*just like Wallace Bentsen had proposed.*

“I am not *a...*” Joseph froze. A *mastadon* crept from behind the three giant creatures. One of them looked as though it wanted to turn and run... but Joseph charged.

“I AM FUCKIN’ *CHEATED!!*” He ran at the tallest of the opaque billowy beasts without hesitation.

Feodor Ivanovich revved the snowmobile... ready to leave if...

The front hunk stomped toward the confused humans.

Just before Joseph could thrust his long dagger into the extended, stringy, white-haired oversized biped’s midsection... he was grabbed, hurled into the air above the incomprehensible primate’s skull, and positioned in such a way that Feodor could see him clearly writhing in pain. He was tossed twenty-five meters down the dune and toward the smaller polar feeders at the ice holes. Feodor could see Joseph’s neck snap backwards.

HRUUHUR!! HRUUUUURR!!

The front monstrous being batted at its chest and howled.

HRRUUHURUR!!

* * *

Nicki and Jake Wilton stayed home at nights and ate home cooking. They *had* liked to go out on the town... but Joseph kept creeping into their heads. Jake wanted to curse his son but found himself constantly refraining from doing so. One night, they ate scalloped potatoes—one of *Squire’s favorite’s as a kid*—and Jake finally delivered his thoughts, “One day, he’s goin’ to make us *PROUD!!*?”

Nicki smiled at him and continued to eat.

“One day, we’re going to see him on *Sixty Minutes*... or *Dateline!!* Maybe even *ESPN!!* And he’s going to be talkin’ ‘bout how Marcus Blacksmith was an inspiration!?”

“He’s goin’ to make a wad o’ money at *WALL STREET* an’ buy us a new place!.” Nicki said.

“*Yeah!!*” Jake kissed his wife on the lips.

They went to the bedroom together and made love.

* * *

The polar bears looked like midgets to Feodor. He had seen the hulks before... but not since he was six years of age or so. He believed they were a figment of his imagination... *as time passed*. He believed he saw them in a dream once—*maybe a movie*.

The young man travelled and did not know how to tell Holly what happened. He opted to lie.

“He fell in *ice* near the polar bears!.” When the group of others returned forty-five minutes later Holly was already gone away on Feodor’s snowcycle.

* * *

“In for a penny, in for a pound!.” Andrew said to the others as they neared Northern Ireland by boat. “You have to tell them that we didn’t *see* the murders!.”

Shirley Stephen was one of the ladies on the voyage. “You don’t know that they were *murders!!*”

“They were taken away to a far off village where we could not find bones, nor foottracks!.”

Andrew was angry, but confusion became his dominant emotion. “I thought it was best to leave the Americans behind instead of allowin’ them with us to Dikson ‘cause they *hated* Americans up there!.” He paused. “I should have *known...*” He started to cry. “I should have *known!!*” He looked Shirley in the face. “THEY WERE *SAFER* WITH US!.”

“Don’t beat yourself up!.” Shirley looked away and adjusted her skirt so that it reached down to her knees. “It’s not *professional!!*” She kissed him on the cheek.