

The Working-Day

A plastic flap flung open and a man squeezed through. "Heirloom Bail Bonds and General Services. How may I begin to assist you moving forward?" His head looked like a walnut with googly-eyes. On the ledge below a shivering lady emptied a manila folder of seven or eight little tongues. "This is all that is left of my orphanage," she whispered. She was as thin as burnt asparagus. The man dipped back into the office and the flap swung shut. Then he got down on all fours and pulled a lever and the ledge propelled the tongues into the office and snapped back into place. Tongues were strewn all over. Tongues were beginning to develop. Tongues were acquiring new faculties. Tongues were achieving self-actualization. Tongues could see the molecular structure of things. "These little guys are a piece of work," the man wrote on a Costco receipt. Then he shredded the receipt. Then he got a text from his wife. "How much did you spend at Costco on eggs and mustard?" The frail woman in the lobby was asleep on the security guard's lap. He was taking little palmfuls of water from his water cooler cup and gently washing her hair. Teenagers were hanging out outside giving the middle finger to the prison across the expressway. "Fuck you, jail." Tongues were projecting hologram footage of Socrates' execution. Tongues were downloading maps of other universes. The man inside the office got his ankle caught in his phone charger. "How much did you spend on K-cups?"

The Loup-Garou of Dole

This is based very loosely on real events. Gilles Garnier was a sixteenth-century hermit in the rural French village of Dole who was burned at the stake for lycanthropy during a famine. Little is known of Garnier, but we know he had a wife.

Gilles Garnier found his wife, Marie, the day after he took out his last mule with an onyx cudgel. She was whistling hymns and gathering pine cones when the anxious recluse sniffed up a contrail from her aura of crab apple oil. The mule Gilles killed was slumped over the doorstep to his hut, its head removed and its body dressed in an armor of industrious bugs.

In Dole, Gilles would give a shout to alert the wash ladies and mendicant beggars to the offering of fresh mule. Over the years, though, his patience for sharing had grown frayed beyond repair.

His constitution, ever more steadfast as he passed into his thirtieth year, was such that everything in the world appeared preposterous, unsavory, even perilous when filtered through the dumb chatter of men. So he set out to the woods to furnish for himself the rustic life of his forebears. In the wild, he could indulge any excess, face the most exotic interlocution with ease, so long as it should not hail from society.

So when Gilles Garnier smelled Marie's putrid crab apple oil that morning, he scoured his memory for any link to that intolerable world of commerce and clubhouses. He found none. His dilated nostrils recognized the slippery tissue of a woman's skin, but the odor of crab apple betrayed a carnality proper to the woods.

"How my wilting fortune now seems to flower," he said to the shrinking frame of the mule. "That abominable festival has surely seen its close, yet some rank maiden tarries still in my grove."

The teeming body on his doorstep merely tucked its legs under its belly and burrowed its head into its bosom, submitting to the ravages of maggots and gnats. "Some good you are," Gilles said.

Marie rustled and Gilles reared up and darted his head around like a sparrow, wearing his characteristic probing frown. He could smell the newly exposed wood from inside a branch she snapped with her heel. It smelled of potatoes. His stomach felt like the heavy ball of an ornery child.

"What say you, beast?" he demanded of the mule. "Shall I employ two loud reeds in the summoning of this nymph?" The mule, buckling into a still more compact form as it surrendered to the bugs, let out a gasp. "Fuck you," Gilles said. "You could scarcely convey your own hindquarters when you took in the air of the living, and now in death you obstruct my affairs with an obnoxious obstinance!"

Spooked by the din of Gilles' outburst, Marie fled into the forest and ran back towards Dole. Her face was ashen and her left cheek was pressed with mysterious ridges, like a tally of scars, but a brighter pink than usual anatomy would present. Her eyes were big and bloodshot, and the thin feet below her skirts were smattered with moss. Gilles was privy to none of this, despite the acuity of his nose. All he knew was that she was running away, and a trail of crab apple oil lagged behind her like some unwieldy freight.

Gilles got his boots down from a bent tree branch and the wriggling mule, now down to the size and shape of a gourd, finally piped up. It cleared its throat and Gilles leaned in, furrowing his brow deep into his darting eyes.

“On this bright and fecund morn,” the mule began in a wet coarse wheeze. “I spend my latemost breath to warn: a thousand curses will be brung, by the charge of another’s hungry tongue.”

“‘Brung’ isn’t even a word. And I don’t think ‘latemost’ is, either,” Gilles said. “Anyway, your riddle is obscure, and I won’t hear it. I have no patience for riddles or obscurity. Riddles are vulgar. And obscure.” (In truth, Gilles had plenty of patience for riddles. He relished anything that wanted for deciphering.)

Gilles blew his nose onto his hand and smeared it on the faded frontispiece above the doorstep. He seemed to suddenly collect himself. “Now you’ve got me lecturing on the obscurity and vulgarity of riddles while our enchanted maid nears the far clearing with mounting quickness!” The mule had deflated to nothing and a layer of bugs bustled in its place.

Gilles booked it into the woods, his knees springing up to his chin with each bound. In the woods, he could carry himself with the bearing of an ostrich or a gazelle. He could eschew the ambulatory fashions of the day: the slouch of the Reformist libertine, the stout carriage of the priest. He could spin his stretched arms this way and that in the manner of a weathervane, his face stony and self-serious all the while, without drawing the ridicule of the street merchants.

When Gilles caught up with Marie, he took her by her thick tassel of hair and pressed her striped cheek to his face. She was unflapped by his boldness and started talking as though she had been moseying about with Gilles all morning. The ease with which she swerved through the dark wood ruled out her being blind, but her gray eyes fixed straight ahead peculiarly and their whites were smattered with little red points.

“When children scamper about amongst adult company it is best to disregard their big eyes and ruddy cheeks and speak to them with stern gravity, lest one inadvertently stimulate the maturation of their impropriety, which is a damage that cannot be undone.” She paused, bent over and peeled a slug off of her foot. He followed her down and back up with his face as though unconsciously. “Where do you live?”

The question caught Gilles by surprise, for she previously spoke slowly and evenly, as though reading aloud from some cryptogram in the wind, totally unconscious of her

audience. "I live in the grove back there," Gilles said. "I have a fire with an onyx hearth and some extra onyx in the back. I am an expert hunter and in my society days I was an esteemed opponent of foolishness. A spell of cold is advancing through the county and bare feet, even bare feet lacquered in moss, will not do. There are practical concerns--you should familiarize yourself with the facts of climate. I have unusually acute inborn senses for the movement of the heavens. We could furnish my home together with all manner of scented oils and meteorological instruments."

With that, it was decided. At the urging of Marie, they were to wed in Dole proper. She appealed to a litany of customs, traditions, and values in making her case, all rattled off with mechanical detachment. Every now and then she would pause her lecture to scrub her knees with spit or dig a beetle out of the creases in her hair and put it in her mouth, savoring the insect with pronounced indulgence. Gilles ceded to her plan, but on the condition that they appear in the court in a kind of tandem gown enveloping both their bodies.

Hushed snickers abounded amongst the barristers and clergymen on the fateful day. Inside the gown, though, an air of mirth was shared unlike any felt by either of them since youth. The red in Marie's eyes began to fade, and, though she did not smile, a stream of drool trickled from the corner of her lip. That day was their happiest, and it was also the start of their rapid undoing.

The coldfront Gilles foretold barrelled in like a drunkard. Gilles' little vegetable patch, fortified with a shabby parapet, succumbed to the lashes of bitter wind. The truth was that in practical terms, both of them were inept. Marie's didacticism only served contemplative ends, and Gilles' constant scrutiny of the world, his tinkering and his diagnoses, rarely bore fruit. They were both severe in manner, yet had hitherto responded to the brute necessities of life with near indifference. The climate and geology of Gilles' grove had, up to then, been fortuitous and he had gotten lucky with a few choice kills, some of which he salted and others, like the mule, he absently left to rot. But a real test of the couple's hermetic fortitude was now being foisted upon them, and they discovered to their despair that all of the measures for survival and flourishing they touted in their lectures were gravely inadequate.

A handful of marmot kills sustained them for the first week, and Marie hoped to parlay such a fortune by using the pelts to sew a durable garment for the long hunts. Gilles stalked the critters out of their crowded holes, skewered them on his stick, and carried them home to Marie. Marie slid the screaming animals off of the stick, tore their pelts off, and tossed their bald bodies to Gilles, who plopped them into a cauldron swaying over the fire like a goblin's

hammock. Eventually Marie began using up some of the twine to sew up the marmot's mouths, and their shriek turned into a reedy hum.

"...by the charge of another's hungry tongue," Marie suddenly recited, shaking her head.

"What the fuck did you say?" Gilles shouted, his fine eloquence taking leave of him.

"What? What did I say? Don't get in a tizzy. It's an old adage from the days of the Thin Milk. Sheesh. It's a cautionary rhyme about the cursed admixture of matrimony and scarcity. God."

"Yes, I understand the message," Gilles said, his eyes going up to the roof and back down in a forced look. The marmots, sensing the tension, went unanimously silent.

"Well, now might be a time at which you ought to *mule it over*, then, Gilles," said Marie. Gilles squinched up his face and began to sweat.

"What?"

"Mull. It. Oh-ver. If you're stopped up in the ears, you need to clean them out. This is no season for compromised senses."

Gilles wiped his brow, bent over with torpor, and dunked a marmot into the bristling water. Their first fight, a marmot at the back of the line correctly guessed to itself. No other would follow it.

All the holes were evacuated, the boiled meat scarfed down, and all that remained of that first and last bounty was the marmot cloak tied snugly around Gilles' body as he scoured the burrows. He marked them with upturned sticks so they wouldn't get lost in the debris of winter. One of the marked burrows appeared like a convex hump, which he thought was a trick of the morning shadows until he prodded it with a stick. It was much softer than the rest of the ground. He cleared the leaves in a frenzy and a human face was revealed, a girl child, her features taut, eyes clenched shut, skin the color of a par-poached egg. Gilles took off his marmot glove and touched her face with his fingertips. It felt like the last remnants of life still dawdled within her, gathering its belongings and blowing out the candle. She was no longer of this world, to be sure, but her departure was recent.

Eschewing decorum in the solitude of the wood, Gilles promptly slung the corpse over his shoulder. Tears slithered down his cheek and made their way onto his lip. When he arrived with the girl, Marie, by the fire, understood the meaning of the boon. She flung off her marmot coat and stood herself up on her head, her loose garments slipping down her body until only bare skin remained. She landed back down with a thump and Gilles joined her. They made blurry, tearful love while the dead girl laid by the door, her eyes shut tight, as though she were scandalized by the scene.

The couple hardly begun salting the body when the mob arrived. This, that, and the other, they seemed to say. Neither Gilles nor Marie could make sense of it. While they screamed and chanted, the stripes on Marie's face deepened and she paced around in a tightening coil until she was spinning like a mystic. By the time they got the door down they seemed already to have Gilles propped up on a board and bobbing on the wave of their caravan. Marie shrieked after him but was restrained against the floor by one of the brutes until the rest of the mob had disappeared into the wood. "P.U.," the brute said while on top of her. "You stink like crab apple."

The following day, a delegation of stoic barristers led Marie to the trial in Dole. Her left cheek was just a gaping hole by then, recalling the marmot burrows of what she had then considered a period of great privation, but would now cherish as the most bountiful and felicitous of her days.

In the hours between the arrest by the mob and the notice of his trial, Marie's husband was elongated with the aid of a newfangled interrogation rack. They stretched his arms and legs with such force that his body was twice its original measure and his bones, mostly shattered, swam around inside him like river debris. He had been accused of lycanthropy following the news of a spate of child killings by a wolven beast. A food merchant, still bitterly offended by Garnier's old habit of listening to his fruits for signs of hollowness and rot, enthusiastically identified him as the mob carried him into town, shouting, "That's the weird bastard! Put that prick on a stick!" That testimony was deemed sufficient for the jurors, who had a predisposition against woodsmen and outsiders. That and the fact that prosecutor Henri Camus, Doctor of Laws, Counselor of Our Lord the King in the Supreme Court of Dole, gave such a vivid account of the children's disembowelment that many townspeople were not able to contain their vomit, despite famine.

Gilles' guilt was established with unanimity. He gave a full confession, the judge's pubescent henchman reported to a weeping, prostrate Marie. He admitted to getting "enwovened," as the boy put it, after the devil tempted him with an array of transformative salves. He submitted thinking only of his wife. He picked, he said, the wolf salve, figuring that he could perform his nightly child-foraging with less conspicuity that way than as a leopard or a gigantic stone fruit. Every night, he confessed while his kneecaps were being pulverized by the rack, he took the salve and plucked wayward children up in his teeth. Marie finally interrupted the boy's report, saying, "he didn't do that." Her face was purged of expression or hue. "I would have been promptly apprised of any transaction, especially one that involved filling our larder with the bodies of babes. He brought home one lass, but he dug her out of a marmot hole. She was already there." She spat dryly. The boy screwed up his face and shrugged.

At the execution Marie knelt in front of the crowd, flanked by Gilles' only regular acquaintances from Dole, two dyspeptic cartographers who seemed almost indifferent to the scene. Skeletal, ghoulis townspeople screamed and hurled pebbles as some men in cossacks strung Gilles up to the stake. The spectacle of death, ironically, was the last vestige of conviviality in a region rocked by famine.

Gilles' body was hideously contorted, his head dangling on his shoulder and his legs extended on the ground in wayward directions like the roots of an old tree. He whispered something to one of the cossacked men. He wanted a final word, the man announced to the mob. The raging throngs went instantly silent, even docile.

"Everything I have done," he began, his voice apparently unaffected by his bodily trauma, "has been executed with thoroughgoing purpose. I have never been superfluous in word or deed. My only concession to whimsy, as you will see, has been in slumber. Even my dreams were things of utility. Though sometimes quite obscure they nonetheless contained messages of practical value, which I would only need to ponder for a few minutes in the morning to decipher. I learned how to build a riverboat in a dream. I fastidiously followed the instructions, which I translated from a cryptogram carved into a wooden sword brandished by a barn owl. My dreams were invaluable lessons, and many nights I retired before dusk in anticipation of the edification sleep afforded.

My dreams changed with the advent of my wife, Marie. Since our first night together, I have shut my eyes to greet the same scene every night. Marie, splayed out on a bed of moss, saturated in the light of the sun, giving a beckoning gesture, her face serious, her finger insistent. No practical lesson has been gleaned from this dream. But as I prepare to die, it has become apparent to me that no other doctrine has been worth its weight in mule shit but for this sight of beauty and truth contained in my radiant maiden, Marie.

That is all. You can burn me now."

The townspeople remained silent and weeping after the conclusion of the address, with the exception of Marie, who, after a lifetime of abstention, laughed. As she laughed, the hole in her face began to contract. One of the cartographers tried to stifle her laughter by covering her mouth, but she bit his hand and he retreated. The distant Gilles heard the laughter, recognized the imprint of her face in this novel sound, and joined her, coughing and wheezing with rapturous laughter. The executioner, holding his torch, shrugged, bemused by the silence of the crowd. He lit Gilles with a quick, uncertain motion, and shrugged again as though ultimately uncertain of his competence. Seeing the flames of death thus deployed, the townspeople cheered and rioted, forgetting their previous sympathy. Marie and her husband continued to laugh as the latter's burning body shrunk to a thin black column, and even as the last embers disappeared in the clouds, his ashes quavered with the spasms of joy.

Good Decency in Government

"All the upholstery is inextricably soiled," said Aunt Barn. The tongue-tied twins had wrought their usual oblivion, and presently they were on a Greyhound giving each other the finger-and-thumb circle in their laps. "Well, it was Mardi Gras," said Gunny. "The death and decay permeates through this culture. It goes all the way to City Hall!" He was right. The Mayor, an equine-looking gentleman with a nasty stammer, had thrice petitioned the state Board of Decisions to rename the town Thousand Wasps, after the frightening event bearing the same name from textbooks of local history. "No one trusts that son of a bitch," sang the jingle of his opponent's popular TV commercial, to the tune of the "Slogan's Shield" theme.

Bob Fahrenheit was a stocky, belching idiot, and his campaign was soaked through with his boorish manner like an outdoor couch. "Double-stuffed fuckin' oreos in every aisle!" he would scream. Gunny and Aunt Barn loved it. The Pallbearer Party had held power for six tours of the locust, and the old country folk were fed up with their panicked gloom. Gunny even volunteered for Fahrenheit, passing out inflatable sex dolls tramp-stamped with his initials to the foresters and their sons. But the foresters popped their dolls, tossing the limp girls at Gunny's feet.

"What's the matter?" Gunny said. "Not keen on a more jocular milieu in the halls of government?"

The foresters and forester's sons formed a phalanx around him. "We don't take kindly to the opposition designs to bring in freckled boys from the northpastures to clean-cut these timbers and make a mess of things with lawn tractor shows and dog-measuring contests," read the leader of Foresters and Forester's Sons. "And further, though the incumbent leadership indeed bears a distinct aura of morbidity, we feel that its ouster would only bring woe down upon the Foresters and Foresters' sons, who hitherto have led lives of great comfort and joy despite the grim disposition of their government."

Gunny had been discouraged and from then on, he kept his civic concerns to the hearth. On weeknights, Aunt Barn would fix a pot of pond eels and Gunny would prepare lectures on civic jubilation and the virtue of levity in government. On weekends, Gunny and Aunt Barn saw to the tongue-tied twins, who got on each other's nerves with pranks and carrying on. The aura of conviviality which Gunny and Aunt Barn fought to transport into affairs of government was at least unabated in the home. Later the tongue-tied twins would win international renown with their jointly authored children's book, "The Truck that Fucks."

Orientation Day

“Here at Tubford and Relatives we value the hard work of our file clerks, which is why we provide them with a ruby-studded tiara to be worn through orientation week and then temporarily revoked pending their first positive performance review. Does that make sense?”

The manager’s eyes are closed during the last sentence and he is exhaling heavily through his nostrils. Denise does an ironic military salute to ease the pressure. The manager doesn’t budge.

Denise adjusts and says, “Yes, I believe it does. The tiara is sort of a probationary bejeweled cap to signify potential, but at the end of the day, the tiara is earned.”

Denise’s phone screen lights up with a message: “Dont fuck this up. your father is nowhere to be found and I have Front Trimming in the Am so I need \$13.50.” From Momma.

“Yes that’s exactly right,” says the manager. “Let me show you to the break room.”

Denise has the jitters something awful. Momma gave her a Red Bull with her bologna sandwich and it is really doing a number on her. Her teeth are going like tap dancers and her knees are a blur.

The break room is all sheet metal. The floor rumbles under Denise and the manager’s feet. Two bony, quivering teens in tiaras cower over piles of pasta at one table. At another, a fat manager cusses to himself while highlighting passages in an enormous binder. Besides the tables, there is only a garbage can and a water cooler. The manager smiles knowingly at Denise, and prances over to one of the metal walls checkered from floor to ceiling with panels about the size and shape of PO Boxes. He claws open one metal drawer embedded in the wall, and digs up a black aluminum plate. Then he puts his finger in the air to say, “now watch this.” The manager then pries open another slot in the wall, which opens out like a postal service box. There is a little scoop attached to a string, and with the scoop he shovels out a large helping of spaghetti from the box and shuts the door.

“You’re going to want to fuel up before you hit the files,” says the manager.

Behind the wall of the break room, in the kitchen to which the drawers open, Tom toils away. The only lights in the kitchen are the blue flames under six vats of red sauce which spit and gurgle. Tom heaves dense thickets of spaghetti into pools, where he sprays them down with a hose. Lizards and field mice skitter around on the stone floor. Recipes, scrawled in an indecipherable hieroglyphic script, litter the walls.

Tom was first indentured by Tubford and Relatives in the year 1912. He sought the favor of Baron Klaus Tubford, known in town as a magnanimous lender, for a fourteen dollar loan to build a small partition between his half acre of grazing land and the neighbor's sweet grasses. Not able to read or write, he returned to his village with a contract that he passed over to his barrister for review. The contract stipulated an interest rate of 2,000%. The barrister, in Tubford's pocket with the rest of the bar, gave Tom a favorable assessment of the terms.

No sooner was the wall built than Tom was placed under arrest. Ruling from his hospital bed in the Tubford Rehabilitative Institution for Invalids and Onanists, the judge ordered Tom to serve six months of labor for the Tubford family to repay the debt.

Six months in the slop dungeon turned to nine, to a year, to five years. To pay the interest on his hole behind the ice box, Tom amassed more and more debt to the Tubford family. And then there was the incident in which Tom, in a fit of night terror, boiled Klaus Tubford's dear son Heinrich in meat sauce. Ruling from his hospital bed in the New Tubford Rehabilitative Institution for Invalids and Onanists, the judge sentenced Tubford to a hundred and fifty years servitude. "You will not bring back my boy, my savant, my darling little Debussy," Countess Tubford exclaimed in a stirring statement, "but you may yet restore your honor by giving your life over to the service of others."

One-hundred and five years later, Tom's spaghetti recipe remains the jewel of the break room. "Indubitably," one file clerk proclaimed, "the most splendid dish I've yet savored." Praised for its delicate balance of flavors and aromas, the pasta has been the proximate cause of several workers' termination—it tends to have a soporific effect when enjoyed with indulgence.

The dish was so popular, in fact, that young Gerhardt Tubford offered Tom an early release in exchange for the recipe, which he wagered could greatly increase his riches. In response, Tom merely grunted and closed the chute. To relinquish the secret would be to deface his very integrity. Besides, after a lifetime of cooking spaghetti in darkness, Tom was hardly acclimated to the free world.

Until death, spaghetti would remain the private passion of this misunderstood beast. And pacing around his sleek apartment in fits of avarice, Gerhard Tubford would drive himself mad over Tom's rebuffed venture. He would fall at 25 to self-inflicted hanging, at noontime, known to all at Tubford and Relatives—from senior management to new clerks like Denise—as “spaghetti time.”

A Survey of Modern History

2016

The Internet Frog, having done as his disciples required, retreats to his fetid swamp. Wispy nightgaunts chirp and belch in a musicless dirge. Millions of teenagers, their eyes bloodshot and hands clammy, must now dispose of their shooting-game computers.

A mother pours Cabernet Sauvignon into a spray bottle. She is wearing a racist totem pole costume. “Hideous bag,” mutters NewBloodRising1488. “Rotgut stool pigeon of the decaying liberal order.” His pants are smeared with fluids.

●

Dagger the Largest, now king of the enormous farm that grows Deals, sets out to induct a hotshot gaggle of disgraced plague nurses and ecclesiastical fixers to govern in his perpetual absence. Millions of people are beaten to a paste by tribalists caked in drying cement. Dagger rides around on a rhinestone plank carried by two idiots in satin coveralls.

“I want to smell her shirt.” He points to a widow. Her shirt is wrested from her body and she is kicked.

At the Interactive Gymnasium, Dagger will play “Winner's Toss,” a game designed for him. His Head Economic Bishop redirects all journeymen's weekly pay to the Fondler's Defense Fund.

2017

Hilda Roland Klint burns “Eat Pray Love” with a long cigarette she borrowed from a harelicked staffer. Her face is the color of a tombstone. Her husband Brill, the musak maestro and disgraced former chief executive is lying underneath her chair, wheezing and trembling with a wide grin. Sunglassed advisors are huddled around her, retweeting Black celebrities and using hand sanitizer.

A torrent of memories washes over her. She remembers when she threw up raspberry milk at the state fair. She remembers her husband’s many impunities, all the dinner parties in which his other arm seemed out to lunch. She remembers the storms: sending battalions to loot and kill as the black tempest blotted all action from view. She remembers her own birth--a brisk affair, just a small nuisance for her father. She planned it that way, never one for a big to-do.

“Totally epic,” posts a young advisor while staring directly into the sun. “Wow factor. Out of the roof. No chains.”

●

Members of the newsmedia convene at Niceleaf, a fresh-forward dining experience recently erected in the place of the shuttered Goodplant. All order the Good Bacteria Bowl, a bramble of moss and vegetation. “It brings up a lot of negative feelings for me, these protests.” All hum in agreement. “Some of these people share qualities with my father: a certain loud voice and a distrusting demeanor.” The media person is crying now. “And we all know who else possesses such traits,” her colleague offers, touching her hand.

She is referring to Dagger the Largest, who is on a business trip to one of his all-girl high schools. His boyservants wheel a gilded cart full of corsets and activated charcoal through the halls. “Some of these girls are going to grow up and appear on television,” Dagger says, his voice as always like a sick, inside-out mouse announcing a nuke test over a megaphone. “The very sad thing is that some of them are not going to grow up and appear on television.” At the POTUS PALACE FLOTUS WING, Pearlescence is monitored in her sensory deprivation tank by a young boy named Tobias. A sort of a raw deal had been struck after young Dagger the Smallest tased the stammering child in the boy’s school latrine. In the Leadership Logistics Office, a member of Vice President Viceroy’s underclergy frantically approves armament contracts from a nine-foot stack of papers. Viceroy is in his study, cutting all of the children out of magazine advertisements.

Home at his apartment in Takoma Park, the ASSS (Acting Assistant Secretary to the Secretary of State) Churro Madrigal tensed his buttocks at the receipt of a memo from Glovetree. "In regards to the ongoing initiative to hasten the liberation of the Latinx people of Nicaragua from the paternalist tyranny of the Llevas regime, we must convene the Joint Chiefs this afternoon to discuss 'the Chile option'." The language, menacing, winked like a sniper scope. Did the President mean to suggest that Nicaragua would meet the fate of 1973? There was no telling what card would be plucked from history's cartoon deck. Thick, wobbly cards. In the hand of the dealer they looked normal, but up close, they were all Jokers and then the dealer was a bone-pyramid crowned by a rumpled suit jacket.

Glovetree, a sickly woman with a farm tycoon's passion for fertilizing earth with bodies, was perpetually gathering the somnolent Joint Chiefs to protect some moribund industry from a torrent of heatstruck reaction. The Nicaraguans were by now wigged-out folk meteorologists, shooting each other's dogs to protect languorous persimmon bushes. Madrigal imagined two bruised, skinny operatives flicking cards at a piss-soaked *abuela* tied to a rocking chair. Wisps of smoke and blackdust from the Terrafire pestered in through the windows of the DuPont Circle taphouses where four of the Joint Chiefs played in their Dire Straits cover band. General Pontiac would lick his upper lip in libidinal satisfaction with his own sleek handling of the waterlike slide solo in "Sultans of Swing." The next morning he would be on the phone with General Dynamics negotiating a contract to fortify Israeli Bantustans. "Omg have you seen this I'm literally dying," Pontiac texted his partner Donovan the Dogwalker. Attached was a clip of a Turkish child eating raw eggs, shell and all, for the amusement of blonde infantrymen.

Madrigal got the text, too. He recognized the tungsten shrapnel at the child's feet. What were they doing in Turkey? Was this YouTube video the fruit of the labor of war? Everywhere they went, doctrinal factions and religious clans sprung out of the hot sand and offered themselves up to the thirsty eardrums of men in dark suits on the other side of the planet. Furtive whispering reified the chaos. Madrigal was now seated in the center of his roomy apartment. He was nude. The bruises made his flesh look like cold pizza. "I am life," he whisperchanted. "I am death. I am every killed child in the Far East. I am both Dulles brothers rejoined in utero. I am Adolf Hitler. I am Young Thug. I am homeless. I have no eyes to speak. I have no mouth to see." He went on like this. Roshi Akira of the Third Mind Temple of Ascension told him to do this in the Business Park where the fat old master had expectantly touched his belly as though Madrigal were with child. "You have to show yourself, using your own powers of mind and association, the crazed tapdancer inside your broken skin. It is not you. But it is not not-you."

Presently, en route to the Gold Room, a text from Leila: "Do I frighten you?". "Are you literally afraid of me? Bc Polo said you saw me at the Chipotle on K and pretended you

didn't and hastened to leave before he even could get lunch so I didn't see you back are you such a fucking coward you'll starve your own kid just to avoid awkwardness." She doesn't know anything about suffering, Madrigal gurgled half-aloud into the Pentagon's warm water fountain water. There was 9-11 shit everywhere in this building. But that day felt more like *Ocean's Eleven* now. A heist, a goof. The ironical honeymouth of George Clooney. Now it's been 64 years of war and piracy, a Mandelbrot set of earthly terrors into which Madrigal and his adolescent goons tossed cured meats, strawberries, and Spanish wine. "I'm sorry you're upset. I have to go into a meeting." Madrigal did a little jerk of his head on reading his own sent message, not smitten with its steely crypticism. A meeting with *the President*, he imagined her thinking. He imagined her imagining him leafing through headshots of Wahhabi clerics and stamping them with the Totenkopf over a heady pilsner.

2091

The bandaged men were to soon be relieved of the dome's unceasing silence. "A little ditty" forthcame. "Shaq slayed the demon of lust. He rode on a horse full of pus. And whatever he said made the steeple bells red, and he did so with hardly a cuss." The bandaged men clapped. "Good Shaq! Good Shaq!" Shaquille O'Neal was a net-toss victor from the time when the ground was still wet. The bandaged men screamed most days, but could be set at ease by limericks about luminaries of the damp years.

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Harge Feltman wheels his barrow full of scrambled eggs towards the Chowder Hall. The mess of eggs has collected dust and soot on its way over from the kitchen, and as such, it's begun to resemble a yellow wool sweater. Sweater or no, the fellas will "scarf" it down, in keeping with textile metaphors. Harge thinks that thought with a grin that leaks a little rivulet of spittle which lands on his fifth-generation Tweety Bird shirt and quickly bores a hole into the polyester. "What's up, doc?" The caption reads. Wrong cartoon--the shirt probably came from some Asian country who didn't know any better. There are more Asian countries than ever before, since High Chief liberated the Chinese mainland. So hard to keep them all straight, Harge thinks. His back hurts. He brings the barrow to heel and sits on a smooth stone. Although, maybe not, maybe keep going come to think of it, as he can hear the fellas' wife-related oaths grow louder with their deranged hunger. Sigh. Back to it. "Ugly fuckin' wife! Wife won't work!" Tousled cats look like electrocuted guards in front of long-shuttered shoe outlets and artisanal candle stores. Things will only get worse and worse when he gets to the Chowder Hall, the fellas smash plates over their heads in rapturous excitement. They can't fuckin' wait for eggs!

Back at home, Harge has barely got his walloping frame in the door before he's lapping up a brisk drink. A hunk of infection the size and color of a macadamia nut dances on the surface of the fluid. His son, Jogger, 17, has two broken legs wrapped up in shirts and watches the TV channel on the linoleum. "*Stocks* is on," he croaks. *Stocks* is a reality show about futures trading. It's hosted by Lil' Crusty: young pizza entrepreneur, rapper, success story. The host before him died in a Hotel Room Accident and the one before that died the same way.

The Foretold Event and Its Features in Full Relief

Three rather homely young nurses are gnawing with their molars on peanut brittle in the children's temporary-sick-barn in the evening. It is hard to eat—most of them are RN-DD (Regular Nurse - Dental Donors). While the BCE (Bovine Catatonia Epidemic) is a plague thus far attributable only to despair (Broel and Whispermint 1998), it has demanded VMIDCD (Voluntary Minimally-Invasive Dental Calcium Donations) to continue progressing when it comes to dental strength in Youth.

Dental strength is critical to muscular strength, in turn critical to the maintenance of a healthy stock of warriors should events transpire as semi-hourly silent radio warnings seem to portent. (Albeit, it should be noted for the historical record, this command in a spirit of jocularly wholly unbecoming for the gravity of which these events, should they transpire, surely merit the respect of any man of judgment.)

The nurses' teeth--and these are sickly nurseteeth!--chip on the brittle and so it is that a faint white halo of dental dissipation surrounding their feet is visible chimneywise above. "No bother," the nurses say. "Don't need good teeth to tend to boys' molars, I reckon?" "Aye, we've got the pictures." The sticky amber candy like violin resin. Grinding chompers, the uncomely lot of them, and the squeak, like the smooth shoes at the bowling lane as girls scoot round to curtsy in an ironical air while the men laugh suspicious. Benzedrine (1-phenylpropan-2-amine) helps if they can suck root beer lollipops to curb pathological dental diminution.

Should it need to be known in the case of the transpiration of events, the nurses are Jacqueline, Cosima and Marguerite, and they share a dormitory in the old grist mill, scant but for candles, parchments of brittle, and the wall hangings: portraits of great physicians and physiocrats. Grand doctors the lot of them...Josef Breuer, Bill Reich, Hesy-Ra, Sushruta,

Rabelais, Rudolph Steiner, Lister, Hippocrates, Ibn Rušd, RD Laing, Sextus Empiricus. It should go without saying to any man of medicine who knows the fads of the day among the girls that featured also were Richard Burton's diagrams from *The Anatomy of Melancholy* and Thomas Eakins' magisterial depiction of the great "Gross Clinic," a vision of gruesome miracles performed in the theater of Dr. Samuel D. Gross.

Fear this: the children's temporary sick-barn can be reached on foot only by passing through the pastures. The nurses, tall as trees in this night, lay into the loamy mud barefooted, for it is said by al-Ghazali that cows possess our human faculties for hearing in the night. Naturally it is in the nature of cattle to be indolent just as it is in the nature of nurses to revere the great physicians. But these cattle are possessed of something like Bacchus deep in the caverns of their animalia, in their slumped postures—some appallingly coquettish, some supine with their legs to the heavens—and their common and natural lowing is ragged, tremulous and overdrawn. (The tortured and beatific fatigue of cows.) Underneath the gags and the strained conviviality of the hokey radiomen, as when they drew long and nervous from their cigarettes, anybody with ears to hear could hear the fright.

But all sorts of terrors give way to games and play as we know and cherish; cruel games and play—how else can we face it? The nurses spent away their evenings spooning up liberally from the laudanum, and they smacked and hit each other, with increasing vigor, to the tragic dirge of Handel's *Sarabande*. It was inevitable that Marguerite, the smallest, would take the first passage. Hysteria, screaming, chants from the Upanishads—Marguerite's indistinguishable from those of the others—quickly and almost in quiet unison gave way to the pliers. What was Marguerite, all bones and skin, to do? What were the *other two* to do, I pose? Wait for eternity upon the dawning good cheer of the cattle? The notion is the very definition of hullabaloo and the enemy of good sense.