

The Folk Bird Melody

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Animals see things what men do not. Since Noah, the animals knew what didn't need to be spoken directly from God to man, of the coming days. Of the rains. Of the floods. Of the catastrophes. They already knew and understood it. No telling was necessary.

And with Birds, you have animals that are the only ones that come from below, and can rise upwards, where heavenly matters are being concerned.

Somewhere in Philadelphia Pennsylvania, a house, a cream-colored mansion, jots out of the greenery around, that stirs like a giant filled with ill will. It sits upright and can't sleep. It feels intoxicated, but not by alcohol, but those occupying this behemoth like lice that do so happen to be filled with alcohol. Are drunk. Biting and infecting its host. At this late hour of night of 2 in the morning.

The scenery looks to be a Henry Clive mat, with colors having an ethereal dreamy quality, making the known world seem to be reanimated in an unknown sense as if in another dimension. It is 1933. Much of the world is seeing hard times, but here, it is forever October 28. And this world and everything in it are Egypt. The world is a desert. It's the black lands of Kemet. And the gods are beings with animal heads and human bodies. The house is a pyramid of the dead. But yet no one alive inside understands this metaphysic. Or maybe they do but choose not to fully acknowledge it.

Montague Sparrow eyes his sister, being the absolute harlot that she is. Sitting there in a davenport, naked, except for her jewelry and accessories, and a man's head nestled between her legs, like the man's head found in a driving wheel, in that one song about a woman in the pines. She is reading James Joyce's Ulysses with a monocular. And Montague Sparrow, the 24-year-old well to do, can't stand this sight anymore. He makes himself known with his cronies hidden in the perverted shadows.

"How Goddamn far you plannin' on taking this?"

Her sister gets up to answer.

"Until I make all the whores of Babylon jealous."

Montague Sparrow bares his teeth. Says nothing further. And leaves.

It's the following day. Montague left the party from last night. He's been driving south with two of his boys. Jimbo and Jonsy. In a Duesenberg Model J. His cherry red J-Bird.

"Where we headed?" Asks Jimbo.

"Georgia... I told you that already."

"You did, but never said where in Georgia."

"Where the Devil lives down in Georgia... where else?"

Smears Montague, playfully, back at his boys, with his circular shades on. Wearing a straw boater hat. And an all raccoon fur coat, stretching from his Adam's apple to his ankles. Like a young Roald Amundsen, first to reach the South Pole in the Antarctic; a man that went the way how all explorers wish to go the way, disappearing without a trace amidst adventure. Suffice to say, they were somewhere around the coast. Maybe near Savannah, Georgia. Then again, maybe not. Georgia was a bewildering state easy to get lost in. All around, the boys could see the weeping trees with their Spanish moss. Weeping. Simply weeping. As if in these wetlands, the trees were the ones watering the ground to flood and not the skies.

"We're meeting up with Roland." Finally lets out Montague. The boys of his let out a groan and growl. They don't like Roland. Neither does Montague. But, what other reason would they have going down south to Georgia. Had just met the odd boy with the crooked nose last night at the Friday night party, that had shown Montague some stuff that made Montague mad he never thought up himself. Roland had left early, but had told Montague where to find him, if he was ever looking for some real "Spaß," as some of the Doughboys had learned to put it over there.

The car passes a large gnarled oak covered in Spanish moss. One that a Mourning Dove lands and begins to sing its song.

This is the Folk Bird.

A Red Cardinal and a Blue Jay also land nearby.

"Must you always sing that song." Asks the Blue Jay.

The Folk Bird stops.

“What is it this time?” Ask the Red Cardinal.

The Folk Bird speaks:

“Men, those men... there is trouble to be started with them.”

Unlike the other Birds, this one has a keen sense when it comes to the affairs of men. All Birds have their own business about them. But the one Bird that deals with the business of men. Which is why it mourns as much as it does.

“I don’t want to hear of them.” Says the Blue.

“There’s always trouble to be had with them. Always. But, why must it be of your affairs?” Asks the Red.

Folk Bird says nothing as it lowers its head.

“God made the world of men and women, made them like Himself. And made ours. Let the affairs of theirs not be our affairs.” Says Blue.

“I agree. All I see of them fills me with anger. Why mourn so much, as yours do. What attachments do you have, that cannot be broken?” Says Red.

“No attachments.” Says the Folk Bird. “I choose... I simply choose.”

The Red Cardinal and Blue Jay shake their heads and fly away.

“I don’t know, Montague, Roland didn’t rub me the right way.” Discloses Jonsy.

“The boy’s fun.” Simply answers Montague. “More fun than the both of you.”

Coming from Philadelphia, they had been driving all night south; they did this from time to time. Boys of their ilk went further than most boys their age would dream. Always seeking... what might be best not to seek. But, idle hands. Simply idle hands. Which boys of their ilk always seemed to be in the possessions of.

A premonition then came to the Folk Bird, and now knew something. As it took off, and flew southwest.

It came upon a house now. A more run-down sort. Like a discarded scarecrow on the side of the road, that was made to scare no Crows because of some esoteric feature that managed to attract them instead, now laying with a murder of such cooing and cawing all over him at the scene of the

crime. Inside, a boy and his father occupied. The Mourning Dove began to sing. As the negro boy inside, opened his eyes, and looked at his father. The boy's name was Joby. His father had been sitting there all night, with the same facial expression. On a wooden squeaky chair, his left leg over a counter, his right trying to unbalance himself on purpose. When the boy had fallen asleep in a corner on the floor, his father held this position. As he awoke just now, there he was again. Time never moved for the father. Time didn't exist, even if in Hell, time most certainly does compared to Heaven. His sights on nothing and everything. No thoughts. No notions. All was nil except the morning and the Mourning Bird. The boy got up and left the house. When the Folk Bird saw this, it saw its next premonition. And took off.

"Montague, we lost." Says Jonsy.

Montague views the delta lands around the area. Wetlands as if a world that is sunken, and the inhabitants of this world are only insects that can fly and seek beings not of this world. Fly, land, and suck their blood. The worse being the deer flies, that would sit on you, and immediately begin chewing your flesh as ferociously as a mad dog chewing a rubber tire for no Goddamn reason, Montague smacks one on the back of his neck where it had landed. Many parasites buzzing in the air, in the month of May. The car is stopped. The boys are tiresome. Montague won't admit to it.

"You promised us fun, Montague." Jimbo mopes.

"And I shall—deliver!"

Montague springs forth, across Jimbo's peripherals, pointing at a fixation. Girls!

Young ones.

No older than 15.

"Take over driving." Says Montague to Jonsy.

Trusting Jonsy and not Jimbo. Montague rummages into the back of the topless convertible to set up his suitcased gramophone, winding it up, setting up the needle, and setting a record to play.

"Birds will live peacefully with other Birds.

Us Blue Jays, with Red Cardinals, and then there's yours, Mourning Dove.

We live together in peace.

We do so also with the Crows and Ravens.

We do so even with the Hawks and Falcons and Eagles, that wish to hunt us and kill us.

But there's an order to those things.

With all animals, there's order.

But with men...

They ate from that Tree of Knowledge. And now understand things we do not. And what they understand drives them mad.

As if the Devil is in them now."

"Yes." Replies The Folk Bird.

The Red Cardinal looks towards these men and also contributes its understanding: "I already know what is to happen,

I see an instigation.

These men are to be a catalyst of events to come.

The white skinned and the black skinned men in these lands... can't live in peace. They have their differences and grievances and remorse. And the Devil that is in them, won't let them do so.

They seek to live in peace as of now. But they will fail. Their dream of Utopia and all brothers and sisters living in harmony... will fail.

And they will grow murderous amongst themselves.

They will seek to destroy each other until none are left.

I don't need your sense of attachments to men, to know this, Mourning Dove."

The Folk Bird sighs and replies.

"I know, none of these things are at all a mystery.

But... I must bear witness. It is my choice to do so."

Music plays.

Jonsy drives.

And Jimbo spectates Montague at work as he stands in the convertible spaces over the driver seat where Jonsy is hidden. This is actually a routine of Sparrows he's pulled many times when dealing with wooing young girls. Where he'll pretend he is the one driving the car while standing in the seat and with his left foot over the wheel. Jonsy will be just below him hunched into the seat to where he isn't visible to any pedestrians. Looking like some romanticized Buccaneer captain standing tall on his ship sailing into the wind. Young girls are dumb and easily enchanted. Thinks the enchanter. Montague is now bewitching the young girls. And he is whistling while the music is playing. Only whistling. And this Sparrow can whistle almost as good as any real Sparrow.

"Oh, I never." A blonde amongst the three girls speaks. She is 14 years old. Her cheeks are now as rosy-red as Gretel's were when she and Hansel first came upon the gingerbread house. The 24-year-old is enticed by what he sees in the 14-year-old. He chooses her. And only her. Since she's also the only non-brunette of this triad of luscious southern hospitality, whose bare skin is pink and fuzzy like the skin of peaches.

And with boys of Montague's ilk, it is just that quick and easy. Unlike all the other boys where those three girls are from. Since Montague possesses the touch of the Prince. And no touch of a Pauper. Hamlet, be his name.

Some hours pass.

Still with the baking sun.

Still with the buzzing insects.

Smack! And the deer flies.

Still with stillness after everything not as such had transpired.

And now the catalyst is consummated.

"All right, Folk Bird, we are interested now of this story. We will also bear witness with you, if only really to persuade you to eventually abandon being this way. For all I see is futility...

Who is that now." Says the Blue.

There is now a group of men from a nearby town mustering at the location, since word in these parts spread fast. There are eight men in total. Even if it's been a few hours since Montague and his boys appeared on the outskirts of the Georgian town of Oubliette, word travels fast, like the word of Crows. They drive their Fords slowly up to the scene to do some investigating. Two vehicles. Almost like premonition. They also had the foresight of knowing what these boys would be about.

"That man there, his name is Duvall." Speaks the Folk Bird.

He is a bald man with a head like a white round rock landscape fixture, trailblazers in 1866 would pass in The Great Planes, give it a name, and never come across again. Corpulent. In his 40s. And a man that saw Belleau Wood.

"I've seen these men before." Says Blue.

"So have I, and the things they do. Although, wearing white sheets from their feet up to their faces which they'll have covered." Says Red.

"Yes, although, they don't usually do what they're about to do with those of their own ilk. With such boys."

"Howdy." Says Montague, now awake to see them.

Duvall doesn't answer back.

"Daddy... no, daddy... I didn't mean to—"

"Shut up! Worthless young whore, if only your mother was still alive to see this." Says the father of the blonde.

Then begins smacking her around like he would his boys, and yet never like this, and especially never with her. Her nose is now bleeding as he drags her away by her hair. The two other girls run off and off to the side, and are unsure what to do and where to go. All three girls are naked.

"Howdy." Says Montague, again.

Like in a western talkie he had seen recently, starring a relative newcomer by the name of John Wayne. Then smiles.

Duvall... almost does himself.

"I'm sorry, we seem to be lost. We're from up north in Philly. I guess a bunch of Yankees to you."

Their eyes intensify with those words.

“We’re here looking for a boy from these parts. Name is Roland, Roland O’ Dochartaigh. His family are well known, I reckon’, in these parts. And well to do. Such as mine are. I am Montgomery Sparrow.

Though the ladies like to call me Montague... as in the Romeo sort.”

Montague announces while wiggling his eyebrows. He’s not afraid, even though he should be. Duvall, steps forward. Montgomery’s boys are now awake too and growing unnerved. These men, two of them, are carrying double barrel shotguns.

“Howdy, you know, I’ve been through these parts. Whorin’. Thievin’. Killin’ even. Ran with a man by the name of... Charles Arthur Floyd, Pretty Boy Floyd. You might have heard of him.”

Duvall now smiles, and takes a step forward. He isn’t carrying a barrel. But the man next to him is. Montgomery stands now in the convertible, he is still wearing the raccoon skin, yet nothing else underneath, and Duvall’s men can see him with his 10-inch pecker in display. Hanging down like a serpent in a tree lowering itself to greet any young ladies passing by. Hung like the other folk reputation proceeds that live in these parts. Actually 10-inches, for the boy is well endowed in that way. Unfortunately, making him believe also in others.

“Oh, I’ve ran with some hard-boiled acts. Machine Gun Kelly, you might have heard of him?”

Duvall with another step.

“Dillinger, maybe.”

Duvall is now smiling almost as heartily as this peckerhead in front of him.

“I’ve been with all sorts of women. Even Bonnie, before Clyde got with her.”

“Is the boy stupid?” Asks Blue.

“Is he crazy?” Asks Red.

“Both... but more than just that, he doesn’t care. Or, does, too much! He lives for these moments. The more dangerous, the better, no matter to what end.”

Replies the Dove.

And then it happens. One shot. Two shots. Jonsy and Jimbo are now dead.

“I’m guessing you don’t believe me for anything I say.” Says Montgomery, frowning.

Says the boy, that had been waiting for this end, all his life.

“No, I believe you’re a hard act in the end, in your own special way. You a lying son-of-a-b—! But you finally managed to lie your way into speaking the truth.” Discloses Duvall, finally.

Montague Sparrow again smiles.
Three shots.

Usually, with such shots, Birds in trees would take off. But there are three as of now that do not. Duvall looks at the tree with the three Birds, and now understands something he isn’t meant to.

The three Birds then do fly off.

Duvall watches the three do so. Strange! He’s never seen a Mourning Dove, a Blue Jay, and a Red Cardinal, sitting next to each other, almost having a liaison together. He then understands something monumental is taking place.

“Duvall... these boys spoke of Roland.” Concerns one of Duvall’s men. Duvall faces him. “I thought that crazy son-of-a-b— had left for good. Left for New Orleans, Old Man Moreau said.”

“I thought too, that is what the old man told me.” Finishes Duvall.

The Dove has now found him. All three Birds land in a tree.

“Is that, that Roland fellow?” Asks Blue.

“Yes.”

It was a sunny day before. Bright. Very bright. Especially during the time of the shootings. The weather doesn’t really care for the theatrics of men: if it wants to blaze a hot sun, it will do that. If it chooses to bunker down with dark clouds and hard rain, it will do that too. Although, sometimes, it will make exceptions. Nature is its own animal, of its own affairs... but sometimes it can’t help but take notice of certain sentients. Especially one such as this.

No one in Georgia could tell you how the clouds moved in with such speed and volume, but they did. It was now almost dark enough to seem like nighttime. The trees in Georgia have a very haughty canopy. As if they're hiding something. Mystery and magic. And definitely madness. For madness is the secret ingredient of the other two.

Roland O' Dochartaigh was wearing his white shoes, white slacks, white buttoned shirt, white vest, and black bowler, he always would. He'd wear these items all year round. And had been doing so for the last two years straight. And never had he washed them once. Yet, somehow, the garments stayed white as snow. Although, they did produce a certain unmistakable odor that had too much pedigree to say it was bad. Like the smell of ancient manure of a fossilized turd. It embodied an arsenal of aromas that were too rare on this earth to want to discard. You would discard silicon and carbon; you wouldn't discard plutonium. Even when the consequences of exposure to such an element would be deadly. Although, they still stank bad. Still very much so.

He was standing at an ancient black wooden enclosure, you couldn't tell what would be its purpose: a church, a barn, a store, a house, not even the builders of the structure could remember after all the years it had been there. Let's just say a house for now, of some progenitor's progenitor. As if, a building older than the earth around it. As if, in the beginning, there was this house and the word, and not the word of the One above, but that which is below. This house and the void. But, currently, no void, but plenty of greenery.

Roland yawned.

And began scratching his neck.

And nicked at his nose, that strayed west of his face, with his index finger. He was a long-faced feller, with staunch black hair and black tanks for eyebrows. With a sort of ugliness that hid behind youthfulness, how Byam Shaw depicted the Jezebel. Roland seemed like Montague in a way. He had his own cronies. Two boys of his ilk. Yet the boys of his were practically nameless and faceless. They had faces. But ones you'd forget the second you looked away and remembered again the second you looked back. The same could be said of their actual names.

There was a vehicle parked near them, an old and ugly jalopy. The three got into the vehicle and drove off. The house. The house they were in before, now smelled also peculiar inside. It stank of tomatoes. Rotted tomatoes.

Joby was now with his cousins; two boys that were older than him. Joby is 8. His cousins were roughly 13 or 14 years old. Barefooted. Wearing jaded rags of rotted blue colorations. But with very elaborately woven sweetgrass hats that sat on their heads like cornucopias, three sizes too big. That were jaunted to the sides and all over like in some Alexandre Dumas Musketeer adventure.

“I sense evil doing.” Says the Blue.

“I sense it, too.” Says Red.

Here is something interesting: animals might have no understanding of good and evil, but they know it when they see it. Almost better than those that do understand themselves. And they know what they can do better than also themselves. A tornado has no knowing of what it does. But when the wind changes, and the Birds feel it, they take off before they can fall victim to it, collected up in its path.

This is why dogs bark at some men and not at some men, with no discernable reason.

When the animals see evil, to them, it's only a force of nature, how a tornado is, and they know it's bad and brings death and destruction, and their aim will be to avoid it. Only men and women will do the opposite, and give it a chance to speak for itself. And then, maybe even like what they hear. And more than they or the Devil, or the angels above, and maybe even God is willing to admit.

Although, something peculiar could be said about The Folk Bird. Since it seemed to understand it all. But truth be told, only vicariously. Which is the nature of those that take an oath to take witness.

The old and ugly jalopy now pulls up next to the boys.

Joby... looks inside, and sees Roland.

Roland is driving.

Roland is eating a tomato.

And as if it was an apple or peach.

Joby has never seen anyone bite into a tomato in this way, since tomatoes aren't the sort of fruit or vegetable eaten by itself. He doesn't even put any salt on it, which has somewhat of an effect to make them desirable to be eaten this way.

"Where you boys headed?" Roland says.

Duvall and his men pull into the town of Oubliette. Two Fords. Also a 3rd now that was a Model A pickup with objects in the back kept in large burlap sacks. Brought to be put into the furnace of the town's mortuary.

Oubliette was one of those towns, even a born and raised Georgian would say "where" when asked about it. Since the densely wooded state was also a maze you were never going to remember where every trail came and went. And sometimes, as if a maze that was always changing, being drawn and redrawn, appearing and reappearing, like that German tale of a village called Germelshausen. There, then not there, and never again for a hundred years or so. Population 451. No signs. Never a sign for such a backwoods town. Just how the inhabitants would want it.

"Dammit, Duvall, I thought we chased off Roland and his boys for good." Says Duvall's second, Deputy Collins.

Duvall doesn't respond.

He felt, maybe, best to go up to Old Man Moreau's plantation to pay Roland's father a visit. Again. Since he last spoke with him. And demanded his son never to return, if he ever wanted to see him alive again.

"Nobody chases a boy off that way for him to come back and never the hard feelings. You beat the Hell outta that boy, and I heard he never had his nose reset."

"When Abbot came to me and spoke of three boys he'd seen driving around lost in the outskirts, I thought he meant Roland and his boys." Says Duvall, deep in thought.

Like a man with a mind set on a chess game, even though he might be better suited for playing checkers.

"I did too."

Duvall then looked into Deputy Collins' eyes to see if the man was catching on. He wasn't, not yet. He then looked away. Both men standing outside the Sheriff's office. Duvall being the Sheriff. Plus, other things in town.

"Well, do you think Roland and his boys are here now?" Asks Collins.

Duvall... wasn't sure. Hoped not.

"This Yankee wouldn't come here on his own volition. And mention Roland. Unless Roland set him up to it." Collins says.

And Collins was finally catching up to Duvall's own deductions. Duvall continued to say nothing, waiting to see what else his second would reckon to say about the matter.

"Do you think Roland did it as a prank against you, bringing a man similar to himself... I mean... I really thought it would be...?"

"I know, I know. Enough. Let's not lose our heads just yet over this." Finally lets out Duvall and closes the matter, and walks off.

Duvall... now felt secretive over the matter, and wasn't interested even in his own men knowing too much. Whatever that was there to know. Something was being orchestrated. Duvall could feel it. And, didn't like it. The day was proceeding odd enough, even with the killings. Death isn't an easy thing. But it can become easy. Like in war. Like the one Duvall was in not too long ago. The world could kill itself, and it wouldn't matter. For even with all sides dead, the sun still shined. The Birds still sang. As the earth drank the blood of men and forgot their creation.

Life is like a Shakespearean theater, with all men and women mere actors, there but not there. Half alive. With some other entity, around or inside them. Governing them. And their choices. According to an inescapable narrative that led like train tracks to and from all destinations. Although, Duvall wasn't a spiritual man anymore. That side was dead to him now. And his soul was a place of rotted flesh in the earth being devoured by the worms. Hundreds and hundreds of worms. Not right now, of course. But eventually. Which was just as good as now for him.

All that mattered was what was being shown to you, and the only choice you had was what to make of it. An endless looped sequence of hating God and not hating God. And never love. Never. For we're all incapable of it.

Joby and his cousins had been abducted by Roland and his boys.

"Goddammit, this all smells like a rotten egg. Something is up, I can feel it." Whispers Duvall to himself in secret.

Moreau was an old-fashioned Irish born, Southern businessman, womanizer, and all-around swindler and scoundrel from the last century. His story being the rags to riches sort, starting dirt poor, but eventually marrying into the Moreau plantation and taking the name. Moreau didn't even have a name supposedly before. Although, the people of Oubliette can only imagine O' Dochartaigh being it because of his son's given name. No idea what his first name to be. But, then again, it could be anything, and made up. Since Moreau had at one time or another in life supposedly been a doctor (or dentist, really), a lawyer, a Mississippi steamboat captain, a pimp or fancymen in those days, a cardsharp or blackleg, a rabble rouser, a chiseler, a sneak-thief, bruiser, highwayman, even connected with the legendary East India Company on the other side of the globe as a young deckhand in his true beginnings, until its decline in the 1870s and saw the Indian Rebellion (no idea of how that fits into his narrative). And several other assortments. The man was like Wyatt Earp but evil, and here in the South instead of the West, and Hollywoodland could make millions with his tall tales. And in today's world, he owned everything and ran everything in these parts. Much of his income coming in from sharecropping and bootlegging and speakeasies and brothels, spreading from Atlanta to Savannah, and God knows what else. Oubliette and Duvall's folk were practically squatters on borrowed time and land since they produced nothing worthy for the old man in town. Although, Joby's folk were a different story. Duvall used to actually work for the old man. Him and Nathaniel, the now local colored preacher, used to be under Moreau's payroll back in their Savannah days. Duvall remembered what Moreau would have him do for him at that portstop. All too well. And knew what to expect of that ghost of Jacob Marley.

"Borrowed time... his words." Says again, Duvall does, as he grinds his teeth and feels how uneven they are.

Duvall now realized he was probably going to have to pay Moreau a visit at his estate. He wouldn't look forward to it, since the old man would talk, and talk, and talk; could have at one point also been a politician if he wasn't so successful at being an honest criminal in so many other categories, but never sank that low.

The father could at least be reasoned with, since his sin was money... no idea what the sons could be.

"What do we do?" Asks Collins, returning to him after finishing with the Montgomery business at the mortuary.

"We gotta find that boy if he's in town or around it or plotting to do something."

"What about Old Man—"

"No!" Says Duvall, getting up from his seat, in the Sheriff's office.

Duvall then stares at a taxidermized gator's head on his desk, stares at its teeth. He has no other choice.

Joby makes a run for it out of that black star that he was in. His cousins are dead. He never saw them die. But he knows it from the sounds he heard in that house. That house. Covered in the sort of blackened wood as if Hell was its resident scorching the wood inside out. A building burning with an invisible fire at its heart. And Joby was in it, dancing with the flames, with no memory now of having done so since memory can only be overexposed from such intense heat.

But he was out now and making his escape.

Roland now stepped out of the house, himself, nonchalantly. Leaned against the doorway, with one foot over the next, toes down, and smiled, watching the boy run.

The three Birds watch all these transactions. Only watched. And spoke nothing. Especially nor the Folk Bird. Mourning is something that comes after, not during. And not with this.

Duvall and Collins are in their Ford driving, only driving. All around town. And sometimes taking dirt roads they haven't done so in a coon's age. Though they won't go to the colored settlements in the west of Oubliette called Artsack. Population 1054. They won't dare go there unless there's official business to deal with those folks. That ilk. It's especially difficult on some of these dirt roads, since they were made when it was much more accustomed to transversing them on horseback, and not in the automobiles Duvall and Collins are in. Duvall is now wondering if he should go visit Emet in the south for a couple of mules to ride around. Damn that Roland boy, he was a worthless son-of-a-b—, but he was sure good at hiding. Which would be expected from a rat like him.

"I don't know, Duvall, maybe we got things a little twisted. Are we to think Roland set those Yankee boys up to come here as a decoy or something. A distraction. A distraction to what? Seems a bit much?"

Collins was thinking exactly what Duvall was right now.

"What if they're hiding in Artsack."

Duvall stopped the automobile immediately to a screeching halt. Duvall needed to think. Duvall... didn't want to answer. Let Collins think out loud, it wasn't exactly a question he was asking as to demand a response.

And then Collins saw something he had never really noticed on these outskirts before; these trails, which he had passed several times in his life, since he was from here, and had been so all his life. Georgia now decided to give them a clue and to share one of her secrets; open a road for them which they didn't even know existed. For Georgia was a witch. And the woods were like spells. And here, was a spell breaker. Duvall saw it now too.

"Go down that road." Says Duvall.

And Collins does.

And after a bit more driving, there it is:

The house.

Joby's father's name is Sylvester.

Joby has reached home.

He's shivering all over.

“Boy, close that Goddamn door, you outta your Goddamn head?” Sylvester says.

Joby eyed his father, and his eyes, broke up the insanity rushing through Joby’s mind. Joby could do nothing now but breathe through his nose as they opened and shut all partially like lairs to a dragon that had now decided to take up residence inside. Sylvester was giving his boy the stare still. Inside the house was practically pitch black, yet his father’s eyes illuminated the entire house with that stare. And for once in Joby’s life, there was something in him now, that could deal with what was in his father. This was a new experience for the boy.

Joby shut the door.

Duvall in life had been no stranger to the faces of death. He was a Doughboy Sergeant in the Great War, and he had had his fill.

He remembered distinctly how death would put on its own theater. Its own world of the eternal and everlasting pause. Capturing the last moments individuals would have in thought. The dead really are just as alive as the living, just in a different state. He remembered that Christmas after, entering a bunker, that had German and British soldiers still sitting at a card table; the war had soldiers sometimes ignoring uniforms and going over to the enemy to simply play cards. Or talk. Or interact in other manners as simple folk. But this card game had been ambushed, and all parties had been shot up while seated in their own seats. Their eyes on the hands they still held in their rigor mortis set hands. Or was that a fever pitch dream. Or something to do with shellshock. Or a nightmare or... this here... what Duvall was seeing was just that. So surreal. But real also.

Smack!

The deer flies were at their most thickest here.

Smack!

“My God.” Says Collins.

“F— me... what God?” Asks Duvall.

In the house of upside-down crosses.

Duvall remembered that one British soldier in the trenches the boys made into a human scarecrow. Actually, didn't make, but was made by pure luck. He had died by a direct mortar attack, but his body hadn't fully blown to smithereens. He looked as if a swatted fly, yet this man having been swatted against a trench wall, with his outlines painted by his blood and gore, and his face that looked like a demon now with white eyes and a grimace of such monstrous depiction. Anytime the Germans would try and rush in, they'd see Roger the Scarecrow from Liverpool, become horrified beyond belief, and just in that brief second needed to return fire, or reload, or maneuver a bayonet attack on the Hun standing there briefly in petrified shock and awe and disbelief. Poor Roger, they wanted to scrape him off the wall and take him to be properly buried, whatever that remained, but he was just too effective in what he did.

Smack!

This was different.

War... at least had principals.

This... was the Devil's Playground.

What Duvall and Collins had stumbled into.

Lucifer dancing in the night skies above as if he had won the truly Great War for all the universe. Elohim defeated.

Collins was now staring at two dog's heads sewn together from their stump ends. There were other spectacles such as those of many animals. Mostly animals, since Duvall could imagine that was how it had mostly started with Roland and his morbid and macabre fascinations. Feathers and skins and pelts everywhere. But there were also bodies that were definitely human. Women! Although, not seemingly anymore. Considering how they were repurposed as chimeras of such. One seeming to have the appearance Duvall remembered in Ezekiel 1 with an angel with four faces of that of men and animals. The interior actually had a pleasant Granny Smith Apple green color to the walls, which did nothing but make all the red just that much more pronounced.

Smack!

"Damn these deer flies." Said Collins.

There was also a civilization of insects and they were practically thriving. Man's world was in a state of depression all throughout the world. This world of insects was forever October 28. Maggots, mostly. Smack! And those.

"I... don't recognize any of these girls... they must be those Roland picked up from out of town and brought them here." Duvall barely stringed together.

In one corner, a torso, just a torso, with what seemed to be with Crow feathers reconstructed as wings for this gore angel.

"These two n— boys, they're fresh kills. Although... still mostly intact." Said Collins, in one room.

There was also the stench of tomatoes everywhere, since the place was covered with them all over the walls and ground, as some harebrained attempt to cover the stench of death the house was bathing in.

In one corner, there were baseball bats, two of them, set up against the wall, and it looked to be a no man's land of mortar bombardment. But with no mortars, but of living bodies, having been used as bombs. Mostly looking as if small dogs and cats and frogs and other live things having been tossed up and batted as hard as Mighty Casey, just to watch what would happen to their masses in trajectory, like watching a pagan shaman toss up animal bones and meat to watch it fall, as to read the minds of the gods based on the physics and astral inclinations of how they fell.

One of the bodies, parts of the body, were that of a woman. Her somewhat distinguishable head-matter in five parts. Her teeth were stuck in the wall. Duvall knees almost buckled since they were jittering so much, as he needed a moment from the sheer sense of brutality at play with this Devil play.

Duvall now saw also on that wall a bit further left knifed up with doodles and inscriptions. Doodles of several spirals all over, and in the middle, the knifed letterings:

"Call me Mr. Doodlebug."

And in another room, there was Roland, in bed, asleep. Under a framed picture of Jesus with the eyes cut out. There was also an embalmed woman's body in bed with him, naked. Covered with several, several eyeballs. Like the flesh was lacerated and sawn up with eyeballs, of humans and dogs and pigs and goats and whatever else. She looked like some wildly imagined space Martian from a science fiction comic in this state. Duvall went over to wake him.

His eyes opened.

His eyes had a queer indignation.

And then came a peculiar laugh from him, sounding nothing at all human, seeing Duvall with his Smith & Wesson .38 revolver drawn and aimed at him. "I... wasn't expecting you this soon... he!" He speaks.

Duvall was speechless from everything.

Duvall and Collins had now gotten Roland into the car. Duvall had no idea why he was feeling so tame from everything he saw in there. He figured he should have strangled the boy to death in his own bed after everything he'd seen. But he was feeling too numb by all this.

"Did you see! Did you see! Jesus has been defeated. I defeated him. I did. Me!" Babbled Roland.

He had grown belligerent now, deep in some psychotic break. He wouldn't shut up with all the Biblical talk. And defeating Heaven. And all else. There was now a childish quality to all this unmasked evil, like the Devil was really a 5-year-old child, that wanted to go outside and play, but only after you helped him tie his shoelaces, since he didn't know how to do it himself. He had the face of a chipmunk, backwards.

"I..."

"SHUT UP!" Wailed Duvall, now feeling like ending the boy; shooting him in the head and burning that evil house to the ground.

But, he couldn't. This wasn't that Montgomery boy. This was Old Man Moreau's boy, of course. Montgomery? Duvall realized he now had questions.

"How did you get here?"

"Huh?"

There was no vehicle anywhere, this place was miles from his father's plantation, couldn't have gotten here on foot.

“Oh, my boys are gone... he!”

“Montgomery?” Mentions Duvall, almost whisperingly, but Roland heard it.

“Who?” Bluffs Roland.

Although, was it a bluff? Duvall wouldn’t know and wasn’t too sure.

“Never mind.”

Duvall drove off.

“How could you do such things?” Asked Collins to Roland.

Duvall cringed hearing Collins getting this way; he looked like he wanted to cry; he could be a big baby sometimes. Even though he was also in the Great War as Duvall had been. Which is why he trusted him the most at his side.

“It’s a lot of fun. Most fun I ever had.”

“What?”

“I’ll be made into an Earl in Hell for all this.”

“I... I...”

“Should try it some—”

“Enough.” Broke Duvall.

Smack!

They got back into town. They put Roland in a cell. It was midday. Duvall began delegating orders with his second in command and confidant:

“Collins, get Clemet to guard the boy, then I want you to take Eubanks and go back to that house. Wait for whoever returns, I’m guessing Roland still has that same jalopy they’d drive.

When they do, kill ‘em! Kill ‘em quick.

Then burn that house down. Make sure to hide your vehicle so when they pull in, they don’t see it. Make sure they don’t see you two, and you see them first.”

Duvall waited to see what Collins would say, Collins was scratching his head. He seemed to have a lot on his mind. He should. He could be dumb, but also completely not.

“Go.”

“Those n— boys, I know them, they’re from Artsack.”

Duvall buttoned his lip, bottom over the top. He didn’t give an answer back.

“Go.”

“What are you going to do.”

“I... gotta go see Old Man Moreau now.” Duvall divulges. “Go.”

Collins got to it and went.

Duvall knew of Roland for having done some unforgivable things in his eyes, perverted acts with the local young girls in town. But nothing on this level.

Things weren't adding up.

Why did Roland inform them how he had two other boys with them in a vehicle: practically framing them as accomplices? Giving away his own boys. As if tying up loose ends to something. This all still felt like a frame job to Duvall. And then there were the two negro boys. The other bodies were embalmed in a way. Roland used to work in the mortuary (he didn't need to, but he chose to, especially for the mousy dark hair daughter of the mortician there), and the workmanship was there with them; they were made to be preserved like Duvall's taxidermized gator's head. There's no saying how long Roland had been using that house to do what he did. Years maybe even. But those negro killings were fresh.

This was a frame job.

Duvall could bet his life on it.

He just didn't know what.

Maybe something to do with the negroes?

Duvall was now at the plantation.

The plantation on top of a hill.

Duvall was now sitting in a foyer full of statues of rococo everything. With seats so properly mannered, the legs curtsied as you sat down and got up. Duvall was staring at a statue of some Victorian era dandy, as the dandy stared back at him. Supposedly, this was a bust of Fredrick Alfalfa Moreau, who would have been the same age as the Moreau Duvall knew, if he was still alive, even a little younger. All the statues had their eyes on Duvall. And so did Old Man Moreaus, somewhere hidden (not some statue of him, but Moreau in the flesh). The statues were all in a single row set on pillars opposite the wall Duvall sat against. And there was a giant mirror with rococo

gold framing behind the statues. And behind that mirror, Duvall was certain. Duvall stared at the mirror, and began remembering much of the work Moreau would want him to do in Savannah. Really much to do with mundane observational work, mostly. Follow this man all day. Follow that man. Take notes. And Duvall had keen investigational skills to match. Observation was Old Man Moreau's main bread and butter. There was also dirty work and wet work Moreau wanted, but, mostly just this.

Duvall continued staring at the statues, remembering them:

The three brothers: Florence, Fredrick and Robert Moreau, which Duvall barely remembered as a young boy back in the gay ol' 90s. The real Moreaus, which the Irish had married their sister. And all dead now. And not by natural means. But mysterious ones. And this all suggesting exactly what it sounds like. It wasn't even a proper marriage, since the sister had supposedly been wooed and had fallen in love and ran away with the Irish charlatan, and they were married in Charleston, South Carolina. Their sister, the Irishman's wife, Charlotte, was also deceased now. Although she died at childbirth, or that is what the official story suggests (not with Roland, Roland came of another woman that's a complete mystery).

It had now been three hours.

It was sometime after midday.

The black butler then came around and told him Moreau was ready to see him.

Duvall was led to the back, and now in the game room. There were billiard tables and a round poker table and other gambling house objects faced with red mats. Moreau was sitting behind the red matted poker table smoking a cigarette from an elongated holder. Crossed legged. Crossed everything. He wore all white. Especially his hair, larded and slicked back. He would now, being a man in his 80s. It was intensely bright inside, enough to where there wasn't an inch of the spaces to allow a shadow to germinate.

Always the poker man. Always. Duvall couldn't imagine Moreau would yet know what the visit was about. Or most certainly did. But, he would play poker with you just for practice. Since Moreau was a man of constant practice. Constant! Playing mind games at breakfast with his wife over who

gets the last helping of buttered toast. And the woman is uninterested and grown weary, and has told him already, he can have it, several times. But no. He must win the toast. He must “win” it.

“I’m going to be straightforward with you, Duvall... I won’t play any games... I don’t want anything to come of my boy.”

Duvall cringed. And he hadn’t even taken a seat yet to start a match. Moreau was studying Duvall. Duvall, in retaliation, began to study the old man back.

“You know what he’s done... what he’s been doing?”

Duvall was all teeth now.

Moreau did a motion with his eyes, a sweeping motion. Duvall... couldn’t tell what that meant. It was like watching a ticking metronome at work, whether he was and or wasn’t. The man was a human metronome. Ticking one way then ticking another, in perfect rhythm and timing, it was almost hypnotic how well Moreau could leave you with blanks. Moreau’s eyes swept across the other way as he said:

“I’m afraid to know...

But he’s my son.

And that’s all that matters to me.”

Duvall was now outside.

He had left.

And he had no recollection of how he had, since he still had aimed to ask a million questions. Yet, here he was, and the conversation was over.

“Wait... why did I leave?”

He still had questions.

Duvall was now furious.

“What type of n— juju is this?” He says.

He is enraged! This is a frame job. He is being framed. His town and their livelihood are at stake. And he needed to figure out what that was, before the next evolution made its play. Before Moreau did.

“Goddammit, that man just made an ass out of you.

He always did, always!

‘I don’t want to play games.’ He says while sitting behind a poker table.

‘I’m too afraid to know.’

‘He’s my son, and that’s all that matters.’ He tells me. And that line shut you up, quick... didn’t it, Duvall?”

Duvall knew to be careful getting mad, and turning on himself; he got dumb when he got mad, as he’d start yelling at himself out loud.

“Goddammit, you ain’t the sharpest tool in the shed, but you ain’t the dullest, neither. You gotta be extra careful, don’t get dumb like the rest of the men that look up to you in town. God, I hate being just mid. Get dumb and you die, Duvall. Get dumb and you die! Remember Belleau Wood! Remember the words you’d tell yourself every day when you were over there.

‘Get dumb and you die!’

Think, Goddammit, think!”

He then smacked himself a few times on his forehead, as if to force himself to. Duvall used to be much sharper than this. In Savannah. In the Great War. But here, home, the big easy life in these Georgian backwoods were making him grow dull. And then it came to him what he should have his thoughts set on:

“The two n— boys, dead?

Oh God!

If Nathaniel ever finds out... Goddammit... why didn’t I think of this before!”

Duvall now realizes who is next on the itinerary, he needs to speak with.

Nathaniel: the colored preacher and community leader of Artsack.

“I gotta find out what he knows and how much he knows. Does he know those boys are missing? Dead? Goddammit, you ain’t the sharpest, but you ain’t the dullest, neither—and neither is he! He a n— but he ain’t a dumb n—. I gotta squeeze him like Moreau squeezed me.

Something like this can start a war between our folks.

They out number us, 2 to 1.

It’s a trap.

This is a trap!

I gotta talk to Nathaniel, first.

And then get the clan together and see what to do next.”

Duvall left.

“Goddammit, boy, why you sittin’ over there staring out the window like that?” Barks Sylvester.

Joby... isn’t feeling good. Not at all. Not at all. And now, his father is starting up again, talking. He could sit for a year, it’d feel like, and not say a word. Stoneface. But then when thoughts would enter his brain, it would arouse whatever darkness in him, and seeing what that was stepping into the light, was simply the most terrifying thing Joby could ever imagine. A face from Hell forever staring at you asking “why” and nothing else.

“Boy... what you snivelin’ over?”

Joby doesn’t answer, as he tries to hide his face from him.

“Don’t you Goddamn stick that long face out the window for any passersby to see. Making our business, their business.”

Joby immediately gets up and walks over to the dinner table and sits upright. In right angles, with hands perfectly placed on his lap. This was a routine.

“Now you Goddamn stay that way.

Don’t move.

Don’t let me catch you even moving.

Or, I’ll give you a reason to snivel.”

That son-of-a-b— Moreau, he put the whammy on me like some n— juju doctor. I don’t even remember shaking his hand to leave the Goddamn house. I didn’t even get the chance to sit down at the Goddamn poker table. One minute, I’m standing in front of him. Next minute, I’m outside, unsure how I Goddamn got there. They taught him how to do the whammy, they would have. How else can you explain it. Then again, those Irish bastards are really just moss-covered n—s, themselves, practicing mallachts! Thinks Duvall. Still unable to process what he had just experienced. Still irritated and mad as Hell. But, at least not talking to himself over it. That son-of-a-b— ... he prefers them folks over his own folk. Since, he can control them. Own them. But not us. Goddamn him and his Roman popery. Duvall is in his office. Standing over a Bird cage with a special Pigeon in it. He had ripped off a long strip of paper, and written “WH” on it. He then takes the Pigeon out of its cage and wraps the note to its leg. He goes over to a window that is open. And lets the Bird fly out.

A Mourning Dove, a Blue Jay, and a Red Cardinal, are sitting at an oak tree watching, and watching the Pigeon fly and head towards Artsack. It is now twilight out. The skies in Georgia get very purplish/pinkish at these hours. Strips of pink clouds written over purple azure. Like incantations of an inside language. Like a forgetting spell. To make all these mere mortals foolish for the sake of entertainment, for all the woodland spirits. To have men weep and rage and fall into folly, while the spirits would laugh and play and be merry.

An hour later, the Pigeon returns and begins pecking at the window Duvall is waiting at. This, was a neat trick Duvall had learned over there: how to train Pigeons over this particular purpose. Duvall unwraps the note attached. And it reads "10." It is now 9:35PM. Good! If it said "T" or "L" Duvall would have to wait far longer than he had precious time to do so.

Nobody needs to know Duvall and Nathaniel's businesses. Like in war, officers of opposing armies could have these liaisons without the enlisted knowing about it. And the two knew each other well enough.

Before leaving, Duvall has an icy shiver go up his spine. Like the feeling of a very cold needle entering your vein.

He then goes over to the jail cell where Roland is at. The boy is there. Clemet is watching him, sitting at a chair, half asleep; he looks funny in that seat, with his arms crossed; he looks like an "S" with his legs folded behind the chair and his head weighing over his chest, seemingly ready to fall off his neck. The spaces look greenish and gray and moldy. And they seem double apparent as if in the decades Duvall had been walking into here, this was the first time noticing such details. As if all the universe is a prism reflecting one light into several colors of multidimensions. How a man could have word with another man, with so many layers of interpretations, of all that is said and acknowledged. A dimension governed by wills, another by race, another by sex and the sexes, another by money or gods or Devils or something completely unheard of. If you were awake in one level, you were asleep in another. Never truly awake at all levels. Never. Roland is lying on the bunk staring at the ceiling, making very strange hand gestures in front of his face.

“Clemet.”

Zzzzz

“Clemet!”

“Huh?”

“Has he said anything worth noting?”

Duvall can now imagine Roland would still be spewing over everything like he was in the automobile before. But, maybe that was all there was to him at that moment.

“No... why?”

Duvall continues to watch the boy with his strange gestures: he has his thumbs touching together at the tips, and both hands are alternating between each other, twisting them up and down, down and up, within that axis.

Duvall chooses not to make much sense of it and leaves.

Duvall is now at the cabin by the creek, one that separates Oubliette and Artsack. It is a rundown fixation from the last century with a pointy roof, that slumped all around, like some witch’s hat. Which is exactly the moniker the two men had given the place, “WH.” No idea how it got this way or how it looked before it did, if it looked different. The important thing is, it has no windows. Just as the leaders of these two communities would want it. Duvall enters and finds Nathaniel standing. He is wearing the minister garments, with the white dog collar. He is exceptionally dark skinned, that has the appearance that his skin is three times thicker because of it. So black he is almost blue. But not as primitive as Duvall imagines it.

There was a pause. A confrontational pause. Old acquaintances or not, the two men had enough grievances over one another to be bitter enemies. Enough to even allow for violence to best their best judgements, but only if the opportunity said there was no other measure. Duvall cringes up with teeth, thinking maybe this might have been a mistake.

“Close the door, Duvall, what are you doing?”

Duvall shows more teeth; he doesn’t like being the one made to heed another man. Especially when in effect of rebuking foolishness, which Nat was now calling him as such: a fool! Duvall shuts the door, then.

They both stay standing, and aren't yet going to sit down at the table in the middle of this cabin with a strangely high ceiling.

"What do you want?"

Duvall says nothing, now fearing this might have been a big mistake, and saying the wrong thing or saying nothing at all, depending on what disclosures are made in the process, might be disastrous. Nat reads into this, the awkward tension, at least. And decides to play it all civil like. He sits down. Duvall... stays standing.

"Well...?"

Duvall is thinking.

"So...?"

"Roland is back in town." Duvall finally lets out.

That information was going to come out, one way or another, so it was best to speak of it now. Or was it?

Another awkward pause.

"So?" Finally says Nat, with his arms out in a "Y" shape.

Duvall's eyes twitch.

"That white boy has almost completely been y'all problem, not ours."

Duvall then sees that as an omission to something positive in regard to his concern: Nat knew nothing of what had happened and of the two negro boys. Duvall was worried Nat might get tricky over the matter of admitting his knowledge or not, just to study him, like Moreau had.

"After what y'all did to Albie last year, do you really think I give a damn what some c— pervert does to some silly white girls of yours."

Nat's eyes are now like daggers having mentioned that name. Yet he still remains seated. Duvall... decides to finally sit down hearing him bring up that name. His eyes were now like daggers, also. This was now a poker table. He takes off the fedora he is wearing on his head and places it on the table.

"Roland is crazy. He ain't a c— in this matter. Nor a n—. He's a force of nature. And he could just become a problem of yours."

"What do you want?"

"Information."

Actually, Duvall decides he has all the information he needs about their knowledge of all these events, which is now made clear how they have none. Although now all that matters are the surprises.

“About what?”

“Anything!”

Goddammit, Duvall, don’t be dumb enough now to omit something about this matter, yourself. He don’t know. But he definitely now knows something is up. This dog is no longer lying asleep.

Nat now seems somewhat flustered. Like he doesn’t know what to say if anything. Duvall is only hoping he doesn’t speak more about Albie and his lynching.

“Duvall... I... I got none.” Nat lets out.

And this is now Duvall’s cue to leave, he figures. This is getting heated enough as it is. He isn’t going to squeeze out anything over Moreau and any framework, that is to say: if there is any. Duvall really doesn’t have that skillset in questioning. Not with Nat, at least. The omission is all the jackpot he needs. No reason to continue drawing it out further. A little too abrupt, but it would do.

“Alright, if that’s all there is, I guess I’ll be leaving. I guess I’m just here to put the word out, that crazy boy of Moreaus is back in town from what I’ve gathered, and he might be looking to start trouble.”

Duvall picks up his fedora, puts it on his head, but before getting up, Nat starts his own inquisition.

“How’d you gather?”

“What?”

“You said that from what you’ve gathered, he’s in town. I haven’t heard lick of him being back. So, what’s going on?” Nat says and asks.

Duvall then gives a telltale sign. One Nat knows about, and one Duvall also does, himself, as if he could see himself giving it. Duvall has a look in his face, one Nat has caught him with before, mostly in Savannah, when the man would keep secrets. Duvall grows frightful.

“You and your boys shot up some out-of-town c—s in a fancy automobile today. I haven’t heard about Roland’s return... but I have heard about that detail.”

Duvall inhales through his teeth.

“Yes... they were supposedly friends of Roland... came looking for him and asking about him. While fornicating with Abe’s daughter out in the middle of the road.

If anything... how we found Albie last year with Abbot’s daughter, Sheryl.

So if it’s any consolation, know we’ll just as well kill any c—s for the offense, as we would any of your boys. So you n—s don’t have to grow crossed with us showing favoritism. We won’t!”

Duvall gets up then, jaunces his fedora all fancifully in Nat’s face. And leaves. “Goddammit, Duvall, maybe he’s lying to test you. How did he find out about the Yankee, Montgomery? Goddamn these Georgian woods. There’s haints in these woods of watching and whispering spirits. They see all, and, tell all, to all the right discerning ears. Something is watching us, watching me, right—”

Duvall looks up... and sees a Mourning Dove, a Blue Jay, and a Red Cardinal. His mouth opens a little, in bewilderment. They’re the same he saw before. They’re also watching him; he can clearly tell. And judging.

“Talking to Nat was a waste of time and dangerous.
Roland!

I need to talk to Roland.”

Duvall then stops talking to himself, realizing he is doing that again. I won’t kill the boy. But I can still beat the living daylights out of him, and see what he... wait... he said to me:

‘I wasn’t expecting you so soon.’

I clearly remember him saying that now. You are being framed, Duvall. Goddammit, he killed those n— boys to cause all this. He’s the key. Duvall gets into his Ford and drives off.

“Why does he keep damning himself, he speaks of damning God, yet, it only does so to himself... doesn’t he know that?” Asks Blue.

“You can’t damn the One that is Most High... it’s like shooting an arrow up into the air... only to fall back down onto your own head.” Says Red.

The two look at the Folk Bird for his input:

“He knows and he doesn’t know, his mind is bewildered, lost in these woods. Going in circles.

Hell is a wood, where men will spend an eternity going in circles, lost. An eternity of going through one’s life on earth, over every decision they had made, and had not made. Every sin. Experiencing them over and over and over again. Right now, the actions he makes, are only a rehearsal, of what’s possibly waiting for him in the hereafter.

He says that word, again and again, because he’s already there. He might not know it... but he feels it being so. He is right to think he is being framed, for, he is! And by his own hand. And his own words.”

“Goddammit, boy, where you goin’... told you not to move an inch!”

Joby needs to go out to the outhouse and take a tinkle. He has sat there all day. And he can’t hold it in any longer.

“I need to—”

“You need to—what?”

Joby gives him a desperate look.

Sylvester understands and says nothing. He’s not that much of a monster. Although he is much worse. Joby leaves.

Joby comes back and sits down exactly as he was.

His father is smiling at him now.

“Boy,

Let’s play a game.

The rules of the game are...

I don’t want to see you existing!

I love the dark. I love it, so very much! Love! It suits me perfectly. For I love how I see not a Goddamn thing in it. I wish it could be that way forever. Instead of seeing this Goddamn house. This Goddamn life.

And you.

I feel like I'm in Hell... and I'm just so sick of seeing everything around me. For it feels like I've been so forever, seeing everything I've been seeing played out again and again and again and... I am just so sick!

Boy... play this game right... and I might not slit your Goddamn throat in the middle of the night while you's asleep and be done with you, you get me?"

Joby nods while weeping in silence.

Collins and Eubanks had returned before Duvall got back from having his nighttime stroll to the Witch's Hat.

"Duvall, they never returned." Collins reported.

"They didn't... did you burn the place down at least?"

"No."

"No?"

"You told us to wait for Roland's boys to return before we did and—"

"Goddammit, Collins, destroying all that evidence was more of a main priority. If those Roland boys smelled something fishy, they would hightail it and we would never see them again. They're not from here. And would never want to return seeing how...."

"I'm sorry, Duvall."

Duvall just eyed his second, who looked flustered now, as he batted his eyes like flapping wings of a nervous bat trapped in a man's closet, and Collins was the least dumbest deputized hick working under his jurisdiction.

"Goddamn I hate this dumb boogeyman getup." Says Duvall.

Duvall is now staring at himself in the mirror, in the red satin robe of the Exalted Cyclops. He hasn't yet put on his hood. The last time he had donned this uniform was for the lynching of Albie. Truth is, Duvall hates this uniform and the Ku Klux Klan.

He hates black people.

He hates white people.

Duvall really hates all colors and creeds and such equally. Purely and most distinctly, he hates the human condition. So, him dressing up as a jigaboo to go deal with other jigaboos, didn't at all sound heroic to him. Goddamn that movie, *The Birth of a Nation*. Goddamn Woodrow Wilson. And WJ Simmons and his initiation fees. And that Grand Dragon from Indiana for what he did to Madge.

Goddamn them all to Hell!

Darkness... Duvall sought the dark.

Let these Georgia trees be like teeth and eat the world and all the people in it, taking them all down to its dark belly to spend forever being dissolved away in its stomach acids.

Loved it as much as he feared it.

Still stuck in that midway point, having started at fear and not yet fully reached his soul's perfect state of revelation, bound in divine judgement. For all souls bound for Hell, love Hell, at that perfect state. They just don't know it yet.

Of course, the morons that look up to Duvall for leadership truly think they are doing something grand in all this. Being vanguards to the purity of the white race. Something in that framing. Duvall only sees a stupid getup and an organization no different than the Italian or Irish mobs in New York; they are no different than Old Man Moreau; a criminal organization that doesn't give a hoot about any of that hoopla of being the knights of order in white society.

They care about money.

Politics.

Power.

Which was especially made apparent every time Duvall reported to the Great Titan, and all the man spoke of was Old Man Moreau and just how deep his pockets ran and if Duvall could find a way to syphon that money into their own organization.

But... the uniform is a necessary evil.

And for whatever reason, the white families of Oubliette had a way of producing a disproportionate amount of pretty blonde females. And hardly any strapping young boys to meet the challenge. Which the young male population of Artsack took double notice of.

Duvall's father used to be a part of the original clan, back when they actually did dress up like ghouls and ghosts, and put on fake beards and horns, and

claimed to be the ghosts of dead Confederate soldiers looking for revenge to scare the negros. Although, Duvall's father was an absolute sadist, Duvall killed with an ax at 17 years old, when he caught the man having raped and murdered his own sister, that man's daughter. That first generation were absolute lunatics. But then again... war can do that to you.

Suffice to say, Duvall has a lot of ugly feelings invested with this dark chapter of his family.

"It still scares n—s good, so it's got its usefulness." Says Duvall, as he places the hood on.

Duvall is now ready to make a scene.

There is a war coming.

And Duvall needs to get his men in the right mindset.

It is now 1AM.

He had called a secret meeting of the invisible empire. They are all in the main office. Duvall steps out of the bathroom. And starts pacing over to the holding cells. Duvall fixates on The Man That Had Defeated Jesus, supposedly, still lying on the bunk, still making those weird hand gestures. Duvall holds the keys, and begins unlocking the barred door, as the clinking and clanking sounds get Roland's attention. Roland turns his head back to stare at him upside down. And something about his face in this position seems more becoming of him, with his eyes at the bottom and mouth at the top. Like the boy really was some Martian himself. With Granny Smith Apple green skin color. Like some otherworldly transfigured being. Or, really, an abomination. Duvall grabs him by his hair, and begins pulling with all his might, dragging Roland out of his bunk, out of the cell, and then he starts dragging him across the concrete floor. At first Roland makes a few terrified guttural shrieks. But then the Devil in the boy comes out, as his shrieks turn into delighted cackles, as if pain is pleasure to him. Duvall continues dragging the boy all the way to the main office, where all his men stand in a circle, roughly twenty-eight Knights/Ghouls and the twelve Terrors, dressed in white satin robes, with their hoods off. Now having seen Duvall enter like this with Roland, they all flash sights of timid reservations. And immediately place their hoods on to hide such sights.

“Everyone,
Meet Roland O’ Dochartaigh, if you haven’t been formerly introduced, son of
Old Man Moreau.

And a man, that has damned our town to HELL!”

Duvall then throws him up against a wall and kicks him in the belly with all his might. Making the boy groan like an idiot, as he sticks his tongue out and goes cross-eyed. Which fills his assailant with malice and makes Duvall want to hit him again and again with no sense of remorse.

“Duvall is only doing, exactly as what Roland is expecting of him to do.” Says the Folk Bird.

“What are those gestures he does with his hands?” Asks Blue.

“I sense evil in it, great evil.” Says Red.

“You should,

That thing he does is the ‘Devil’s Windmill.’

It’s how he communicates and coordinates with his master, on what to do at every juncture.” Finishes the Folk Bird.

Nat has called his own meeting, roughly at this same hour, at 1AM. They are meeting at the chapel at Artsack. Roughly eighty men. A white hexagonal shaped building of wood. Inside, the structure is still being illuminated by candlelight, since that’s all they could make-do, and it is giving the atmosphere a very hazy and heightened and bygone sense, like these Anno Domini men having been interwoven with the fabrics of before Christ like times, back when Esther and the Jews in Biblical days had learned of the Persian king’s decree of their annihilation: and tonight would be the night just before the end of the world as they knew it. The men are wearing their sweetgrass hats and denim overalls and backbreaking fat and muscle. Very burly men.

And so are Papa Bear Elijah and his Goldilocks Gang.

Elijah, presently isn’t employed at doing any good and honest backbreaking, cotton-picking work in the fields with the rest of the men of Artsack. When a man like Old Man Moreau sees a disgruntled man like Elijah with a chip on

his shoulder, he smirks, and sees prospects in other forms of work for him to do. In something much less good and honest.

Preacher Nat... doesn't like Elijah.

Since he knows all too well what the details of such work entail. Elijah and his gang aren't wearing any of 'em raggedy sweetgrass and denim. They wore Savannah tailored three-piece suits that were Prussian blue and patterned with white jail bar stripes. Elijah has a very pretty burgundy porkpie on his head with an ostrich feather stuck in the brim, that is quite an eyesore, considering how much bigger it is than the hat and even his head. Elijah takes a raking glance like a metronome of the humble church mouse arrangements, while hiding some level of disparagement and disdain, by way of turning his nose up at the establishment, as he jingles the coins in his pockets, and says out loud for everyone to hear:

"Never fear, Elijah is here!

Here to be your savior, like good old Elijah in the good book.

That summoned grizzly bears to maul his fiendish foes. And rained great balls of fire on the heads of King Ahab and his Jezebelites."

What the Hell is this country ass n—ahem!

Thought Nat. Now realizing why the boy fancies calling himself 'Papa Bear.' Even though that wasn't Elijah in the good book, but Elisha. Elijah, here, being the type of good attentive Christian, that only ever picked up his head from dozing off in church, when another character similar to his name was mentioned. Nat now wonders if he ever remembered a name like 'Jesus' being mentioned in all those sermons. Jezebelites!

Nat... now sorta doesn't know where to go from there. Boys like Elijah would make scenes like these, thinking everyone with their raggedy clothes would fancy being indirectly patronized, with words only Elijah would think would seize the moment. Which of course, didn't. Elijah looks at his crowd. Crickets. And grows the ever more disgruntled.

"Anyways, I called y'all here, because I've heard words that Roland is in town.

Also... I spoke to Duvall...."

Everyone winces hearing that name. Even Papa Bear. Nat figures he couldn't hold this a secret.

“And the man was acting mighty suspicious telling me about it, and, I called y’all wondering why that might be.”

Suffice to say, nothing of substantial noteworthiness was brought up at either meetings. Just more of that stumbling around lost in the woods business, these Georgians, were all but used to.

Sylvester had not shown up at that chapel meeting.

Nathanial and Elijah, if anything, were sure glad that motherf— hadn’t. The word for it is “malaise,” that uneasy feeling you can’t describe, especially when dealing with uneasy people. Like you already know their cursed fate and how it correlates with you, it’s just a matter of getting around to. Like Hell, and those Hellbound, just a matter of getting around to.

“Hello.” Says a lonesome stranger with a fedora, and no face, as he shakes your hand. One you just so happen to meet.

An apparition. A ghost.

And it’s at that moment you realize, this entity is going to kill you.

“Why’d you say you weren’t expecting me so soon?”

Wham!

Hahahahaaha!

“Is your daddy setting us all up for this?”

Wham!

Hahahahaaha!

“Why’d you kill those two n— boys, you trying to start a war between us and Artsack, just for your own fancy?”

Wham!

Hahahahaaha!

“What aren’t you tellin’ me that I oughta know?”

Duvall mostly refrained from punching him in the face, so when he returned him to his daddy, the events of this night wouldn’t be apparent. Still too cowardly over the old man.

Yesterday was Saturday.

Today is now Sunday.

The sun rose, the Rooster crowed, and the earth drank the blood of men, and forgot. Although, those men that were still around alive and kickin', weren't going to do so, just yet.

Joby opened his eyes. And saw the blue morning dew, of a new earth. His father was nowhere to be found. Joby was part of the gospel choir. Joby left for the morning's 10AM service. This was the longest walk the boy had ever taken in his entire life. Not having lived much of a life to make such claims, but, at this age, it meant everything. A year out of a man's life at 80 means nothing, unless special circumstances dictate otherwise. A year out of a life of an 8-year-old has 80 times more likeliness. Joby looked up and saw Turkey Vultures in a tree with their meaty raw heads, that were as red as the dead meat they had been feasting on alongside a road. One especially eyed Joby in a manner of recognition, as if a small prey. Joby, acknowledged now exactly what it meant to be one. Their eyes disclosed a soul that only understood a merciless brutality, animals understand all too well, but men won't admit to, until it is too late. And for Joby, it all felt like it was already too late, for he now could. It took 80 years for Joby to reach that chapel finally. He was now 88, and no longer meant for this earth.

And what was all so peculiar about all this was how the boy felt nothing.

He was now a Bird. Joby was his own special Bird. Ready to grow wings and take off for the skies. He eyed a tree right next to the chapel, and saw a Mourning Dove, a Blue Jay, and a Red Cardinal, and immediately began having reveries of joining them.

He was singing in the choir now.

Now he was weeping.

Everyone noticed.

The services were stopped.

The Preacher Nathaniel approached the boy, asking what was wrong.

Joby told them everything.

Duvall now also opened his eyes, and saw the blue morning dew, of a new earth. He had slept at the Sheriff's office, in his armchair by his desk. Although, Duvall didn't wake up by his own volition, Collins was standing over him. He seemed concerned. He was concerned.

"What?"

"Nat is outside."

"What."

"Man's got a look in his eyes, I've never seen him like this."

Duvall then had his own look in his eyes, but only the sort of look that would react to what he could imagine was in Nat's look. Duvall got up. He was in his white a-shirt, khaki slacks and socks. He strapped his suspenders over his shoulders. Slipped on his shoes. And immediately went outside to have face to face. Duvall saw him. He had the thousand-yard stare in his eyes, and it had been a long time since Duvall had last seen that look in a man's eyes. He knew. He Goddamn knew. Duvall immediately went up to him, vis-à-vis.

"What?"

Nat didn't say anything. Duvall now understood, Nat was studying him, thoroughly.

"What?"

Nat still says nothing.

Duvall paused.

"Witch's Hat." Whispers Duvall.

"No." Crys out Nat.

Duvall shows some pearly enforcers.

"N—... I'll—"

"Don't you...!"

"What do you want?"

Nat has a moment with himself. The tension is making him grow crass, and he couldn't be crass right now.

"Where's Roland?"

Duvall gives his telltale.

"You know where he is!" Says Nat.

"Why you lookin' for him?" Asks Duvall.

"You know why!"

Duvall catches himself before he's able to give his telltale again.

"Witch's Hat." Says Duvall.

....

“What the Hell you doin’, we look like two dummies standing out here.”

....

“Why don’t you tell me what’s going on?” Asks Duvall.

Nat looks into the Sheriff’s office. He sees three of Duvall’s men giving him the stare Nat was giving from the windows. Nat is alone. And feeling dumb now and like a sitting Duck.

“Well?” Says Duvall with his own thousand yards.

Nat concedes. And nods.

“Nightfall.” Says Duvall.

Then tries to turn around, but doesn’t. He can’t turn around. Nat has to, and walk away. Nat is the one that’s stepped over the line. His folk aren’t allowed in town, except to use the local Post Office. And some stores that would have them. But that’s it. Nat begrudgingly turns around and leaves. Gets into his jalopy and drives away. Duvall goes back into the Sheriff’s office.

“Are they onto us?” Asks Collins.

Duvall thinks. Goes over everything that just happened in this head. Everything said. He knows what Roland did. That Duvall is certain. Although he didn’t know where Roland was, which was right forty yards from where Nat was standing just, inside the building in a holding cell. Duvall looks at Collins and says:

“Get some men here, and armed, we need this building guarded!”

Collins leaves.

Goddammit, Collins, why didn’t you burn that house to ashes! But maybe they haven’t been there yet. But how else would they know? Did they find it? What don’t I know about? Duvall felt like asking Roland again, but trying to beat info out of him didn’t do anything. That dog won’t hunt! As it made Roland into such a mangy mutt at the ends, not even worth putting him out of his misery. You can’t fight fire with fire with fire, just makes the blaze bigger.

Nat reaches back to his chapel in Artsack.

Enters.

And the place is still a commotion inside as it was after Joby had made his testimony. Nat probably shouldn’t have snuck out to go and pay Duvall a visit, and left his deacons in charge. He now figured that to be a dumb move.

But he needed key input. And not the input of all the individuals in the chapel, that had turned it into a hall of echoes of fervor. Blind fervor. He now knew certain details which only Duvall could give him: they knew more about Roland and his whereabouts than they were willing to let out. In the middle of the chapel standing, in this building of all white interiors, with all the black faces, Elijah's was now the one most present and prominent; his wasn't here for any ordinary service before, but definitely now here for everything out of the ordinary. Nat walks up to him. Nat is in charge of this community. Not Elijah.

"Where the Hell did you go?" Elijah asks Nat, loud enough for only a few key figures to hear in the vicinity.

And Nat.

Elijah has his eyes slit. That was a quiet challenge. But one Nat isn't going to entertain at the moment.

"We need to find that house. Timothy and Thomas' bodies need to be returned to us. Where's Joby?"

"He's in your offices behind the pulpit, he's—"

The doors to the chapel up front open again. And for whatever intensity, everyone pays attention to see who it is. They look.

They see Sylvester.

And it's as if though the Grim Reaper had entered God's house. Dressed in all black. As if they were clothes that were once lighter in color. Now not. And overnight. Transfigured black. He seems... curious. As if he hasn't heard the full story yet. But here now to hear it. Nat and Elijah go back to the matter at hand. Joby is brought out by one of the women.

"Joby... can you show us where that house is?" Asks Nat.

Joby looks at his father... and grows a blank stare.

"Joby?"

Joby turns to Nat and nods.

It's around nightfall.

Elijah and his boys had volunteered to take Joby along with, in their Chevy, to that house. They had come packing Colts and sawn-offs, so they were the ones most ample and able. Nat found a means to sneak out again. All the folks of Artsack had stayed in the chapel waiting, waiting for anything and

any news. Nat reached the Witch's Hat, which is a brisk twenty min stride through the woods from the chapel. It's easier for him to get to it inconspicuous than it was for Duvall. Skies are crimson before dusk. And the Witch's Hat has a certain ultraviolet glow to it from the dirt to its shingled spire. Making Nat see colors he feels like he shouldn't.

He enters.

Duvall turns around.

"We want Roland." Says Nat.

Nat, doesn't want to play games.

Duvall hesitates.

"Tell me what you're not telling me." Says Duvall.

Duvall has a look in his eyes, as if he knows what those things are already, making Nat wonder why he should: telling people stuff they already know is a fool's errand.

"Alright... Joby today in service—"

"Joby?"

Duvall gives another telltale Nat hasn't seen from him before, but it's one all the same.

"Yes, Joby... he tells us some white folk had kidnapped him and taken him and his cousins to a house. A house full of unspeakable things."

Duvall is looking straight at Nat in surprise. The insides of the Witch's Hat are now all colored in ultraviolet.

"Joby had escaped. Joby tells us, his cousins were less fortunate, from what we could make of it."

Duvall has his eyes still fixed on him.

"Suffice to say, I know you've been trying to put a blanket on it, holding secrets. So cough up!"

Duvall bites his lower lip.

"We also found the house." Admits Duvall, after ping-ponging his eyes for a second. "We were looking for Roland after that other business we spoke about. And we found it. I guess after Joby made his escape. We never saw Joby. But we saw your kin there. Along with whatever stray women Roland and his boys had been bringing there over the years. Not alive." Duvall gives a look with that last bit, as his eyes sink a bit into his skull.

"Roland... has gone Jack the Ripper on us... if you know what that means."

Nat did.

“Do you have him in custody?”

Duvall... doesn't seem to want to answer.

“Duvall!”

“We wouldn't give him to you, even if we had him!” Says Duvall, and this time, Duvall doesn't ping-pong his pupils, but does a waiver like a metronome, and Nat doesn't know how to read that. “We'll deal with Roland, rest assured... when we find him... there will be justice.

I'm... sorry....

So go home now.”

Duvall left immediately after that.

Nat... didn't want the conversation to end like that.

But it did.

Roland is in the holding cell, lying in a bunk. He's shivering in pain from last night still as he breathes. And as he breathes, he makes a wheezing sound. He is making the Devil's Windmill. His mind sees things, his eyes do not. He then whispers:

“Yes, Master...

I see now.

It's good that they arrived early. I'm safe here. Granted, a licking or two, but still safer! And my boys were gone when I went asleep next to Asherah, my darling, so it was perfect timing.

Just like all of your schemes... perfect.

Then putting the whammy on Duvall's men, to make them dumb and forget their orders. We had to juggle that, so they wouldn't burn that house down, not until the n—s could get there, and we succeeded. Sometimes all it takes is an eerie sense in a spot, to spook a couple of scaredy cats. And the boys knew what they needed to do once they got back to that house.

Then you turned into a Vulture and put the whammy on Joby before he got to the chapel. So, he'd then spill the beans. And now, that n— Elijah, Papa

Bear, ha! He's there to see how my boys have decorated the place with their kin. Couldn't allow Duvall and Collins to find it in that state, or they would have immediately done something about it. Some juggle, but we managed. Now, however Papa Bear reacts to that scene... he!

Yes, Master...

I will stay here now, I know, I need to be here, like a doodlebug, to draw both folks into our trap! For I am Mr. Doodlebug, at your service.

Yes, Master...

Yes, Master...

Perfect... simply perfect!"

Roland then smiles.

"Why won't God do something?" Asks Blue.

"Men are His children, why allow the Devil free reign to do all this?" Asks Red.

"Because, these folk have made up their minds. They have anger in them, unyielding anger. And hatred. And they'd refuse to see His intervention. Not until they see to their wrath to the very end. Therefore, God will appease their wishes, and grant the Devil the authority of free reign to wreak havoc." Tells the Folk Bird.

Nat returns.

He sees the Chevy Elijah and his boys and Joby had left in, parked near the chapel. They had returned. And from just outside, still some yards from the chapel, he can tell the commotion inside has gotten worse. It's night out. And all feels like Fall and not Spring. He enters.

"This means—WAR!"

Smack!

Cries out Elijah as he smacks his hand onto a table where Timothy and Thomas lie, like a gavel at a court hearing. Their eyes are open. And yet they see nothing, but what all dead souls happen to do so: the eternal pause. Nat sees them all at center frame. He walks up to the bodies. Elijah doesn't

comment as he did before with his mouth, but does so with his eyes, catching Nat again like this today.

“War?”

“I went to the house. Tim and Tom were not inside. They were outside and lynched up to a tree!”

“What?” Baffles Nat.

This isn’t lining up with the story Duvall had told him.

“They were in a Goddamn tree.

Hanging!

Blood.

We want blood!

This means war!” Elijah finishes.

Sylvester is standing next to Elijah, and his eyes are like meat hooks pinned onto the sight of the bodies. Sylvester then lifts such peepers and focuses them on Nat. And his intensity is more than Nat can handle, as Nat looks away. It now occurs to Nat what exactly is on everyone’s mind after this revelation.

“Were there any other bodies in the house?” Asks Nat.

“No... why?”

“Did you check?”

“Yeah, I Goddamn checked.” Says Elijah, redirecting his wrath some.

Nat now thinks; his eyes like the hammers of a typewriter, printing out his thoughts before him.

“Roland....”

“What?” Blows up Elijah.

“Roland must have—”

“Goddamn you, Nat! Roland... what Roland?”

Elijah turns to his Goldilocks Gang.

“Have you seen Roland around, Jordan?”

“No.”

“Have you been seeing him lately, Jenkins?”

“No.”

Elijah turns back to Nat.

“There is no Roland... that boy ain’t here! This is—Duvall’s doing!”

“Not just Duvall.

They must PAY!” Finally speaks Sylvester. “ALL of ‘em C—S must DIE!”

And his words, and his energy, speak new volumes of where this is all headed. And in ways no one else in the chapel can manifest. Not even with Elijah, who was only spinning rhetoric.

Roland still in his bunk.

Still with the Devil’s Windmill.

It’s almost hypnotic watching it before him, weaving portals in and out of this world and into the next. Creating a maelstrom pulling all these wretched souls into its center.

“Men. Women. Children.” Roland incants.

“Men.

Women.

Children.” Again and again, incessantly.

Nat had practically barricaded himself with his deacons in his office to have what he saw was a real meeting of the heads.

Bang. Bang.

A deacon opens slightly to look.

“It’s Elijah.”

“Nat... what are you doing in there, hiding?” Cries Elijah.

Bang. Bang.

“Nat... you coward.”

And that’s all the lip Nat is willing to take from him. As he gives his nod to let him in. Elijah enters. Scrutinizes Nat and his deacons in these meek spaces of its bare necessities. Nat gets up, and walks right up to Elijah’s face, which is much more richly and robustly put together, and set a couple inches higher, and, Nat feels like young David confronting King Saul, that has come looking for his life, with javelin at hand.

“I don’t believe Duvall and his men did that.”

Elijah shows some maulers.

“Are you out of your—”

“Me... you’re the one that wants war! And what exactly would that entail?”

Elijah's eyes go up as to use his brain over that question, and it's a particular muscle, Nat can clearly see, he doesn't use much often, compared to the rest of his. Nat nudges his head up close to his ear and slightly whispers:

"Are you suggesting what I think you're suggesting... what Sylvester is—"

Elijah jerks his head back hearing that man mentioned. Sylvester has now somewhat been made into a pariah with his outburst. Not outwardly declared as such, but inwardly elected by the collective mass. As he's mostly shunned by the people there and left to himself. He'll walk over to a group, with his eyes, and his smell, and slowly the group will disperse from his presence. And Sylvester will then move towards another group and start the process again. Although, right now, seeing how Elijah was granted into Nat's office, Sylvester has walked right up to the door, which is still left open accidentally. He peers in. And now everyone can feel the weight of his eyes. Nat grows nil after having mentioned his name. And won't do it a second time.

"I think it was Roland."

"Oh, Goddamn it, Nat!

Roland... I've been around that mick in Savannah more than a few times. Going through all sorts of women of all colors. He a fiend. But not this type of fiend to string up young boys. He ain't a killer. Duvall although is. And you know it!"

Nat now narrows his eyes on him, and sorta wonders whether Elijah is only circling that wagon for Old Man Moreau's sake. His boss' sake. But, then again, Elijah had made a good point with what he just said: Nat didn't know of Roland as a killer, but he knew Duvall was definitely one. He knew it personally.

"I know you and Duvall have history.

I also know you and him like to have get-togethers and powwow at that funny looking cabin by the creek.

Him and his boys, and with their white sheets, they want war. Only reason they would do such a thing."

Nat grew fearful. Elijah, for once, wasn't being dumb about this.

"Fine, you're right, Elijah...

Just as you said, I've been paying visits to that cabin, talking with Duvall. But if he really wants war, why don't he just start it instead of giving us a heads-up? You and me would be bigger targets, why start with those boys? And why would he tell me this is Roland's doing?" Asks Nat.

"Because... because...!"

Elijah grows irate. But then sighs. And gives a follow up sounding hoarse:
“Fine... you the leader of this community... but prove it, at least. If we find Roland, and he did it, we get justice for what he did to Tim and Tom. But if we can’t find him anywhere, that’ll only mean one thing.”

Nat had also asked Joby a few more questions before the meeting ended.

“Who were the white folk that grabbed you?”

Joby didn’t know.

“Was it Roland and his boys, were they young, or older, like Duvall?”

Joby said... he couldn’t recall. His mind was drawing blanks. And he didn’t want to linger in memory.

Joby was now back with his father at their home.

Joby didn’t want to be there.

Joby didn’t want to be anywhere.

Joby... didn’t even want to be alive anymore.

“Joby, you’ve done a good thing.”

Sylvester’s eyes were so intense, they were no longer functioning as eyes, but like hands gripping with all their might the thoughts in his head. Eyes focused inward. And practically blind outwards.

“You’ve done a great thing. The greatest thing.

If only they’re pushed a little bit further. Just a little more. They’ll be ready.”

All the folks in these parts of Georgia had a nightmare that night.

They all did, shared a similar one.

Which could mean only one thing, as Roland stayed awake the entire time, incessantly performing his black magic by way of the Devil’s Windmill. In it, all folks, both white and black, saw wolves in the killing fields. Having very monstrous outlooks, as if werewolves. The skies were crimson color. And the fields were too. Like enraged animals, they were killing each other. Ripping each other apart, limb for limb. Bite for bite. Soul for soul. They knew not what they were. How they had come to this state. Or who or what all others were in their presence. But, all they understood was the insurmountable wrath. As there were nothing but shouts and screams. Shouts and screams. At the absolute peak of agony. Some awoke in cold sweats, screaming as they themselves were screaming in the nightmare, hands placed on either sides of their skull, ready to crush their own heads in.

Others awoke, in contemplation. Most, actually, forgot entirely of the nightmare, left mostly with a sense of malaise they couldn't quite grasp what it was.

And there were also those that awoke, and smiled. And saw how they loved what they saw, with all their heart and mind and soul. God be damned! Loved.

Monday.

Oh my God!

What in God's name was that, why did you show me such a dream!

Thought Nat, waking up. For he was one of those that remembered.

I've never seen anything so vivid and violent.

Nat felt jarred by it, like a blow to the head that had left his senses shocked.

There had been a crimson sunset yesterday. And there was now a crimson sunrise. The sky and land, like in the dream, felt bathed in the blood color.

Nat walked over to his window, looked out, and he felt the earth wasn't going to drink the blood of men and forget, but drink and vomit out. His own soul felt set on a path, along with all the folks of Artsack, that was heading downhill and towards a hole, in which the deeper you got, the more the elevation dipped, and to where there would be no coming out of. Soon, all would be in the doodlebug's mandibles.

Walking amongst his people in the community, he saw a certain sense about all of them, as if they were also on such a path, and had also experienced such a nightmarish dream. And in his heart Nat then knew:

The Prince of the Power of the Air was amongst them.

Nat stuck his pinky finger into his left ear, and shook it, as he realized his ears were ringing. It didn't go away. It then occurred to him how they had been doing such since he awoke this morning.

Nat was now at the chapel in his office.

Elijah enters. Nat didn't look up.

"Follow Duvall." Says Nat.

Elijah didn't say anything.

“That man has been very careful of what to say to me and what not to. And I’m pretty sure he knows where Roland is or simply has him in his holding cell. Find out if he does.”

Nat waits to see what Elijah would say. He says nothing. Nat sighs and says what he fears to touch upon.

“If it’s Duvall,

If it’s all him... we kill him.

Just him.

Cut the head of the snake... and the rest of those c—s of Oubliette will become too disenfranchised to do anything about it.”

Nat looks up at Elijah, finally. Elijah nods.

And leaves.

Nat then sticks his finger in his ear and shakes it again. The tinnitus isn’t leaving him. And Nat grows fearful of what that means.

Oh my God!

What in... wait...?

Thought Duvall, waking up. For he was one of the majority that had already forgotten, after a minute of stirring within a cold sweat, after sitting up in bed.

Alright, this is what I’m going to do today:

I’m going to go up to Old Man Moreau’s plantation, and let him know we got his son. And then we can turn his boy over to him. I don’t care. I don’t care. It’s not Oubliette’s problem what that boy did to a bunch of out-of-town whores and those n— boys. Once I’ve done that, if Nat and his boys—and I know Papa Bear and his Goldilocks’ Gang are now involved when they ain’t too busy murdering their own folk—if they come snooting around looking for Roland, they’ll know where Roland is. And if those n—s decide to take revenge on Moreau’s plantation, good! Actually, that would be a lot of good to us. Two Birds with one stone! It’s Goddamn Moreau and his well-to-do Dixieland ilk that got us into this mess in the first place—they brought those n—s here! Brought those man-eating, Devil-worshipping monkey people here from that King Kong dark continent, on an armada of ships from across the Atlantic. And did all the whipping and such, supposedly for Christian values... which they possess none of... and for what? Cheap slave labor! And

yet, even after losing the war, which my poor ilk had to pay in blood, they still managed to stay on top, and they're making more money through sharecropping than they were when they simply owned the n—s. Goddamn Democrats!

I hope they firestorm and burn that plantation to ash!

Duvall was now in the same foyer as last time in the plantation. Three hours! Three hours, again! It was painstaking sitting there, as he kept fidgeting around. And his left leg fell asleep a bunch of times from the poor blood circulation, making him get up and stomp it a few times and deal with that 1,000-needle prick sensation, which he couldn't stand. And Goddamn those statues of Florence, Fredrick and Robert, as they all kept staring at Duvall the entire time, as Robert slowly began smiling at him, Fredrick winked, and Florence made kissy faces. Goddamn dandies.

The black butler finally shows up.

"I'm sorry, the master is feeling a tad under the weather, you can go home now."

Duvall was outside again.

"God—"

He didn't even have the energy to speak in vain as such. Duvall lowered his head and simply left.

Back in Oubliette, Duvall then got a strange inclination, as he panned his sights around, and into the woods.

He got the strange inclination... that he was being watched.

"Alright, I'm calling Ernie." Says Duvall to himself.

That is all that transpired that day.

And, that night, Roland weaved another Devil's Windmill.

And everyone once again had the same exact dream from last night:

Wolves in the Killing Fields.

Roland was now going to be putting the screws on the people of Oubliette and Artsack, until they could take it no longer. As like all successful ventures... "persistence..." was the key.

Tuesday.

Oubliette was actually mostly just a single road town, and this main road was the only road paved in asphalt. All else were dirt roads and woods around. A truck was waiting for Duvall this morning near the Sheriff's office. Duvall looks into the driver's seat, Ernie Bogner is sitting in the seat. He is wearing an eight-panel cap and smoking a cigar. Ernie is one of the few out-of-town individuals Oubliette would see bringing in supplies from time to time. He is a Yankee originally from New York City. Duvall had met him and gotten to know him back in his Savannah days. Yesterday, Duvall had placed an order for Ernie to grab a shipment, lickety-split, and would pay a hefty amount. And here he is today. Duvall thumbs Ernie towards the back, as he walks there. Ernie pulls back. Stops. Gets out. Opens the back. And needs Duvall to help him with a wooden crate. They enter the office around back, then into a storage area. Ernie then goes to work with a crowbar undoing the crate.

"Dough?" Ernie asks.

Duvall pulls out an envelope, a fat one, and hands it to him.

"You just had such dough at hand?" Ernie asks.

"Don't get wise, what God-fearing Protestant in this day and age carries money in a bank?"

"Mattress?" Ernie jokes.

Duvall sneers at Ernie.

"This definitely costed you a pretty penny."

"Wanna know what the secret of the march of progress is? Not enlightenment, and definitely not Christianity, if you think that." Asks Duvall, out of the blue.

Ernie scratches his head and looks stumped. He shrugs.

"Beats me."

"Guns."

Inside the crate, there's a hefty load of tommy guns.

"I'm not an educated man. But I'm an observant man."

In the world of men, there's book smarts, and street smarts. Book smarts comes from street smarts, by observant men like me. We're not educated, but our observations are what's written in all the books, book smart men educate themselves with. Book smart men, themselves, aren't observant men. And

they can't come up with any knowledge for themselves, and they need us more than we need them. Although, they read a lot of what men like me write. And they do end up retaining more knowledge than men like me can gather by ourselves in our lifetime, which ends up giving them an edge."

"What's the point of this lecture?" Asks Ernie.

"Point is,

In all my time,

This, here, is the only thing that matters."

Duvall kneels down to pick up a tommy and studies it in his hands. As he remembers his basic training days.

"We conquered the world, because when other men waged war with us, they came at us with swords and chucking spears... while we came into the fight using canons.

Every civilization known to man, has always wanted the big piece of the pie."

"What kind of pie?" Ernie is being comical.

"Lemon meringue." Duvall says and rolls his eyes.

Ernie's face soured up hearing that, still comically.

"Anyways...

War...

Was the means to get that big piece. The world hates us, not because we did something wrong. We did what they were also doing. What all men have done since the beginning of time.

They hate us,

Because we got the big piece, which they thought rightfully belonged to them.

They're really nothing more than sore losers in the end.

And we're the ones stuck with winner's remorse.

And all the blame and responsibility that comes with it.

This, here, is what you can call the human condition.

This gun in my hand, is how you get that big piece.

Book smart men will talk and think and talk and think... and they'll devise wild ideas in their imaginations of how to run the world. And they'll create things like communism and religions, and they'll think that's all it takes. Based on all they have read. And they'll miss the point completely.

The only good that comes from book smart men is them figuring ways to make the guns—bigger! Which really is what puts us over the edge.

Still....

This!

Is what it takes.

Because as smart as you think you are, you can't outsmart a bullet."

Ernie Bogner begins applauding, lightly patting the heels of his hand, although with sarcasm, since he is a man that chooses to substitute earnestness for a comedian's folly to the very end. Duvall releases one reluctant snicker to his gesture. Then shakes his head. He knows he is right. He knows.

Duvall steps outside again as Ernie leaves.

"As many words as Jesus came with to speak to the world below.

The last thing he revealed was pulling a sword from his mouth.

Might is the only right.

And evil men won't have it any other way."

Why do I keep thinking funny?

Goddamn those dreams, whatever the Hell they are, they feel to be the source of my—

Duvall then gets that same strange inclination of being watched as he did yesterday. And he narrows his eyes onto the woods again. And thinks he sees someone. Or something, eying back.

"You get your boys to watch me?

Did you, Nat?

Well, go ahead, watch! See if you like what you see.

You ain't getting no piece of the pie from me.

Eat water pie!

This town ain't big enough for the both of us."

He walks off.

The English word for "race" is a competition between people, animals, vehicles, etc., to determine which one is the winner by matter of speed. Of course, the English word for "race" is a homonym, so it has more than one

meaning. And the word also means a group sharing a lineage being the descendants of a common ancestor, that tend to share similar physical traits. The word is a homonym, since both definitions are not related, and the word isn't a polysemy. Although, maybe not relatively, but philosophically, it could be.

The world is a race,
And there are races that must compete with one another, in a speed contest to determine which is number one.

Build your empire, and the first to reach the finish line, which is Utopia, gets the crown of laurel leaves.

Like the chariot races of Ancient Rome that were featured in Ben-Hur, between competitors from different geographical backgrounds throughout the empire: Britania, Gallia, Hispania, Dacia, Macedonia, Judea, Armenia, Aegyptus, Asia, Africa, to appease Ceasar watching in his special pulvinar.

Ultimately, to determine which race gains most favor with God.

To determine a victor, there can be second or third places winning silver and bronze.

But only one that can take home the gold.

There are winner races.

And loser races.

And always one finishing last, to the boos and jeers of the crowd.

And in this world, the losers would be made to serve the winners.

Nat was in his office again.

Sitting at his desk.

Hand on his forehead, and feeling like he was having the worse migraine in his life. His tinnitus hadn't left him yet. And the ringing in his ears were now driving him mad. Should he see a physician? Maybe he should! Maybe he should make a trip to Savannah to seek a proper one. Nat picks up a vanity mirror on his desk, and sticks his tongue out. And eyes himself. He thought

he looked haggard. Hair becoming untamed. Face unshaven. Clothes unkept. He thought he looked like an animal, almost. Like a wolf.

The reoccurring nightmare was seriously beginning to make him grow hysterical.

Elijah walks in.

“What do you got for me?” Nat asks.

Elijah informs him of Ernie’s visit.

“What do you think were in those crates?” Worries Nat.

Elijah didn’t know and couldn’t tell.

“Why didn’t you stop Ernie when he drove off in his truck?

Beaten it out of him, if you had to!”

Elijah... then realizes that would have been the smartest move.

“Goddammit, Elijah!” Cries out Nat.

Then puts his hand on his dog collar, regresses back some, now having realized a shortcoming of his own. Especially as a man of God.

That night.

Roland weaves another Devil’s Windmill.

But adds a bit of flavor at the end. Especially for Nat, since he showed the most resilience towards the cancer Roland was trying to breed within him; consummating an alternate self in a man, to become that man, and eat that man’s entire being from the inside out. In the fields, Nat viewed the horrors and gore and screaming around, then whisked to the face of one of these wolfmen, that was ripping apart young pups with its claws and canines. And the face, to Nat’s abomination, with eyes rounded and shaped very familiar to being his. For it was his. These weren’t wolves. They were men. Actual men. Nat spectated himself entering the eye of this creature, and now, he was in a room with no doors nor windows. And in this mind’s prison, he sought himself which in return sought himself back. It spoke:

“Men, women, children.

Men, women, children.

Men, women, children.”

Nat awoke.

And after some time contemplating his dream, he realized he needed to put an end to all this before it was too late.

Wednesday.

Nat that morning had gone straight to Duvall's home. Although he wasn't near the front where he could be seen by his neighbors. He snuck to the back to the back door. The morning glow still lingered, past morning twilight. A Mourning Dove could be heard making its calls in a tree. Duvall opened his door, and Nat saw the face of a golem; his eyes were like stones, and his bottom teeth stuck out a bit and jittered.

Duvall then realizes this was the last time Nat was going to ever visit him again, after the words Duvall was now formulating and framing to tell him; words that there was no coming back from. He never hated Nat, personally. So, he was going to allow him one more talk, before the end. He allowed him to enter. Duvall was in his sleeping long johns.

"Just give him to us." Nat says.

After a long second:

"No." Says Duvall.

Nat now understood himself, this was going to be their last talk together.

"My folk think you did it, they think it was all you."

Another long second.

"Let them." Duvall says, as he sticks his bottom teeth out further.

Nat anguishes in disbelief.

"Are you out of your mind?"

"Yes."

That takes Nat back a bit. Duvall was initially a cowardly man from what Nat had known of him. Although, when that initial phase wore off, that's when the monster came out. He knew Duvall that much. And knew, with this other side of him, there was no reasoning with.

"Did you hear me."

"Yes."

"Was it you that really did it?"

"No."

But let n—s deal with n—s. And c—s with their own folk.”

“My folk are growing mad. They want blood. If they don’t get Roland’s head, they’ll come looking for—”

But then Nat realizes, maybe... that’s exactly what Duvall wants now. For Duvall smiles, as it then widens, as if self-aware over the notion, like this is exactly what it’s aiming for.

“Oh, so you’re sorry.” Nat says, remembering that line from before.

That takes Duvall into his head. Nat was referring to the makeshift apology he made over Tim and Tom. And Joby, in the end. Duvall then develops his response to that.

“Oh, I’m still sorry.

This is our fault. All our fault.

We should have never brought your folk here in the first place.

After the war I was in, over in Europe. After it was over. I remember our men were in France, celebrating. And amidst all those merriments over winning the war that would end all wars, I remember him:

An Armenian man.

That had a horrifying story to tell everyone in that tavern that night.

You see, during the war, in the Ottoman Empire,

The Turks had all of a sudden—all of a sudden—decided to kill all Armenians in their lands.

All:

Men.

Women.

Children.

They murdered something around a million or so. Because, all of a sudden, after one night, they woke up, from a bad dream or another. And decided to kill all them people from their lands.

This man told me, his father was a priest, a Godly man, like you. His father had gone to the Turkish troops to speak with them, as a man of God. To placate. The Turkish soldiers had then gone on to kill the priest. Cut his head off. And decided to drag his headless body through the village he came from, through their streets on horseback, to let all of his folk know...

What was coming!

This Armenian man that was telling us this tale, was a cowardly man, that had survived mostly from hiding in the bushes and trees. Watching, what the Turkish soldiers did to his people. They raped and killed many, and with the rest he told me, they had placed onto a ship, since this village was a seaside sort, and decided to take his people out in the middle of the Black Sea, and dump them all into it to drown.

I remember I grew curious of this man. Name was Hatchik something. Hard to pronounce. He spoke English well enough, since, American missionaries had taught his village English. Asked him about stuff. Stuff like, what exactly had made the Turks do something so horrendous and unthinkable, all out of the blue. This Hatchik told me, he couldn't tell you. For generations. Generations and generations, their folk had lived together. A thousand years or so. And in the end...

(Duvall snaps his fingers)

This was the result.

You know,

Everywhere I've been to in my life, I've seen the human condition. Division! People... simply not getting along. In the Great War, I remember the interactions between the English, Welsh, Scots and Irish. For roughly a thousand years, again, they had lived around each other, and after all that time, they still couldn't get along. And the English and Scots and such... all look like the same folk. Armenians and Turks... look exactly alike.

Nat... the two of us, us c—s and you n—s... look nothing alike.

We are—nothing alike!

So explain to me... how in God's name are we supposed to make this work, with all these differences?"

Nat steps back, with dread, realizing he had no answer to that.

"So, when I say, 'I'm sorry,' I really do mean that.

This is all our fault.

For we should have never brought your folk here in the first place.

For, even if we can get along for a little while, how will we know we won't be just fooling ourselves, thinking that way. Like those Turks and Armenians had thought, before they decided to show their—true colors!

The two of us, might end up having something worse than those folks had.

So... if this is our time, let it be! I'll be the honorable man and allow you the opportunity to do to us, as what we'd have done to you."

"Goddamn you, Duvall." Says Nat, while shaking his head in awe and disgust. Nat leaves.

Duvall, then thought of one last thing to add:

"The only way it can ever work, is if your Jesus ever returns... although, I don't see that as likely.

Since Roland defeated him...."

But, it was too late to do so, for Nat and Duvall were never going to see each other again after this.

That night, Duvall called another meeting of the invisible empire. They were all in their white satin sheets again. Hoods on, since Duvall had his on. Although, with most meetings, they wouldn't have them on unless they were going to do what they did last time, which was the interrogation of Roland. Or simply hiding their identity out and about. There was no reason to do any of that indoors with a simple meeting. Duvall mostly spent the meeting discussing tactics and showing everyone the crate full of Thompson submachine guns and how to use such firepower. Duvall had no reason to still have his hood on. But he did. Truth was, he didn't want anyone, even his

kin, to see his face. He was like the Minister with the Black Veil of Nathaniel Hawthorne's fame. Duvall was now one of the true faceless.

Duvall did notice the men were no longer fearful and hesitant about any of this as they usually would be expecting him to lead by examples. Their convictions were more consolidated.

"If it comes down to it, we do them like how God commanded Joshua when dealing with the Canaanites.

And let the sun not set, again, until it is finished!" Abbot said.
Duvall began to hate his kin for this.

Also, that night,

Nat had his own meeting.

Nat... felt totally crushed by everything, after the testimony Duvall had given him. His will was crushed. Hopes crushed. Spirit crushed. He sat, while listening to his folk's fervor. He looked old and gray and didn't say a word. Elijah noticed.

"This isn't the time to get the blues... your people need you." Elijah whispers to him, sounding hoarse.

Elijah, in the end, was no leader. And the weight of the people was now no longer being placed on Nat's shoulders, but Elijahs, seeing the lack of Nat's participation. And Elijah was never a man of the people. But mostly himself. And the folks of Artsack were no longer taking what Sylvester spoke of last time as totally unchristian like and blasphemous.

It was as if they were all sharing the same nightmarish dreams to put them on edge. No longer feeling human. But like animals. And animals that had eaten the forbidden fruit from that Tree of Knowledge.

"This is now our time,
The time of the c—s is DONE!

Goddamn those white Devils.
They must PAY!
With their BLOOD!"

Elijah couldn't stand Sylvester, but the folk were listening to him now. And not shying away from what he had to say. Elijah, for the most part, had a disdain for this own folk, because he saw them as docile. They had been slaves, and they were practically still slaves, which left them with a peasant mentality, making them lower to white folk, and incapable of agency. Sylvester was although giving them agency. He was a revolutionary force turning his folk upside down. And even though Elijah would have favored heavily of such a revolutionary force—NOT LIKE THIS! He was an obelisk of a pagan god's unmitigated flames and fury, in the middle of this Christian house of God. And it was becoming difficult to control Sylvester's momentary outbursts, now that Nat had decided to sit this out. And turn a deaf ear to everything. Especially with his worsening tinnitus.

"Nat... Goddamn you... say something!" Whispers Elijah.

But the ringing in his ears is so bad now, he can barely hear, as he sticks his fingers in them, and shakes, but can't shake out what the Devil's Windmill has put into them.

"Nat..."

Nat exits the chapel towards the back, going through his office, and through the back door. He looks at the night. It's starless. And dark. And Nat sees nothing in it. And, he sorta likes not seeing a Goddamn thing. But then does hear something as the ringing in his ears decrease a bit. There's a Chicken coop behind the chapel that's fenced with Chicken wire. And in there, he hears something similar to the shouts and screams he'd been hearing in his dreams, but coming from the vocal range of Birds. Nat then also sees a sight somewhat similar: sees a fox, with bright flashing eyes of unyielding carnal hunger, as it steps out of a coop with blood and Chicken flesh hanging limp in his penetrating canines. It flashes sights at Nat, and Nat reads its eyes and predatory soul. And... doesn't care. Foxes need to eat, too. So let them eat. Even if with Nat's Chickens, that depend on him for safekeeping. Those Chickens are saved either for Nat's dinner plate, or a scoundrel animal, like a fox. Nat heads back in. He's no longer a good shepherd, no matter the flock.

"Don't worry, Sylvester... I see your worry.

It's working. It's all coming to fruition, exactly how you and I would have it.

But if required... you know what you have to do to push your folk over the edge.

He!” Whispers Roland in his jail cell.

That night, no horrid visions of wolves in the killing fields.

Roland understood, the philosophy behind the calm before the lightning and thunder. The folks had been worked up enough, and when it came to pushing folks over the edge, you didn’t want to do that to them when it came to the last step. The key being, pushing them all the way to that last step, and making them take the plummet, themselves.

Although, Duvall did dream something peculiar that night. Just him. In the dream, Duvall saw himself as a white ant. And he was in the doodlebug’s sandpit, struggling to try and escape. But the harder he tried, the more he’d lose footing and slip deeper and deeper. And at the bottom of the pit, he could see the doodlebug’s mandibles, like twin gnarly sabers sticking out of the sand, ready and waiting. And Duvall wasn’t alone, for at the opposite end of the sandpit, he saw a black ant, also in the same predicament. Also trying to escape. And also unable to.

Deeper and deeper.

And then, both slipped too far in, and they were now caught.

Duvall then saw Roland in his jail cell lying on a bunk, and performing the Devil’s Windmill.

Duvall then woke up.

And Duvall... didn’t forget.

But decided not to think too deeply into it for now.

Thursday.

It’s now sometime around midday. And at exactly around this time some days ago, it was then that Montague Sparrow had shown up on the outskirts. Papa Bear and his Goldilocks Gang are in their Chevy, which is especially long and can fit most of his boys. It’s never apparent how many of them there are, since they tend to seem like a blur in formation. And they’re pulling a big no-no on purpose. A big no-no for their ilk. They’ve decided to drive right through the Main Road of Oubliette, at cruise level, just to get a feel. A feel. Of the c—s’ response. And, they’re getting it right now. Duvall steps out of his

office, with the red satins on. He slept in his armchair in his office by the desk again. And did so in the Exalted Cyclops uniform. He has his hood off. But, he now wants Papa Bear to see his face. He'll now show Papa Bear and not even his own kin from last night, his face. With the Ku Klux Klan outfit. He stares right at Papa Bear, and if Papa Bear decides to pull a sawn-off out right now and blow him away, Duvall is ready. He's been ready for a moment like that since the Great War. Almost looking forward to it at this point in his wifeless and childless 40something years. Duvall smiles. Papa Bear... doesn't like the smile. And doesn't like the sheets. Especially not the red sheets. The Exalted Cyclops uniform didn't necessarily need to be red according to the clan's uniform guidelines, but Duvall had it personally tailored such, since he, personally, wanted to stand out. Duvall's men are grown unnerved for their fearless leader, since right now, he's being too fearless. Downright crazy.

"If y'all are looking for Roland, he's in yonder Sheriff's office, come over for a spell, if you feel you've got the endurance. We'll be ready." Duvall says, and he has death dancing in his eyes.

Papa Bear Elijah grows daunt and knows that's a straight challenge. And he's sure Duvall wouldn't be acting this way unless Duvall had the firepower to back it up. He could actually get his sawn-off and blow him away right now. But, then, he'd have to deal with the repercussions, from his bunch. Which made him grow unconfident. Elijah drove off. He got the feel he'd come looking for. Even though he didn't like it.

Duvall went back in. Back to the jail cell with Roland. Roland seemed to be asleep in the bunk, facing away.

"Maybe I should just throw you to them. Those n—s are mad. Really mad! And mad enough to tear you apart and practically eat you if I do, like throwing a live Chicken to a pack of starving dogs.

Well... Roland....
Should I?"

Duvall was seriously questioning himself if he should.

Roland just lies there. Like the jail cell and him in it are just a painting on a wall. And not something you could interact with. Just contemplate the

image. This wasn't fated how he was meant to go. And then a sight flashed before Duvall's eyes, seeing how he is. A flash. Like another painting. And Duvall unconsciously approves of that sight. Duvall leaves him there.

"Duvall, Beauford wants to have a word with you." Says Collins.

"Oh, he does, does he?"

Officially, when it came to the town of Oubliette, Beauford was the mayor and in charge of the community. He was more on the family-oriented end of the town, whereas Duvall was at the end without one. Beauford, and their preacher, Morris, would be at their church, running the town how husbands run their wives and children. But to Duvall, with all that religion, they ran the town in their own imaginations, in a pretty little bubble. Where all the good and white and blonde and blue-eyed boys and girls held hands in a circle and sang Ring a Ring o' Roses with Jesus.

Duvall, unofficially, really ran the town.

And dealt with matters in the real world, instead of the make-believe world Beauford sort did.

"Duvall, what in God's name are you doing?

You want to enrage the negroes, and turn our community into Belleau Wood or something?"

Duvall... sorta did.

Beauford was a very narrow shouldered man, with a large turkey neck and head. His hair larded in layers, how a pretty Hollywoodland actor would have it, even though "pretty" would not be the word to describe Beauford's weasel-like mug and frame.

Weasel?

Thought Duvall. That made Duvall come to terms with what he needed to do.

"What is your plan... do you have a plan?" Begs to ask, Beauford does, with the backs of his wrists leveled against his kidneys.

Two years ago, Abbot had a secondary house on his plot of land he wanted to lend out to kin from Savannah moving back because of the depression. Although, it was a structure that hadn't been used in a while, and had become infested with rats. Hundreds and hundreds of rats. So, what they needed to do was simply scare them out. Clemet would train weasels to hunt rats,

preferring them over ferrets since he found them to be more vicious. So they got Clemet to bring his weasels, that were narrow shouldered lengthy animals, that could squeeze in spaces where rats would reside. They'd ferociously attack the rats and kill them in those tight spaces. Then scare out the rest, which, when in the open, could be delt with by Clemet's two hound dogs, that would immediately sic onto and kill with their teeth. In just that day alone, they manage to uproot the entire nest. When they collected all the kills, and lined them up in rows, 12 by 12, roughly 144 rats were dead, and the rest had been chased out completely. The secondary house was ready to be lend out the very next day.

Duvall now has a moment of clairvoyance over that notion, followed by astonishment.

Am I really going to do this... is this real... this is lunacy! This is...?

Duvall closes his eyes, and for some reason, pictures Roland doing those weird hand gestures again.

"Yes, I have a plan...

Collins, call Knickerbockers' boys from Pleasantville to come with his klavern. We need more able bodies."

"What's your plan?" Asks Beauford, growing worried seeing how Duvall wishes to call upon Knickerbocker.

Duvall then sees it again in his head. Sees Roland, and once again with that gesture. Duvall's mind goes blank.

"Duvall...?" Calls out Beauford again, growing impatient.

That gets Duvall's attention.

"We liquidate Artsack." Whispers Roland in his rack in the jail cell while doing the gesture.

"We liquidate Artsack." Announces Duvall, finally.

And he now feels trapped within this fate. Trapped. And damned. And like there's no turning back.

"So, this is how it all ends?" Asks Blue.

"Yes, this is how it ends." Confirms the Folk Bird.

"Why doesn't Duvall just give them Roland?" Asks Red.

"Well, for one, Roland.

Roland has really messed around in his head good, putting thoughts into his head and making him think they're his. And not just with Duvall but also others, both amongst the whites and blacks.

But then again... deep down... Duvall also wants this. He wants to get rid of them. This isn't all just Roland. Because if it was, Duvall might actually try to fight back the spell Roland's putting on him. Truth is, Duvall's also tired of the troubles between his folk and their folk. And Roland has actually worked out a good opportunity to see to this end.

In the end, the driving force in all this isn't even hatred. Hatred only fuels it.

It's lack of faith that's driving these two to perdition.

Faith that might at least give them strength to fight the manipulations and malice. Duvall even said it to himself, maybe with the Son of Man, there could be peace and harmony between all their folks. But without Him... it's a waste of time. They will fail. Maybe they'll have it worked out for a short period of time. But no more than that. They will fail. They will grow mad. And they'll come for each other's lives when they just can't tolerate each other anymore.

For the Devil in them will surely see to that!"

Preacher Nathaniel had abandoned his folk of Artsack.

Around the time Elijah had decided to take a tour of Oubliette, Nat had packed up whatever he could carry, gotten into his jalopy and had simply left. If anything, he felt like he would set the best example. To leave. Simply drop everything and leave. There was nothing in Artsack worth staying for. Nat had family in Chicago, and he had heard they were doing well, and he had decided to go there.

Without even saying "goodbye."

Elijah was in Nat's office, now learning of this. There was also a note left for Elijah or whoever, from Nat, that stated:

"Just leave.

~Nat."

And nothing else.

Nat had seen what was coming, especially after what he saw in Duvall's eyes yesterday. And now, he was gone. And Elijah was in charge of Artsack. Elijah stood there. This was always what he wished for: to be in charge. And now he was. And... maybe he should have actually been careful, like the old saying goes.

A deacon of Nat's then pops up.

"Where's Nat?" He asks.

Elijah just turns around and looks at him, solemnly and sullenly.

"Duvall is outside, he's in sheets, with two of his men."

Elijah grows petulant for some reason or another; he doesn't want to do this; he doesn't want to take on this responsibility.

But he's no coward.

He figures.

Unlike some people.

He goes out to parley with what Duvall has to say.

"Elijah... they have machine guns."

Elijah hesitates for a second, but still endeavors. Out front, he sees them. It's quite a bright afternoon, for the weather is always about its own business, no matter the business of men. The weather seems cheerful and warm out, enjoying itself. Like God in Heaven, and with His chosen children. Yet, with no one in Artsack being of such ilk. For there be blessed races of men. And cursed races. And the cursed must suffer forevermore for the choices they have made. And the sins they've committed. And in the next world, there is no tolerance. Even the tiniest spec upon your person is grounds for disqualification. Especially all those specs invisible to the naked eye. And also, all specs no matter how hard you scrub and scrub, that can never come off. Amongst the Armenians, there is a saying, "may your face be black." Cursing those for having transgressed.

Maybe that's why my folk are black in the first place? Thinks Elijah.

One reason Elijah never liked church was, the idea of good versus evil. Light versus dark. And most striking to him, white versus black. As a child, seeing how his folk had darker skin, it painted him with the idea that they were supposedly bad. Maybe it had something to do with sin? The sin of his folk.

Which had made them black in the first place. The blacker the skin, the worse the sin was, and the worse was their curse. A curse, which was the grounds for everlasting damnation.

Of course, a child's mind can form a very malignant imagination and get carried away with itself and assume too much.

Elijah looks at Duvall, a man who doesn't have their curse. And on the idea of good versus evil, that supposedly made white folk their opposites. Having less sin. Less damnation. And the closest thing to God's chosen people on earth. For Jesus Himself was white, and when he went up onto that mountain, his sheets were transfigured white, not black. For black be damned. Black be damned! If sin does darken the skin, just looking at both white folk and black folk, it became very clear to see which race were the elect.

Goddamn Duvall, for he is by no means one of the elect. Thinks Elijah now. For the universe really does operate under several different realities. With different governing principles. And Elijah can now see into others, having taken Nat's place as Artsack's leader. Elijah walks up to Duvall. Duvall is this time wearing his red hood.

"Where's Nat?" Duvall asks.

Elijah sneers for a moment, then shakes his head.

"I'm going to be gracious,

I'm going to give Artsack two days to pack up and leave town for good. You got two days."

"Gracious?" Asks Elijah, still with a sneer, as he lifts his upper lip to express disgust in his upper teeth.

"Yes.

But after that...

I'm going to show you and all of Artsack a universe I was once shown and made a part of. A mechanized universe of no mercy.

And of complete and total horror.

Do you understand me, boy?"

Elijah does. But gives no sign that he does, still with his upper lip. Standing fast to the punk's resolve.

“Not doing what I tell you, I will take as an act of war. And I will go to war with you. And all your people.

Men.

Women.

And children.

And wipe you from the face of this earth.”

A long pause.

Duvall gets mad and takes his red hood off. And gives spiteful eyes. But Elijah then focuses on a drop of sweat running down his forehead. Duvall tries to turn away.

“What if we try to do the same to you?

We do still outnumber you.”

Duvall takes the tommy gun from one of his men.

“Not when we got these. And my men got twenty more like them. Even though all it would take is what I’m holding here to take care of you and your boys.

And I got more of my clan coming to town in that time. You remember Knickerbocker and them boys, correct.”

Duvall puts his hood back on. As Elijah learns something about him.

“Two days.”

And walks off. His men not turning their backs like Duvall would. And they still hold onto the tommys.

Duvall was right about one thing he had said to Nat: black folk and white folk are nothing alike. And the relations between both weren’t like the English with the Welsh and Scots and Irish. Nor the Armenians and Turks and Greeks. Not like Africans having enslaved Africans. Nor the Ottoman Empire having done the same, and would even castrate their black slaves and turn them into eunuchs. With white and black relations, there’s a very nasty complex brewing, like within a witch’s cauldron, of many nasty assortments of metaphysical properties.

Superiority/inferiority complexes.

Blame the chariot races.

With one being the most advanced, and the other being the least to start, Luke 12:47-48 spoke of the differences within the severity of punishment for those committing sin amongst most to least. Therefore, to the most advanced, would be bestowed the most severest punishment for the exact same crimes.

Like the common saying goes: “the bigger they are, the harder they fall.”

Although, having said that, black folk, white folk, brown, yellow, no matter, all of God’s children were with sin. All had their virtues, and they could vary. But also sin. And always by nature, a very particular sin inherent in them, and only them.

God, I don’t blame white folk, I blame you. You made us slaves. You did! You the biggest, you should fall the hardest! You could have done to us better, but you didn’t! Thought Elijah.

Although, no!

Be fearful, man, no matter of your skin color. Be mighty fearful. Of what God will and will not do. For let’s not forget, in Noah’s time, God drowned every man, woman, child, alive, on earth, except for Noah and his family. Man is quick to dismiss his sins, out of pride. God, is not. Every infraction is tallied, whether you committed it knowingly or unknowingly. God will even tally infractions committed by heart, and never by hands. Man, especially woman, is quick to dismiss, because they’re too busy imagining they are gods. But, if you feel as if God has been unfair to you, and done nothing but condemn you in life, realize, it’s better to have done so in life, than in the second life. For, in the second death, remember, His condemnation towards you will be realized with endless, endless, endless wrath and rage!

You will reconcile with ALL YOUR DEBTS!

Every last one!

And spend an eternity turning out your pockets to find only lint to pay it off.

NO! What have I done, what sin did I commit?

I have not a single blemish on my person!

Goddamn you!

No, Sylvester, may God damn—YOU! For you know what you did.

Elijah heads back into the chapel.

Knickerbocker... ah s—! Thinks Elijah, knowing Duvall is a teddy bear in comparison to that man.

“Wait... Nat left...?” Questions the same deacon, somewhat in denial.

“Yes.”

“Nat would never.”

His name is Samuel from what Elijah can recall. He has a face resembling a moon frog partially covered with skin tags, but still a gentle and good and God-fearing face. Elijah snuffs a bit at him but then pities him.

You think you know a man... but no one ever does.

If anything Elijah could claim to have over Nat: he would make a much better wartime leader. Which meant, he definitely knew when he was licked. Goddamn you, Nat, I always figured you'd be a quitter in the end. But, then again, you were never wrong. Thinks Elijah. He needed to call one final chapel meeting in the town of Artsack, to tell everyone... it was time to pack up. If Nat wouldn't be willing to risk his skin for Artsack, Elijah definitely wasn't. And this really was best for his people.

“What do you mean, we have to leave?”

“This is OUTRAGEOUS.”

“Where's the JUSTICE?”

They were in a fervor again, and Elijah was standing at the podium to confront the people of Artsack, who still sought revenge for what Duvall had done. Still seeing this as Duvall's doing. All of it. Since Nat never disclosed his last words with that man, that drove him away from town in the first place.

“People... listen to me....”

“You a coward.” Says someone from the back, but stays in the back.

Elijah's standing side by side with his Goldilocks' Gang, and they look like stooges to the people of Artsack. Especially dressed like a group of Savannah dandies as they are. Elijah grows angry.

“They have some serious firepower.”

“So do we.”

“N—!

Don’t be a Goddamn fool, do you know what a submachine gun can do?”

The fool... gives eyes he sorta doesn’t.

“It’s a gun that can hold a fifty round drum that can be emptied in seconds with one squeeze. They got roughly twenty of them with them. Trying to go up against that... we’d be annihilated.

Think of your folk and kids... they won.”

“I AM thinking of my kid... N—!”

And that’s Sylvester speaking out.

Although, Elijah mostly wins arguing with the people of Artsack. As they come to terms: these clansmen have gone mad. Since, everyone has been going mad and such in this part of Georgia in the last couple of days. And more than any other parts, not just in the entire state, but the entire South. Then again, blame the woods, and the witches, that are so good at hiding these personal events in these people’s lives as well as they do.

Most grow fearful, and decide to stay at the chapel overnight where they see it’s safe. And Elijah and his gang promise to stay the night as well for safekeeping.

Sylvester... goes home.

But, his eyes before he leaves, everyone notices.

Like an omen.

Like a spell.

A curse.

Sylvester is home.

Joby has been sitting at the dinner table all day, told not to move or mope again. Or else. Sylvester has words for him.

“Boy... take it as an honor... you’re going to have to do one more thing to make things good again.”

Folks might think the Devil always has got everything figured like clockwork. This simply isn't true.

He's got his work put into all the affairs of men, but only men. For against God, the very second he tried, Lucifer was shot out of Heaven like lightning. His fall was just that fast. Lucifer, the most brilliant and beautiful of all angels, became the most wrought and wretched. In the blink of an eye.

For eternity is only for the perfect.
And damnation for everything and everyone else.

When a man deals with the Devil, even though the Devil is smarter than a man, there always feels something to be off with the intelligence he comes with. Something you just can't put your finger on. For his logic will appear flawless. But only for a little while. And only to you, oh man! And most certainly you, oh woman, with twice the folly!

God's elect will see to the Devil's imperfection and notice it.
Those not, and those still tested, won't.
And be convinced, since no man nor woman can resist the Devil without the full armor of God.

No, Roland hadn't defeated Jesus... although he had convinced the folks in these parts he had.
For a little spell.
But unfortunately, a little more than enough.
And enough to allow pride to set in, and deny reconciliation.

"No, no, no!
It should have worked!" Says Roland. "They should have been ripping each other limb for limb by now.

Well, Sylvester, I hope this will be enough... it better be!"

Friday.
It's the following morning, and the earth had once again drank the blood of men... but would not forget this time. A Blue Jay, a Red Cardinal and a

Mourning Dove see a bird they had never met in these parts fly through the sky and disappear... and then they knew. They knew, what had happened.

The doors to the chapel flung open that morning, and a man came marching in. He was barefooted for no reason. There was an unnecessary and relentless and bizarre rhythm of how he strode in, as if doing the cakewalk in some rag tag musical outfit. So invested in whatever in God's name he imagined glory to be; like a man that told you he once saw another man run over by a locomotive, and pulled to pieces underneath, and it was 'glorious.' And he expected you to feel the same way.

He was carrying Joby.

Joby's throat had been slashed from ear to ear.

Joby was dead and the marching man carrying him in his arms was trailing blood.

"Sylvester... what has... oh my God...."

Everyone was in awe.

Time broke.

Yet the marching man marched on.

"They killed him.

They killed him.

They did it.

They.

Hmm... hmm!" Sylvester says and sorta sings.

And then there's Sylvester's eyes, and they have an intensity to crush stars inside. Most only held their sights on his bare and ugly and ashy feet, they couldn't look at anything else. He was all ashy now. All saw an abomination in God's house, and yet they could not understand in what sense it was so.

Elijah ran over to him, to see to Joby, but the marching man would not let him go. And kept moving forward like a blind stone rolling down a hill.

"What... oh!"

Elijah needed a moment, being this close to the sight of brutalized innocence. As he bent down and felt lightheaded and almost like fainting right then and there.

“What do we... what do we.... What—”

“Men.

Women.

Children.” Answers Sylvester, keeping up his pace.

“Men.

Women.

Children!

Hmm... hmm!”

“I don’t want to watch anymore.” Says Blue.

Red and Dove don’t answer.

And it was better if they didn’t. If this was a book, it was better to close it about now.

Duvall and his men had mostly bunkered in the Sheriff’s office, while others with families stuck with their families, having a special gathering at Oubliette’s church. Armed. Afraid. As if the world could end at any moment. Like Christopher Colombus, sailing to these new worlds, having that one irrational inclination to turn back, for at any moment, sailing towards the horizon, they’d reach the line. And Duvall knew all too well what that sensation was about: crossing the line. And into uncharted territory. Or no territory. As the world simply did end, and all that came was the eternal waterfall. Duvall and Oubliette weren’t going to get dumb, after the message he delivered, to go back to their day-to-day mundane living. As if with the sun shining, the bird’s singing, and the world not drinking the blood of men and forgetting.

“Get dumb and you die, Duvall, get dumb and you die.”

They were waiting for God knows what.

And hopefully in those two days, the n—s would simply leave.

Goddamn the march of progress, and the efforts of making all the world a civilized paradise. A utopia. And bringing those wild apes here to join the

Jesus' family. They could have stayed in Africa, with all those lions and zebras and giraffes and hippopotamuses and bananas they could eat. And both white folks and black folks would have been happier that way. For this was all turning into a tower of Babel it seemed like. Thought Duvall.

"Get dumb and you die... maybe I want to die!"

Whispers Duvall to himself.

Hating nothing in the world more than his own spouts of cowardliness at moments like these. Duvall tended to operate under two modes: cowardly and mad. And, as bad as mad was, at least he felt more in control. Even though it would then become difficult to control himself.

"Duvall,

Why'd you give them two days? Why tell them anything? Let's just be done with them." Abbot says.

Goddamn you, Abbot. You were never in the war, you don't know what killin' is like. Not on that level. Thinks Duvall but doesn't say.

"You told them what we wanted to do, you told them we have these machine guns, and now we're like sitting Ducks here hoping they—"

"I'm a monster, Abbot, but I rather not become that kind of monster, anytime soon.

Killing men, women and—"

"They're not human,

They're just wild animals.

That's your problem Duvall... you have no sense to see what plainly others can see." Explains Abbot.

Duvall eyes Abbot. And feels like doing him in. Thinking how, even if Duvall won, and he was to get rid of all the n—s in these lands. What he would need to do to get rid of all the c—s, next.

The Mourning Dove and company then see a Turkey Vulture circling the skies above all. And, they knew, that was no Turkey Vulture, or any sort of Bird, which they happened to be. There was something very unreal about its aspect, as it flew, yet, now and then, it wouldn't flap its wings to keep flight, and truth be told, it didn't need to. Like looking at a Van Gogh painting of a sky and scenery, and in that sky there's a Bird painted red, yet through closer

inspection you realized Van Gogh had never painted that Bird there, and it was really a blood stain. The raw and red headed creature was eyeing a particular Chevy that was approaching Oubliette from the backwoods area; a roadless path that could only be maneuvered by folk that had lived in these parts all their lives.

“I see the Prince is planning to play a lot more of an active role in all this now.” Says Blue.

“Why though?” Asks Red.

The Dove says nothing.

All three see these individuals exiting the Chevy about half a mile from Oubliette: Elijah and his gang. They were all armed heavily, and carrying liquor bottles. And cloth strips. And Zippos.

And Sylvester is with them.

The Vulture was now right over Sylvester’s head, not gliding or anything, but simply hovering in position above.

“What if they retaliate?” Asks Abbot.

“What if they do?” Duvall asks back.

Duvall didn’t have time to entertain other people’s cowardice.

Goddamn it, Knickerbocker’s boys should have already been here.

He then walks over to the windows facing the woods, that are shut with emerald green roller curtains. He moves them aside, from a hunch. A simple hunch. Within nature, something unnatural extends its long neck out of the brush. A man-made Bird, you could say. Like a long-necked Ostrich, but it was no Ostrich, and made of metal. Duvall immediately ducks, as the barrage of bullets came in.

Within thirty seconds worth of time, nearly three dozen shots had been fired. Duvall is on the ground, and he looks around, and sees there’s been fatalities. Duvall had all twelve Terrors in the building before the shots came in, now only eight were standing.

A sound can then be heard of glass shattering against the roof. And a fire comes alive as it consumes the wood around to sustain itself. Duvall now

knew what was happening. Abbot, who was dead now, shot through the eye, was right. They were sitting Ducks. Duvall had taken a huge gamble not finishing this when he had the chance. And now this. Parallellly, Duvall had had this exact same plan go through his mind when driving towards the chapel of Artsack: setting the building on fire and shooting anyone that would flee from it.

War to Duvall was now no longer a memory from his past.

It was alive in the present.

It's agency, reborn.

And balancing himself barefooted on the edge of this blade felt exactly as he remembered it. He was bleeding, and Duvall wasn't sure what for.

"As the building becomes a furnace inside, they'll come running out. When they do. Stay in the woods. Don't be seen. And pick them off however you see fit." Says Elijah in the brush.

They were all crouched in the greenery, hidden.

Most of Elijah's men were behind the Sheriff's office. Since biggest entry/exit point of the building wasn't even the front, but the back, with several doors and windows and everything. Although two of Papa Bear's Goldilocks Gang had gone to the front and used a rope to tie the double doorknobs together, to where they would not be able to open them, unless they were to saw the ropes from the inside through the slit in between. The front entrance had two windows to escape from. The two men had two liquor bottles also at hand with cloth and lighters. They lit the two and tossed them through the windows after the barrage was over with. And just in case Duvall and his men were to get through the front somehow, both men were pressed against the wall of an adjacent drugstore ready.

"What the Hell are you n—s doing—"

Bang.

Jenkins shoots and kills Jimmy the Pharmacists with a gat, that had come out to see what was going on. All Jimmy saw were two well dressed n—s with bandit masks over their faces and fedoras. And the barrel of Jenkins' gun.

"You're gonna die today, Duvall.

Show me your fat face. Let me see it. So, I can put a hole in the middle of it you can whistle out of." Whispers Elijah, also with a bandit mask on.

Elijah figured Knickerbocker's boys would be coming in tomorrow. So he had all day to play cat and mouse with the fat c— inside. He figured the crate of tommys were still in the Sheriff's office, so burning the building down with Duvall and his men was the best strategy. Duvall needed to die! Elijah needed to cut the head of this snake, as Nat had once stated, so the rest would grow disenfranchised. Kill him. And hope Oubliette was a snake that didn't turn into a hydra when the head had officially become severed.

And that was as far as Elijah had planned to do.

He didn't like playing cops and robbers like this, considering the rest of Oubliette would still have at least forty to fifty able bodies to deal with throughout.

Elijah and his boys were to be the hit squad, coming to do their business quick and dirty, while the rest of the men that had volunteered at Artsack's chapel would arrive on foot to do the rest of what was needed later.

Elijah was still unsure what that would necessarily be.

Elijah was flying by the seat of his pants with all this, and he didn't like it. Elijah then noticed Sylvester standing over him. He was standing, when he should be crouching. He had asked for a gat. He wanted vengeance for Joby. He had tagged along.

"We need to go to the c— church at the north end of the Main Street once we done here." States Sylvester.

"What?" Goes Elijah.

"I heard the rest should be there, Beauford, with Morris, and the rest of Oubliette's men. And they'll be with their wives and children."

Elijah... didn't have time right now to process everything Sylvester just said. He looked possessed. His eyes still looked blind. And he was staring in the direction of Oubliette's church.

The rest are at the church, how do you know that? Thinks Elijah.

And, truth is: he doesn't. Or didn't. Until his marionette master above didn't feed him the thoughts and ideas from above. Up yonder, where a Turkey Vulture was still hovering in the skies.

A good portion of the Sheriff's office was now in flames. The roof. And the halls and passages at the front. Duvall was under his desk. The rest of the Terrors were in that office. They only had one exit. The back. And Duvall wasn't stupid. He was sure Papa Bear and the Gang were in the trees, packing and waiting, for them to make a run out of the burning building. Duvall was prone to the ground, and began crawling to one of the tommys. Picked it up. And crawled to the window. He crouched up to take a look again, barely moving the roller curtain up. He quickly surveyed the woods yonder, and swore he saw Elijah, and two of his men.

Duvall jerks the roller curtain handle down, and the curtain immediately spins up as it is activated. And immediately opening like that cues Elijah to start another barrage of fire, exactly as Duvall wants them to do.

Elijah and two of his men empty their guns into the building, and the minute they do, Elijah then knows what Duvall is trying to finesse. Elijah ducks himself.

The doors behind Duvall's desk fling open as a blaze of fire roars out. Duvall then gets up and begins his own barrage with the tommy at hand. It was a sight like a bat flying out of the flames of Hell. Both of Elijah's men get hit by Duvall's retaliation. One dies, the other is wounded taking lead to the belly. Sylvester had wandered away, somewhere Elijah didn't catch sight of.

"Duvall, we need to exit the building, the fire is reaching us." Says Collins. Duvall didn't want to, yet. If he died, he'd die... but not before seeing to one order of business he should have done since the beginning. Duvall went through another door that wasn't in flames. Towards the holding cells.

Goddammit, that boy was going to die, not by the flames, saved for the flames of Hell. He was going to die by Duvall's hand. Somehow, in his gut, Duvall knew it was that motherf— that was behind all this. Like a third eye seeing into the witching world, he saw it being so.

F— me!

Those strange hand gestures I caught him doing again and again... it's how he pulled us both in, like quicksand, like the doodlebug's trap, like that dream

I had night before last. That son-of-a-b— has been putting the whammy on me this entire Goddamn time—Goddamn sorcery! I'll murderize him! Assesses Duvall.

Reaching the cell with his tommy at hand, he's then astonished to see the boy has vanished without a trace. Duvall's jaw drops.

"I see the other men in sheets arriving from the south." Says Blue.

"What is the Prince doing now... is he...?" Asks Red.

"Yes." Answers The Folk Bird. "He's going to make it rain. He's going to extinguish the fire with a downpouring of rain. And then he's going to have Sylvester do one last bidding of his."

"What?" Asks Blue.

But then both Blue and Red realized what that was.

"Why is Sylvester doing all this?" Asks Red.

"Because,

Roland is going to be made into an Earl in Hell for what he's done here. And Sylvester, a Baron. That was the deal the Devil had made with him last night. Sylvester would be damned if, in the next world, a white man was going to again have a higher position than him. Although, little does Sylvester know, in his ignorance, a Baron is actually lower than an Earl in hierarchy. His folk never learn.

The Prince had masterminded all this almost perfectly, and Duvall was wrong to think it was his folk the one's being framed. It was the folk of Artsack.

Once Sylvester does his master's final bidding.

Artsack is truly doomed!"

The Turkey Vulture was now flapping its wings much more aggressively. Like a tempest, the clouds around grew and grew dark. The clouds themselves looked alive and covered with eyes, as they began to weep for all these wretched souls.

Elijah looks up, and sees the clouds, and the rain, and a Turkey Vulture, and now he himself gains an inkling into the witching world and all the treachery at work.

Knickerbocker was an albino. His skin was bone color white. And so was his hair. And eyes. And lips and everything. And since his hair was the exact

same color as his forehead, you couldn't tell where one or the other began; it made them all seem like one piece and his skull misshapen from the contours. He had very narrow and beady pinkish eyes. And buckteeth. And his family were originally four generations of inbred Appalachians. Him and his boys were driving up from the south. Three Fords. Packing. Unlike Duvall, Knickerbocker loved the clan and everything it was about. Duvall called upon him to come up from Pleasantville, because killin' coons was his specialty. And not the racoon sorts. Knickerbocker was wearing the clan garments, since he almost always paraded them around, and he was also an Exalted Cyclops. And since Duvall made his specially tailored red, Knickerbocker wasn't going to allow Duvall to outdo him, so he had his satins tailored blue. Not at all by any of the KKK's guidelines, but who was keeping track?

Knickerbocker and his boys were driving up through the rain, and then they saw two of Papa Bear's boys, with bandit masks, and guns, and a white man dead on the ground with blood trailing from his head. And seeing how the Sheriff's office was still smoking, even though the fire was being put out by the rain... well... even if Knickerbocker wasn't anywhere at the mid-level intelligence Duvall was, he wasn't that stupid, and smiled, and saw he had come right in the nick of time. Coon killin', his speci-alty. Him and two of his boys got out of the Fords with double barrel 311s and they both went straight to work.

One shot.

Two shots.

"Coon killin'... my speci-alty!" Says Knickerbocker, since his mind was like a Parrot with matters like these.

Jordan now ran up to Papa Bear to inform them of the blue clansmen's arrival. And now, Papa Bear sunk his brow, and was cemented of their folly.

And just like that, the Devil won.

Although, he wasn't through just yet.

There was still a lot more Spaß to be had.

"We need to retreat back to the Chevy." Says Jordan.

The fire was out. A good chunk of the roof was exposed, but the exposure allowed the water from the rain to extinguish the fire from the inside. It was almost at the point the smoke was going to make Duvall and his men run out from the back. But now there was no need to. The Vulture took off and started making its way towards Oubliette's church. Elijah saw the Vulture do so... and then thought of Sylvester.

"We need to—"

"Go ahead... I need to go find Sylvester." Says Elijah.

Jordan and the rest of his boys leave, with Jordan and another carrying their wounded friend. Elijah tells them to go back to Artsack, and try and meet up with the reinforcements, to tell them to back out, now that Knickerbocker has arrived.

Too much folly.

Elijah feels hapless and helpless and mad.

He's been framed.

He heads towards Oubliette's church, now with a strange premonition of the marching man in all this.

Knickerbocker's men undo the doors to the Sheriff's office. Duvall and Collins step out, coughing still. The fire is out.

"It was an ambush." Says Collins.

"Nick, get your men to the church north of town." Says Duvall.

"You told me you had twenty tommys with you, so... we going to war with the n—s?" Asks and smiles Nick.

Duvall frowns at him, the man is very repugnant to look at; he had the face and feel of a rabid possum. With this very discreet quaking, that was very unsettling once you noticed it, which now would not go unnoticed.

"They're at the church for safekeeping. The n—s that tried to do this here have disappeared back into the woods. We need to all go to the church and get them in case they try to attack us again."

"So... we're at war?" Asks Nick.

"Yes, you dummy, isn't that obvious to you by now."

Nick smiles. He likes war. He was hoping the n—s wouldn't leave before Duvall's deadline. Now they didn't have to.

Sylvester stands before Oubliette's church. A white building full of white people. He's in the woods. He has a 1911 carrying seven bullets and one in the chamber. A wind blows in, and the man is covered in ash now, all ash. Hovering above him is the Turkey Vulture flapping its wings, that a child looking up at the man would see as if sitting on his head. Sylvester Davejohn looks at the church, then looks left, and sees a smaller building. An armed man sits at a chair in front of the building, wearing white sheets. But he's dozed off asleep. The smaller wooden structure is like a secondary building for children to play in. A Sunday School. The children were with the congregation in the church, but they were making a lot of noises and hooting and hollering and Beauford thought no harm would come to them if they allowed the children to enter the Sunday School and play. Plus, there's Thomas there sitting with the kids. The n—s are animals, Beauford figures. But they're not child killing animals. What would it hurt... of course those were the thoughts put into Beauford's head, since Roland had made a few more Devil's Windmills. Also, done so to put Thomas to sleep.

Then the Ruler of the Power of the Air had made the air dense in Oubliette that day, so the sound of gunfire wouldn't carry this far north and...

All sounds contrive, doesn't it? Of course it does. Of course it does! Haven't you been paying attention, are you also of mid-level intelligence?

The Devil's work is never finished: like a pathological liar, that must tell a lie to cover another lie to cover another lie. Like a spider, that requires so much tangled web weaving to set up a trap for some dumb fly to get caught in. For the Devil is a Black Widow, and always weaving webs, always!

All about the never-ending deception. For when slated for Hell, wouldn't you also be, to keep your mind distracted from all that fiery dread and damnation? For Hell is an eternity of screaming for help in the dark, where no one can hear you; an eternity of you and your thoughts and the dark. And your thoughts are the flames, your thoughts are; an invisible fire burning you inside out. All thoughts of what you did on earth. And a lie is now the only thing that can take your mind off of your cursed fate.

"Men, women, children." Says Sylvester.

Then his eyes turn red. And literally, and not just figuratively.

"M—

Children.

Children.

Children.

Children.

Children.

Children.

Children.

Children.

Children.

Children.

Children.

Children.

Children.

Children.

Children.

Children.

CHILDREN!"

Sylvester enters the Sunday School and does the Devil's last bidding.

Seven shots are then fired.

Seven... for all seven blonde and blue-eyed boys and girls that were in that structure. And then, as if Judas waking up the next morning, his eyes open finally, and they're no longer blind. Not for his own black child, but this loathsome creature would for these seven. He sees seven little blonde heads with blood pouring out. And he's truly awake now.

For he's shed innocent blood in all this.

Elijah reaches the church, as the gun fires an 8th shot.

Elijah... knows exactly what's happened.

"You did it, didn't you?

Joby...?

You betrayed us all... and damned us to Hell."

Thomas was awakened by the shots. He's stirring now. He sees Elijah. He grows crossed seeing Elijah.

"God... save us." Says Elijah.

Bang.

And then his forehead pops open with blood pouring out. Elijah falls to his knees. And slumps down onto his stomach.

Knickerbocker walks up to his body from behind him, holding a smoking revolver.

“Coons.” He says.

And spits on his corpse.

“Are we done?” Asks the Blue Jay.

The Folk Bird doesn’t answer.

“We sat with you this entire time.

We told you from the beginning, how this would all end in folly and tragedy. And evil. Lots of evil. And heartbreak.

This is the world of Men.

This is all it is.

Tragedy and folly. And evil.

We knew there would be a war between the white folk and black folk, and it would all end in madness, like it has. We were right. There was no surprise in this story.” Says the Red Cardinal.

“Yes, you did.

And I agreed with you from the beginning.” Answers the Folk Bird.

The two other Birds grow crossed.

“Stop caring.

Stop!

We only stuck around this long, so you yourself could see what we already knew, and with the aim of getting you to stop.”

“Yes, I remember. We spoke about this.” Says the Folk Bird.

“Well...

Will you?”

The Folk Bird doesn’t answer.

And the Blue Jay and Red Cardinal see how The Folk Bird wasn’t going to. It chose to bear witness. It chose. To the very end. And after everything, it wasn’t going to change its mind. The two Birds grow furious and fly away... and for good this time... they’re done.

The Folk Bird continues watching.

The Devil wasn't done.

He wouldn't be done until all saw to his eternal destruction in Hell.

Until the day he'd be cast into the Lake of Fire... he wouldn't be done. And until then, The Folk Bird wouldn't be done bearing witness.

Duvall, Beauford and Knickerbocker enter the Sunday School to see the horror that had transgressed. They stood there for a long time looking at it. A circle of children's bodies, and their killer in the middle, having shot himself through his temple. A sight as if they had played one last Ring a Ring o' Roses, but not the game, but the actual thing. "Ashes, ashes, we all fall down." And around their Black Death.

"Duvall... begin the liquidation.

I want them folk erased from the earth.

All!

Men.

Women.

And their children especially now!

Like Psalms 137:9... happy is he... dashing them against rocks!

I want 777 of theirs dead, for these 7 here!" Says Beauford.

Duvall stands at the doors looking out.

"I'll take care of it—I will! We'll go from house to house to house in Artsack, and torch them out, and machinegun down all trying to flee and escape their Judgement Day. Do to them like they tried to do to us. You have my full loyalty and support over this matter. I swear to thee." Says Knickerbocker, growing idiosyncratic, as he places his left hand over his heart and gets on one knee.

Duvall stands at the doors still.

"Well... Duvall?" Asks Beauford.

But Duvall just leaves.

He says nothing and leaves.

He declines... he's a monster, but not that much of a monster.

He gets into his Ford.

He has a rendezvous with the true Devil behind all this.

Duvall doesn't know how that Roland boy escaped, but he knows where he is now. Like a premonition. He just did.

That house.

That one house they should have burned to ash.

Duvall's headed there.

He's there.

He enters.

He goes to where he saw him last in this place.

Roland is in bed again. With the eyeball lady.

Roland wakes up. Roland freaks.

"Boy,

I don't know if you a genius, or a damn fool coming back here." Says Duvall. Looking at the eyeball monstrosity next to him, Duvall figures it must have been for her. Roland probably figured Duvall would be off tending to the matter in Artsack, "so, what would it hurt if I returned for only a brief moment?" The stupidity of youth: taking everything so lightly, since time and hardships had yet to teach them to take things as hard. Duvall is now holding a Stevens 311 side-by-side barrel shotgun, right up against Roland's head.

"You're gonna DIE now, Roland.

I'm gonna kill you, DEAD!

Your daddy won't be able to save you, this time.

At this range... as in, no range at all, your head will literally EXPLODE taking the full blast, the second I pull this trigger. I just want you to know that, internalize that, before I do you in. Because you won't be able to after it's done." Rages Duvall.

Roland tries to squirm, but then the Devil in the boy takes full control. For, he is him now. Him! At his perfect state.

"I've never been a man to believe in God... but I do so now believe there might be a Devil. Why did you do all this?" Begs to ask, Duvall does, while sweating a little.

"Why?

What do you mean, why....

Why... why... why... why... why... he!

Oh, I know:

Because.... I like death.

I like violence, murder and mayhem.

I like the horror of it all.

I like calamity.

I like getting all you black and white ants to war with each other, while I hold a magnifying glass overhead.

I... LOVE!

Plus, I'll be made into an Earl in Hell for all this, I think I told you that already." Roland says in a comical manner, while wiggling his eyebrows.

Duvall releases a sigh of astonishment. It truly is a child, in all forms.

"Who are you... who are you, really?" Duvall now asks.

"Who I am isn't important.

Who my daddy is—ah-ha—that's the answer... he!" Roland says while wagging his index finger.

Duvall thinks over all of Old Man Moreau's details, all which he knew about, and nods. It would be him. It was a given. Duvall feels like a damn fool not having the notion at least cross his mind once beforehand. Duvall looks back at the boy that still thinks he defeated Jesus. And now, this is what Duvall saw would be this boy's end; what he approved of in his heart.

"Boy,

I'll see you in—HELL!" Quotes Duvall.

Hahahahaaha!

Quotes Roland, having waited for this moment all his life.

Duvall pulls the trigger.

BOOM!

Roland's face and entire head became undone, like a banana being peeled open, at all corners, at once.